PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
22 April 2002—2 May 2002

£70

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22 April 2002

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 384**

FIFTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001-2002

House of Commons

Monday 22 April 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

DEATH OF QUEEN ELIZABETH THE QUEEN MOTHER

THE VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported to the House that its Address of 3rd April had been presented to Her Majesty; and that Her Majesty had been pleased to receive the same very graciously and had given the following Answer:

I thank you most sincerely for your expression of sympathy in the great loss which I have sustained by the death of my dear mother, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth.

I am greatly moved by your comments about my mother and by your sincere condolences. These are a source of comfort to my family and to me at this time.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Police Reform

1. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What representations he has received on police reforms from Police Federation members in North Yorkshire. [47060]

4. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): What recent discussions he has had with the chairman of the Police Federation on the reform of the police service. [47063]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): While individual members of the North Yorkshire force have made representations and attended the meetings organised specifically for that purpose, there has been no recorded approach from the North Yorkshire branch of the Police Federation. We have, of course, been in constant contact with the federation and in negotiation with it through our officials on the Police Negotiating Board. There have been a number of specific meetings with the chairman of the federation. Last Wednesday's Budget has given us a facility not only to intervene more effectively in terms of street crime, but to assist forces in the development and delivery of the modernisation process.

Miss McIntosh: While I am grateful to the Home Secretary for that reply, can I share with him the dismay of the North Yorkshire Police Federation about his trying to impose changes in pay and conditions on its members without proper negotiation? I assure him that the police reforms are dear to the heart of the North Yorkshire Police

Federation, which would like to work with him. Will he give me an assurance that he will negotiate with it and reach an accommodation and settlement?

Mr. Blunkett: I am enthused to learn that the North Yorkshire Police Federation, which has not been in formal contact, is enthusiastic about the reform agenda. We are all enthusiastic about that agenda on behalf of the public, who want an improved, effective and less variable service. I refute entirely the allegation that there have been no negotiations. There were negotiations with the federation until 27 December. Heads of terms were signed and a consultation was then undertaken by the federation as the trade union for members of the work force who fall within the relevant salary category. Following that consultation, the rejection was made, and three further conciliation meetings were held subsequently. At the end of this week there will be a fourth such meeting, in which I hope that we can reach agreement.

Mr. Syms: There is real anger among Dorset police officers that the Government want to turn them into centralised form fillers rather than local crime fighters. Will the Government think again about the centralising aspects of the reforms?

Mr. Blunkett: I am slightly mystified, as we have no intention of centralising the operation of police on the beat in the community. In fact, it was we, at the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety, who undertook the "Diary of a Police Officer" survey. It was we who revealed that 43 per cent. of the time was spent in the station and who suggested halving the number of indicators so that we could reduce the number of targets expected from the police. It was also we who brought across the former commissioner from New York to instil the importance of community and targeted policing and talked to former Mayor Giuliani about what had worked in New York. We are involving ourselves directly in achieving the sort of reform that will improve the police service, on the back of the substantial increase in numbers that this Government have brought about.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Does the Home Secretary agree that one of the reforms most badly needed is reform of police pensions, because the cost of pensions bears much more heavily on some police authorities than on others? Its effect on North Yorkshire is especially heavy. Will my right hon. Friend make proposals for reforming police pensions, and if so, when might we expect an announcement about this important reform?

Mr. Blunkett: We indicated in the White Paper that we believed reform to be necessary, but that it had to come first in respect of variable performance, over-regulation and outdated practices, not least because Governments of a variety of persuasions have fought over the years to try to get to grips with a system under which, in many areas, almost a fifth of the total police budget is used for servicing the pension. I hope that anyone who comes up with a bright idea about how to reform the pension will be heard in due silence, if the proposal would not either cause people to want to leave the force very quickly and take advantage of the existing rate, or preclude them from wanting to remain in the service more than 30 years. Above all, there is the need to reduce dramatically the level of medical early retirement, which anyone of any political persuasion will agree is very damaging to the force as a whole.

Vera Baird (Redcar): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a further category of urgent need for police reform was revealed by the damning report of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary published on 8 April, which showed the half-hearted way in which rape cases are investigated by police in the United Kingdom? This contributes to a strikingly low conviction rate: only one in 13 complaints result in a conviction. If my right hon. Friend has not yet discussed that critical and urgent need for reform with the police, what plans does he have to do so?

Mr. Blunkett: I have not had the opportunity of doing so with the Association of Chief Police Officers, but I have done so with the Attorney-General, who is very exercised by the statistics and, therefore, by the reality that many people experience. At his suggestion, we will set up a joint working group immediately, to work with him and with the police and criminal justice system to see whether we can bring about a dramatic improvement.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The Secretary of State has earned a solid reputation for speaking directly and not mincing his words. Would he accept that one lesson to be learned from the recent consultation on police pay is that policemen sometimes thought that that created an atmosphere of antagonism, which earned the Secretary of State a rebuff for measures that many people regard as necessary? Would he reserve his antagonism for the Chancellor of the Exchequer? That would be extremely welcome.

Mr. Blunkett: No, I reserve my antagonism for the villains who we are all intent on catching. I reserve praise for the Chancellor for the Budget last Wednesday, and for the resources that were released for secure accommodation and prison places and for tackling crime and for counter-terrorism, all of which I hope the House will strongly welcome. The distribution of those resources will be announced shortly.

I also want to reinforce heavily the backing for the police for the work that they are engaged in across the country. With an extra 4,500 police officers over the last two years, we now have an opportunity to build on the improvement in morale and to invest in catching and convicting more criminals, in preventing more criminals from reoffending and, above all, in creating a safer society in which hatred, prejudice and fascism can be thwarted.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): In the Home Secretary's list of things that he has done, he omitted to mention that virtually all of them simply involved undoing the actions of his predecessor. What would the Home Secretary tell the inspector of police to whom I spoke last week who wanted to increase community policing in the city-centre area for which he was responsible? His city-centre police station had to deal with 100 shoplifters each month, and he estimated that each case took four hours. That is equivalent to 10 officers permanently occupied with dealing with shoplifters. How much more effective would policing have been in that

community if those 10 officers had been properly deployed in the community, policing the streets and getting to grips with the problems of the neighbourhood, rather than having to face the bureaucracy and form filling which, despite the Home Secretary's earlier remarks, are still a hallmark of this Government?

Mr. Blunkett: The simple answer is, "A lot better." If there is any dispute about the need to get officers out into the community doing preventive work, I have not heard it. As I saw in Nottinghamshire on Thursday, tremendous strides are being made, in co-operation with business and commerce, to get the police out on the main streets as we are doing in the safer streets campaign in London and the anti-robbery campaign across the 10 forces. The police are using closed circuit television to apprehend those engaged in shoplifting and other crimes of robbery, and local communication links such as two-way radio with the shopkeepers to take action on the street to prevent those crimes from happening. That is what the anti-street robbery initiative is about. With the co-operation of chiefs of police at local level, who have, and will continue to have, operational control, we can achieve a dramatic change in preventing people from committing crimes in the first place.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): The Home Secretary is doubtless aware of the serious concern among police officers in Scotland over the pay and conditions negotiations and their perception of how those were handled. Some 94 per cent. voted against the heads of agreement, although I am pleased to hear today that conciliation is ongoing. Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify what will happen if no satisfactory agreement is reached pursuant to the conciliation? Will the matter go to arbitration?

Mr. Blunkett: Should we be unable to find a solution through conciliation, it is open to any of those participating in the Police Negotiating Board to refer the case to arbitration, which would be the next step. I hope that that does not happen. We clearly have a disagreement remaining on the major issue of how to get overtime payments down in order to redeploy the resources to front-line policing on a more rational and planned basis. If we can solve that problem, I feel certain that the conciliation process will succeed.

Chief Constables

2. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): If he will make a statement on the operational independence of chief constables. [47061]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): The police are under a duty to enforce the law, but chief officers have wide discretion in how they apply their resources to achieve that. No Minister or police authority may instruct a chief officer of police on whether or how they should act in relation to a particular case or individual. The House knows that the measures being sought by the Government to tackle persistent poor performance do not alter that principle.

Chris Grayling: The Minister is aware that among those who have raised concerns about the reform proposals are chief constables themselves, who believe that they intrude significantly on their operational independence. He is also aware that bringing the senior people—in this case, the chief constables—on board quickly is essential in developing any process of change. Why has he failed to get them behind his process of change?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that, last week, the Association of Chief Police Officers welcomed the amendments that the Government introduced in another place. Sadly, that message was not heeded by all parties there, but we listened and responded, and our response has been welcomed.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): Is not our constitutional provision that there should be no political interference or interference with the operational performance of the police sacrosanct, and have not the Government made that absolutely clear? Will not the power be used very exceptionally—once in a blue moon? Does my right hon. Friend understand the criticism? The chief executive officers of our major industries and the heads of public services are out of the door if they do not perform. What is the difference with the police? I cannot understand the argument for it; can my right hon. Friend?

Mr. Denham: My hon. and learned Friend makes an important point. Of course it is right to listen to the debate about operational independence—indeed, that is why, for the first time ever, the principle that I set out earlier has been stated in the Police Reform Bill—but another issue must be taken into account. What do a Government say to a community, a town or an inner-city area that for a long time has not received the quality policing and, therefore, the protection from crime, criminals and the fear of crime that it deserves? In such circumstances, surely Ministers who stand at the Dispatch Box must be able to say, "If necessary, we will act." That is precisely what the Bill sets out to achieve. Everybody should understand that the Opposition parties that oppose the proposal are saying to such people, "We will not lift a finger to help you, no matter what problems you face."

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Minister referred to the Government amendments introduced in another place, but was it not disingenuous to fail to recognise that the only reason for their introduction was pressure from Conservative Members in another place? Do not the Government recognise that what remains a concern for chief constables and for many in another place and on these Benches—clause 5 of the Police Reform Bill—will lead only to increased centralisation and still gives the Home Secretary power to interfere in what chief constables want to do? Having made welcome changes in response to pressure from us, will he go further and accept what we are saying about clause 5?

Mr. Denham: As I understand it, the Conservative party has said that it does not want clause 5 in the Bill, and it has no intention of ever doing anything about the problems of policing a particular community, no matter how deep-seated they may be.

The hon. Gentleman is wrong to use the centralisation tag. The Government are working with the police to deliver what they want. They said that they wanted more

police officers, and we have provided the resources that have delivered record numbers of police officers—there will be 130,000 next year. The police said that we should cut down on the things that hamper them in their fight against crime, so we have introduced video identity parades to replace the old-style parades that took weeks to organise and enabled people to evade being brought to justice. They told us that we should speed up the courts, so we have halved the time that it takes for a young offender to go from arrest to sentence. They told us, in London in particular, that they want community support officers to free other officers to fight street crime. The Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats, far from backing the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not here to answer for the Opposition parties.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I represent a community of exactly the sort to which the Minister referred. It has been historically let down by its chief constable and its police officers have work loads much greater than those of other police officers in the same police authority. May I urge my right hon. Friend to ensure that communities such as Slough which—on any statistical analysis—expect their police officers to work twice as hard as other police officers in the same police authority, get a better standard of policing?

Mr. Denham: I believe that the whole package of police reform measures will enable the problems of particular communities and towns to be tackled not just through the powers that we seek in clause 5, but through greater flexibility in the way in which the police are rewarded, to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has just referred. All policing jobs are difficult and demanding, but some are even more so. That should be recognised in the employment and rewards of police officers. The whole package will make it much easier for the police service and chief constables to address those problems.

Police Morale

3. **Mr. David Lidington** (Aylesbury): What recent assessment he has made of police morale. [47062]

13. **Bob Spink** (Castle Point): What recent assessment he has made of police morale. [47073]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): We created an extra 4,578 officers in the period from March 2000 to January this year; we have established a new occupational health service; and we have provided a one-third increase in capital investment for this coming year to enhance the conditions in which officers work and the technology that they use. We have slimmed down bureaucracy, and we have made a commitment to having 130,000 officers by this time next year. As a result, we can all look forward to officers catching more criminals and being able to protect us more effectively. We will ensure that they know that they are valued, and feel that they are valued, and that their morale improves all the time.

Mr. Lidington: Surely the Home Secretary agrees that the optimistic assessment that he has just given the House would be regarded by the more than 800 officers from the Thames Valley alone who attended the lobby and rally in central London as at best a fantasy compared with the reality that they experience. Does he realise that one of the chief causes of low morale in our police service has been his intemperate and hectoring language towards hard-pressed officers in all parts of the country? Does he now regret describing our police as wreckers?

Mr. Blunkett: I would, but I have never used that word. I have never described the police as wreckers privately, publicly, on radio or in writing or to any journalist. When Opposition Members, like some journalists, put words into my mouth, they should ensure that they get them accurate.

Bob Spink: Over the past two weeks, I have met the Police Federation, the police associations, police officers and sergeants on the beat day and night in my constituency, and I have spoken with senior command officers in Essex. They all tell me that police morale is at dangerous levels. Does the Home Secretary realise that, if he continues to pursue his policies of centralisation and putting civilians on the street with police powers, the morale of the police will be driven lower, to even more dangerous levels? Will he pull back from those ill-thought-out reforms?

Mr. Blunkett: First, the only civilians who are, or who will be, put on the streets with police powers are the Specials. We are not proposing to give community support officers a replica set of police powers.

Secondly, the police themselves want support and back-up work. The Metropolitan force in particular has asked us for that. Anyone, in this place or the Lords, who votes against that proposition should answer to the public and to the locality—and to the Commissioner and the other chief constables who they rightly say should have operational control—as to why they want to take away the power and right to have the operational control and the support for full-time, trained officers, many of whom are on the beat because we have put an extra 4,500 on the streets over the past two years.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I thank my right hon. Friend for visiting Nottinghamshire last week, where he saw a force that was not having a crisis of morale but working hard, in partnership with others, to tackle some real problems. However, one issue that affects the morale of the police is the fact that persistent offenders are constantly bailed by the courts, which undermines the good work that the police often do. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that his proposals to deal more effectively with persistent offenders are speedily implemented?

Mr. Blunkett: First, I confirm that the morale of the force was very high. Steve Green, the chief constable, is an excellent leader and manager who is doing a first-rate job with officers in a service that has been reorganised since 2 April. That is enthusing all of them with a new vigour and commitment.

Secondly, yes, we shall put in place the recommendations that I made last Tuesday. The order has been laid in respect of intermediate cases that did not previously result in remand for those on bail. Furthermore, the Chancellor's Budget enabled me to set

up additional places—2,300 remand and prison places—over the months ahead. That will enable the courts to do the job that we all want done so that repeat, continuing, prolific offenders are put out of harm's way until they can be dealt with through the courts and properly convicted.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that there has been no year during the past 10 when those representing, or purporting to represent, the police have not declared police morale to be at an all-time low? Has he also noticed that the number of recruits to the police is at an all-time high, and that there is no difficulty in attracting recruits? Does he consider that odd?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I consider it very odd indeed.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the factors depressing police morale in London and the south-east is that, despite recent improvements in housing allowances, many police officers have to commute long distances because of the shortage of affordable housing? Does he share my concern about the fact that the Metropolitan police in particular are continuing the policy introduced under the last Government of selling off police housing? Is he monitoring that process and giving guidance to the authority about the proper policy to pursue?

Mr. Blunkett: We were pleased to be able to join the national health service in using its low-cost co-ordinators to find accommodation and identify property suitable for renting. We are using the new programme for travel costs brought in by my predecessor. That has been a tremendous boon to those working in the Metropolitan area—sometimes to the detriment of forces just outside, as people find that it is attractive to be able to travel into the area. Of course, I am happy to raise with the Metropolitan police authority and with the Commissioner any concerns expressed by hon. Members, in the expectation that, within their operational jurisdiction, they will listen to those concerns.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Will my right hon. Friend accept Labour Members' appreciation for his work to improve police morale at all levels through discussion and dialogue with officers? Does he believe that more aids such as CCTV—particularly portable CCTV, which will help officers in small urban areas—would greatly boost police morale?

Mr. Blunkett: Together with up-to-date, 21st-century equipment and the complete review in which we are engaged, the process through which police officers make charges and secure subsequent convictions and the spreading of excellence across the country will ensure that best practice can be available to all. Of course, that process is backed up by the measures that I described earlier, which will reduce sickness absence and support those who work day in, day out at the sharp end, including the rewards in the new reform package. They will provide specific bonus payments for those who do the most difficult tasks in the most difficult circumstances at the most difficult time of the week.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): The Home Secretary will doubtless agree with the apparently unanimous view of the House that nothing would raise the morale of the police more than the feeling that they are, as he said earlier, out on main street fighting crime in the community. But have not the bureaucratic measures introduced by this Government during the past five years contributed to the feeling among police officers that they cannot do so? As one community constable said, they face

"an ever increasingly demanding environment where performance targets seem to outnumber personnel."

Moreover, even if the Home Secretary did not use the word "wreckers", criticisms have been expressed about the police's belief that they are consistently denigrated—an impression that drove them to lobby the House. Has not the combination of those two factors done more to undermine police morale than anything else?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I do not agree. I am sorry that we cannot give the hon. Gentleman a round of applause for his rhetoric, but it bears no resemblance to reality. Officers lobbied the House—in most cases, perfectly reasonably—because they were concerned that the package of measures would lead to too many losers and not enough winners, and in particular because they were concerned about premium payments on overtime rates. That is what the conciliation process is seeking to address, and I think that a solution will be found.

Because of increased numbers, better technology, the spread of best practice and the demanding of better from all forces so that the performance of the best can be matched, people in our communities will experience better security and safety, and will be able to believe more readily statistics showing that crime has fallen. Above all, they will be prepared to invest further in crime reduction and policing, because they will see that it is worth while. That applies not only to those who are subject to the worst criminality in our most deprived communities, but to those who are negotiating the spending review.

Police Numbers

5. **Mrs. Joan Humble** (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): What plans he has to increase the number of police officers. [47064]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): At the end of January, police numbers stood at the record level of 128,748. We are on track to reach our target of 130,000 officers by spring 2003.

The Government's crime fighting fund has played a major part in driving up officer numbers. It is enabling forces to take on 9,000 recruits, over and above previous plans, in the three years to March 2003.

Mrs. Humble: I welcome the additional police numbers that my right hon. Friend has announced. Will he join me in congratulating Blackpool police force on using its additional 45 police officers not only actively to reduce crime, but to reduce the fear of crime through high-visibility policing? Does he agree that the best way to further that aim is to reduce the level of paperwork that keeps so many police officers at their station desks?

Mr. Denham: I am very pleased to hear of the way in which Lancashire police are meeting my hon. Friend's

constituents' policing needs. She is absolutely right to say that we must go further to reduce paperwork. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said, we have drawn attention to that problem. We have asked Sir David O'Dowd, the former chief inspector of constabulary, to lead a taskforce, which is composed overwhelmingly of serving police officers of all ranks, to identify for us the measures that need to be taken to reduce bureaucracy. The measures that we have already taken to introduce video identity parades show how committed we are to making progress and to freeing up police officers' time for patrolling duties.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): The Minister will be aware that areas such as Berkshire, which have very high housing costs and are very close to the Met, are having serious recruitment and retention problems. What does the right hon. Gentleman propose to do about that, particular bearing in mind the fact that his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has increased national insurance contributions, which will make it even harder for hard-pressed police officers to buy or rent property in our area?

Mr. Denham: We are working closely with the very small number of forces that have not done as well as the vast majority of forces in the past few years in delivering the extra 4,500 police officers across the country to whom my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary referred earlier. I am confident that the problems that have affected recruitment in each of those areas are being identified and that they, too, will benefit from the growth in police numbers that the police service as a whole will experience.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Although I accept everything that my right hon. Friend says—we have done a lot to improve policing throughout the country—I am sure that he will recognise that people are always saying that we need more police in the communities. Does he believe that community wardens—such as those we have in Burnley, working together with the police—help to give communities the better standard of life that we want them to have?

Mr. Denham: I agree with my hon. Friend. As he knows, I recently visited Burnley and was able to hear at first hand how popular has been the police's decision to develop more fully the community beat officer role and the very important links between police officers and the extended police family provided by community wardens. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to that.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): Have not the questions and the answers this afternoon demonstrated that policing is not just a matter of numbers and that the main question is how the police are managed and deployed and what they have to spend their time doing? I am genuinely puzzled by the messages that Ministers seem to be giving us. Half the time they seem to deny that they are centralising and bureaucratising the police, whereas the rest of the time they appear to be justifying doing so. The Home Secretary and I have recently been studying policing in America. What has the Minister concluded from studying policing in the Netherlands and Belgium?

Mr. Denham: We are working with the police service to deliver the type of police service that we, the police and, more important, the public want to see in local communities: more police officers, with more time to play a visible role in the community. The hon. Gentleman asks about policing in the Netherlands. I can tell him that one of the things that the Dutch do is to deploy people very similar to the community support officers that the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis wishes to deploy in London—something which the Government will make possible, but which the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats want to deny to the people of London.

Mr. Letwin: I am delighted to hear that the Minister is so knowledgeable, but it is odd that that is not the way officials and policemen in the Netherlands and Belgium describe the situation. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, in the Netherlands and more recently in Belgium, neighbourhood police officers—the bobbies on the beat, who become the custodians of the neighbourhood—are described by large numbers of officers who have spoken to us as the elite force, because that is what people demand locally?

Is the Minister also aware that, in the Netherlands and more recently in Belgium, increased and increasingly effective control over street crime has been brought about by decreasing central bureaucracy and decentralising control over the police? Is he aware that by international standards his efforts and those of the Home Secretary to centralise control over the police in this country under clause 5 of the Police Reform Bill are a retrograde eccentricity?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman is about as wrong as it is possible to be. He is wrong in his characterisation of the Government's proposals and in his suggestion that we are opposed to developing the role of community beat officers—my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and many others have been advocates of that essential role of police officers in the community. The hon. Gentleman is also wrong to oppose the types of reform that, according to the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, would enable him to free the time of police officers from the routine but necessary patrolling duties that have been seen since 11 September. The Commissioner would like to be able to free those officers to join the fight against street crime. That fight has already had a big impact on street crime, yet the hon. Gentleman opposes it. He is wrong to oppose those changes.

Street Crime

6. **Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall): What discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on how the police can make an impact on street crime. [47065]

12. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): What additional resources are being made available to the police to respond to levels of street robberies and violent crime. [47072]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): There have been three meetings of the cross-Government street action group, which is chaired by the Prime Minister and involves ministerial colleagues, the police and local government. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced last Wednesday that £180 million in new money and a further £100 million from the criminal justice system reserve is to be made available to the Home Office.

Mr. Khabra: I have received a number of letters from constituents complaining about crime, especially street crime, in my constituency. Recent cases in my constituency include an arson attack in which two people were burned to death, and a person killed by stabbing. Muggings are on the increase, and two cases of murder remain unsolved. Police capabilities have been stretched to the limit by the fact that the police have had to deal with a large number of marches of a religious or political nature. A large number of such events take place in my constituency, which is unique. Ours is a multicultural society, and many people would like to come and settle in my constituency.

My question is this. Will the Home Secretary consider allocating more resources to the police force in my constituency? The force is in a unique situation and it needs more resources.

Mr. Denham: I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friend acknowledges the considerable work that the Metropolitan police have done in constituencies such as his, which contain members of many different minority communities who have been fearful of racism and misjudged reprisals following the events of 11 September. The policing operation has been considerable and, I believe, successful. My hon. Friend is right to say that it has imposed on police time, but it was necessary.

Now, in response to street crime, the safer streets initiative has been started in London. That has shown everyone how having high-profile policing on the streets, well directed and concentrated on a certain area, can have a real impact. In the eighth week of the safer streets campaign, street crime in London was 14 per cent. below its level a year previously, and in the target boroughs the reduction was 21 per cent.

My hon. Friend asks about resources. First, we need to support the Metropolitan Police Commissioner in terms of powers for community support officers so that he can free up officer time to help in the battle against street crime. Secondly, it is clear that part of the allocation of resources made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will have to go to the fight against street crime, and we hope to announce details of that as soon as possible.

Mr. Jack: If things are going so well in London, why did the *Daily Express* tell us today that detectives ignore two thirds of muggings in Lambeth?

Police in Lancashire take the robbery reduction initiative extremely seriously, but they have not yet had any extra resources following notification by the Home Secretary of their inclusion in the initiative. Further to that, are more resources to be made available to the probation service in Lancashire, and to the drugs prevention initiative, to ensure that they, too, can play their full part in combating street crime and robbery reduction?

Mr. Denham: The first point to make is that the right hon. Gentleman is wrong about Lambeth. The truth is that street robbery offences fell from 916 in October 2001 to 513 in March 2002. That is a 12-month low and a 17 per cent. reduction on robbery figures for March 2001. During the eight weeks of the safer streets initiative, the number of robberies in Lambeth fell by 6.4 per cent., ahead of the trend across the rest of the capital.

On resources, the big question for the right hon. Gentleman is whether to back the decisions by the Chancellor that have enabled us to say that we will invest more money to tackle street crime. We shall see what he has decided to do in the next day or two. If he is not here voting in favour of the Chancellor's decisions, he is in no position to start asking questions about extra resources for Lancashire.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): In my right hon. Friend's discussions with his colleagues in the Lord Chancellor's Department, will he give particular emphasis to the approaches taken by magistrates, especially in relation to new initiatives? Last year, I was involved with the first case in my constituency arising from an antisocial behaviour order. When it eventually went to the magistrates court to be enforced, the magistrates gave the person concerned a conditional discharge. I was subsequently advised by the Home Office that they did not have the power to do that. Lo and behold, a few weeks ago the same individual was taken to the magistrates court in Chorley in connection with a similar order, when a conditional discharge was again given. Will my right hon. Friend ask his colleagues in the Lord Chancellor's Department to ensure that those who advise magistrates courts understand what the law is and are able to enforce it correctly?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend raises an important point, and I shall certainly refer his remarks to the Lord Chancellor's Department. Antisocial behaviour orders work best where there is clear understanding and support from every single part of the criminal justice system, as well as the youth service, social services and so on. I shall see what we can do to address the matter that he raises.

We are working closely with the Lord Chancellor's Department to ensure that appropriately restrictive bail conditions, or indeed the refusal of bail, are used when tackling persistent offenders, especially street robbers.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): Is the Minister aware that in the London borough of Bromley street crime has risen by 150 per cent. over the past 12 months? Is he also aware that the number of police officers in Bromley has fallen from 464 in 1997 to fewer than 430 today, as a result not only of his decisions, but of the decisions of the Liberal Democrat and Labour majorities on the Metropolitan police authority? Can he tell the residents of Bromley why they should pay more and more for fewer and fewer police as crime gets worse and worse?

Mr. Denham: I am tempted to refer the hon. Gentleman to the shadow Home Secretary, who clearly would not want anybody to be able to do anything about anywhere that did not have enough police officers.

The good news for the hon. Gentleman's constituents and for the people of London as a whole is that the number of Metropolitan police officers rose by 1,000 in the 10 months to January this year and will rise again next year. That is evidence of our commitment to ensuring that the number of police officers in London increases. It is of course for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to decide how those officers are allocated across the London boroughs.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): In my constituency last week there was a particularly ugly incident in Trealaw following the death of a young boy in a drug-related incident. A riot took place when the dealer involved turned up at the funeral. Will my right hon. Friend address the coincidence of drug-related crime and violent crime—especially in the south Wales valleys, where it is prevalent—with a view to providing additional resources for the police in the area?

Mr. Denham: There is a relationship between drug abuse, especially of class A drugs such as heroin and crack, and violent crime. The chief constable of south Wales recently expressed concern about the impact of heroin. We intend to enable the police to concentrate their time on the class A drugs which do the most damage to our communities. We also intend to work across government to ensure the availability of treatment services so that people who get hooked on serious drugs receive treatment and support to enable them to overcome their addiction. That is critical if we are to break the cycle of acquisitive and violent crime.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am sure that the public are genuinely relieved that, after five years of Labour in government, police numbers have increased from those under the Conservative Government. People were pleased that the Chancellor allocated £180 million of new money for Home Office priorities in last Wednesday's Budget. However, when will there be additional resources to make up the extra cost to the police authorities of the employers' national insurance contribution, which takes money away from front-line policing? When will all parish and local councils that want them get funding for as many neighbourhood or community support wardens as they need? Will Home Office Ministers join those from other Departments in a campaign for many more youth, community and sports workers to provide genuine alternative, constructive activities to divert young people from crime?

Mr. Denham: That was quite a shopping list. The resources that the Chancellor has made available to the police and other Home Office services will be announced shortly, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said. The spending review will deal with longer-term issues. It is also important to ensure that every one of the record number of police officers is used effectively. We therefore support the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis in introducing community support officers. I cannot understand why the Liberal Democrats, who originally supported the idea, have subsequently decided to oppose it. That would mean not making the best use of police officers in London.

Dangerousness Orders

7. **Mr. Clive Soley** (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): If he will make a statement on progress towards establishing dangerousness orders. [47066]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): We have acted already and are continuing to act to address the challenge to public safety posed by dangerous people. We have introduced a raft of measures, including sex offender orders, which we will further strengthen.

We also plan to introduce new measures to deal more effectively with the dangers posed by people with a severe personality disorder.

Mr. Soley: Does my hon. Friend accept that this is a difficult but profoundly important subject to tackle, and that it involves a relatively small number of violent offenders who can wreck people's lives and kill? Does she accept that we need to introduce some legislation to deal with people who are acknowledged to pose a high risk to others? At times, they ask to be locked up to be prevented from doing what they fear they will do, as happened in at least one case a few years ago. Although this is a difficult matter, I ask my hon. Friend not to give up on it.

Beverley Hughes: I know that my hon. Friend has great interest and expertise in this matter, which he rightly describes as important. We all know of several cases that have exposed the gaps in legislation and in assessment and treatment, especially of those who are dangerous and have personality disorders. We are determined to close the gap; we have published proposals and will introduce legislation as soon as possible. In the meantime, we are developing four important pilot projects in two high-security prisons and two special hospitals. Development of assessment and treatment is also important.

We are also considering the way in which new sentences, including new orders, can help us better to ensure that a dangerous person, whether suffering from a personality disorder or not, will remain in custody or under supervision while continuing to present risk. Risk assessment and management is the key to that.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Does the Minister accept that the need for dangerousness orders would be vastly reduced if the number of police was greatly increased? Often only two police officers patrol the whole rural area of Harborough district on Fridays and Saturdays. In the Oadby and Wigston borough council area, there are always far too few police officers to carry out necessary police work. It is annoying for the police to be continually harassed by Members of Parliament and members of the public about their inability to carry out their work. Why do not the Government stop talking and get on and do something?

Beverley Hughes: The hon. and learned Gentleman is entirely wrong, and he has managed to divert a question

on another very important but different topic back to the subject of policing. The most important factor in protecting the public from dangerous offenders is not the number of police officers per se; it is effective and strong partnership between the police, the probation service, the health service and other agencies at local level. It is also crucial to have in place the measures to contain, treat, observe and survey those offenders. Since 1997 there has been a sea change in the way in which agencies work together, and we have introduced measures such as sex offenders orders to reduce the risk to the minimum level possible. We need to go further, but that is not a matter of having more police; it is a matter of better inter-agency working.

Drug Misuse

9. **Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): What assessment he has made of the links between drugs misuse and crime; and what steps are being taken to tackle the problem. [47068]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): Research shows a strong connection between the misuse of heroin, cocaine and crack cocaine and theft and other acquisitive crime, and a consequent high level of local concern about supply and other drug-related activity. Measures to tackle that include the £220 million communities against drugs programme, a range of interventions in the criminal justice system to identify drug misusing offenders and get them into appropriate treatment, and our ongoing efforts to disrupt the supply of those drugs.

Linda Perham: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. My local court, Redbridge magistrates court, which is one of the most effective and efficient in the country, is concerned about the suitability of drug treatment and testing orders for less serious offenders, including young and first-time offenders. Are there any sentencing measures that my hon. Friend can introduce to cope with those offenders?

Mr. Ainsworth: We recognise and accept that drug treatment and testing orders are not suitable in every circumstance, and that is why we introduced drug abstinence orders and requirements. With regard to young people, it is our view that magistrates' ability to make various attachments to supervisory orders is sufficiently comprehensive. Youth offending teams have the funding to ensure that all young offenders are assessed for drug misuse, so they are able to access appropriate treatment where it is available and as outlined by the drug action teams. However, if specific concerns are being raised by my hon. Friend's local magistrates, we should of course be prepared to listen to those. I should be more than happy to receive further representations from her about the gap in provision perceived by magistrates in her constituency.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Would I be correct in inferring from the Minister's initial reply that the Government are moving towards the decriminalisation of so-called soft drugs? If that is the case, will the Minister bear it in mind that many people have grave misgivings about such a move?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman should not take any such inference from my reply. I was asked what assessment we had made of the clear link between drug misuse and acquisitive crime. All our research shows the clearest link between the three substances that I mentioned—heroin, cocaine and crack cocaine—and such crime.

That does not mean that other drugs are not harmful—they are. It continues to be the Government's intention that those drugs should remain illegal, and that the message that all drugs are harmful should continue to go out. However, if we are to get young people to listen to us, we have to try to differentiate the message so that we can say to them that certain substances are seriously dangerous both to themselves as individuals and to the communities in which they live. Our effort has to be directed towards having the maximum effect on the use of class A drugs.

Criminal Records Bureau

11. **Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton): If he will make a statement on the new Criminal Records Bureau; and what plans he has to give employers access to criminal records. [47071]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): The Criminal Records Bureau will provide employers and organisations with improved access to criminal records and other information, through applications initiated by individuals. Its primary purpose is to help employers and voluntary organisations make safer recruiting decisions, especially for those working with children or vulnerable adults. The bureau first began processing applications for the two higher levels of disclosures on 11 March.

Jim Dobbin: I thank the Minister for that reply. I agree that care in recruitment procedures is absolutely essential to protect children, young people and other vulnerable groups from dangerous people. Can my hon. Friend assure me and the House that job applicants and voluntary workers will have a fair deal through these procedures, and that at least their private lives will be protected?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend is right that we are dealing with sensitive issues—the criminal records of individuals—and, to ensure that that information is used fairly and that the individual's rights to privacy are not prejudiced, no disclosure can be issued without the consent of the individual applicant, and the information is always provided to the individual applicant. If they are unhappy about any aspects of it, they have the opportunity to challenge it before it is made known to anyone else, including their employer.

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As Home Office Ministers are still in the Chamber, may I ask whether you have received any indication from them that they intend to make a statement about the impending visit to this country of Henry Kissinger, and requests that have been made in courts in Spain for him to be investigated by the Metropolitan police for abuses of human rights in Chile and other countries in south America during the 1970s, when Operation Condor killed large numbers of people? It is a matter of international human rights, and, as Henry Kissinger will be in this country, it would seem a useful opportunity to ask him questions, as he is a person in a good position to know a lot of answers.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no such approach from any Minister.

Vaccination of Children (Parental Choice)

3.32 pm

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to allow parents to choose to have their child vaccinated separately against measles, mumps and rubella; and for connected purposes.

There is a simple point to this Bill: to give parents a choice. I believe that they deserve that choice, and clearly they wish to have it, as 80 per cent. of the public appear to agree with the contents of my Bill. It would require the Department of Health to allow GPs to give parents the choice of single vaccinations for measles, mumps and rubella, rather than the prevailing situation, in which any child being inoculated for these diseases can have only a combined triple vaccine, which is known as the MMR, on the national health service.

I believe that that lack of choice in the national health service is why we are seeing massively falling immunisation rates for children across the country, particularly here in London, against these dangerous childhood diseases. Sadly, the figures are not terribly up to date. The most recent figures that I could find from the House of Commons Library pertained to the year 2000–01. Those figures show that 87 per cent. of children across the country are now protected against these dangerous childhood diseases, falling to 79 per cent. of all children in London. That compares with the figure in 1995–96 when 92 per cent. of all children across the country had been vaccinated.

Clearly, there is a major fall in the number of children being vaccinated, and those figures apply to some 18 months before today's date. I fear that events over the past 18 months are likely to mean that, when new figures are produced, we will see a further fall in the number of children being vaccinated—almost certainly, one in four children will not have been vaccinated for these dangerous diseases in the London area. The Department of Health and the Government should allow parents the choice of single vaccinations; the arguments for that are straightforward.

I believe that the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) hopes to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker; if he does so, I am sure that he can give a list of organisations that approve of the combined triple vaccination. There are too many to mention in my short 10-minute speech, but I do not doubt that they believe that it is right to give children the MMR.

Parents are entitled to choice; they make decisions on behalf of their children which, along with their right to choose, should be respected by the Department of Health among others. Although the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), may not like it, parents are choosing not to have their children vaccinated because they are not being offered a choice. I am sure that we both seek the same end—increased vaccination rates. It is important that children are vaccinated and the only way to accomplish that is to provide choice on the national health service. Parents are now in the position of having all, meaning the MMR vaccine, or nothing, and clearly far too many of them are choosing nothing.

For the luckier ones who live near a private clinic, and who can afford to spend hundreds of pounds on private singly administered vaccinations, there is a choice. We do

not know quite how many parents choose to have single vaccinations privately because the Department of Health does not keep those figures. However, the situation is not fair for parents who cannot choose single vaccinations, either for logistical or financial reasons, which is another reason why the Department should change its guidance.

People with young children may remember that little babies are vaccinated at three months, six months and nine months. There is no reason why, at 18 months, they should not go back to the doctor to have a further set of vaccinations; that is perfectly reasonable for those parents who wish vaccination to be done in that way.

At the moment, doctors have a financial incentive to vaccinate in the form of the MMR; if there is an incentive to boost vaccination rates in general, doctors who use a computer database to determine which children need to be recalled for single vaccinations could just as easily boost the number of children immunised through the triple vaccination as they could the number of children immunised through a series of three jabs. It is logistically possible for that choice to be given on the NHS. It is a great disappointment that the Department of Health is pig-headedly refusing to give parents that choice.

Administrative reasons are among the many reasons why the Department appears to be against providing choice, and I have just dealt with that. Doctors are able to make sure that their systems are compliant and that they can call up children in danger of missing their jabs because they are having them done singly.

Curiously, the Department has suggested that somehow it would be dangerous to allow children to have separate inoculations. If we had a system that allowed single jabs, I do not see why children could not be inoculated against the most dangerous disease first. If children were given the measles jab first, many of the Department's arguments about the danger of single jabs would fall. At the moment, the only way to secure a single jab on the NHS is for a child to have the rubella jab first if there is a risk of contact with a pregnant woman. If the Department changed its guidance and guidelines, the measles vaccination could be given first, and the risk of contracting the most dangerous disease, from which children may die, and which certainly has serious repercussions, would be removed. After that, children could have vaccinations for rubella and mumps. That would not pose any danger to public health and would counter one of the Government's major and most frequently cited arguments for not proceeding with single inoculations.

There is, of course, another reason why the Department of Health has set its face against giving parents the right of choice within the system: 2,000 parents are suing the Department because they believe that their children have been damaged by the MMR vaccine. That case may come to court in the next couple of years. How would hon. Members feel if they were in the position of those 2,000 parents, with a child who had been developing perfectly well but who, the parents believe, was damaged by the vaccination that they had taken the child to have? If I were the parent of one of those children, I would not want to believe that any action of mine had resulted in catastrophic damage to my child so that they would not lead a normal life.

I do not believe, that the claims of those parents are vexatious. They do not want to accept that an action that they took lies at the heart of their child's problems. I urge the Minister to consider the possible outcome of the case if it is decided that there might be a problem with the MMR vaccine and that in some way the Department of Health and the Government are liable. Ministers are proceeding down a worrying road. If they allowed an element of choice, they could absolve themselves of much of that potential blame.

We all know that medical procedures, including the simplest operations, can have severe side effects or even result in death. All medical procedures involve that possibility, so we cannot rule out the possibility that the same is true of MMR. Given that fact, the only way forward is to offer parents choice. In exercising that choice, they will be taking responsibility upon themselves.

3.42 pm

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I must admire the persistence of the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride). She has raised this matter on Adjournment debates, in meetings in the House and now on a ten-minute Bill. She knows very well that I take the view that her persistence would be much better targeted if she campaigned for the needs of autistic people. If she put some of that persistence into campaigning for additional research into autism and its causes and therapies, I would support her.

One of the reasons for the drop in MMR take-up is that people as persistent as the hon. Lady raise the matter constantly and bring into the public domain the most tenuous and circumstantial evidence to support their case. The overwhelming body of scientific evidence supports exactly what the Government are trying to do. I cannot imagine circumstances under which a responsible Government could ignore the huge welter of evidence presented to them, turn their back on it and take a diametrically opposed view.

The Government's position is not and has never been based on political dogma on this matter. It is not and has never been based on administrative convenience, as the hon. Lady suggested. It is based on the advice of public health professionals. At a time when we are debating the needs of the national health service, we would do well to remember that more people's lives are saved and more sickness and misery are prevented by public health measures than by anything that happens in primary or secondary care. We lose sight of that at our peril.

We are faced with a clear case of scientists and public health professionals in difficult circumstances weighing up all the advantages and disadvantages, the risks and the costs, and presenting as near as possible a unified approach to Government. The Government are taking that advice, as a responsible Government should. Attacking that advice and continuing to bring such tenuous and circumstantial evidence to public attention is an attempt to undermine the Government. If take-up of the triple vaccine is falling as the hon. Lady suggested, there are children in this country whose lives are at lethal risk. People who continually raise the matter in this way must bear responsibility for that.

I will not trawl through the list of organisations that the hon. Lady mentioned. I could certainly mention all those that recommend MMR, and I could cite the 90 countries that use it. I could in great detail go through the scientific evidence that shows no link between MMR and autism. I shall not do so, but I will mention a few cases. The data

[Dr. Stephen Ladyman]

produced by Brent Taylor's report based on children here in London show no correlation between MMR and autism. The evidence produced by Boston university, using data from the UK, shows that while MMR take-up rates have flattened, the increase in autism is as steep as ever. Therefore, there is no correlation between MMR and autism.

I could go through all the evidence that suggests that whatever causes autism happens in the first three months of embryological development. It almost certainly happens in the earliest months of pregnancy, possibly even before the woman knows that she is pregnant. We have clear evidence of some sort of effect at that time in the child's development. Clear evidence is also emerging from the United States that new-born children have chemical markers in their systems that demonstrate that they already have autism. The autism may not develop for 18 months or two years, but they have the ticking time bomb that is autism in their systems. There is a huge body of evidence showing no link. To throw away the advantages of MMR on the basis of a few small shreds of non-proven data would be irresponsible in the extreme.

Let us not forget what all this is about: the phenomenon of herd immunity. Once take-up levels of an immunisation procedure reach about 90 per cent., the remaining 10 per cent. who are not immunised are protected from epidemics. We prevent an epidemic because people with a disease do not come into contact with those who are not immunised against it. That is a valuable benefit of immunisation. If we lose it because people are not having the vaccine or are talked out of taking their immunisation opportunities, everybody in society will be threatened.

Conservative Members talk about choice. That choice should first be rational, considering the advantages or disadvantages that one option might have and another might not. There is scientific evidence that single vaccines are not a rational choice in that respect. Secondly, the exercise of choice in public health terms should not have a detrimental effect on the rest of the population, and choosing single vaccines clearly would have that detrimental effect.

We know, for example, from evidence already being gathered that offering single vaccines results in a fall by two thirds in take-up rates. We know, therefore, that people would not complete single-vaccination courses. We also know from experience of providing a diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis multiple vaccination that offering single vaccinations for those diseases resulted in take-up falling from 80 per cent. to 30 per cent. We know what will happen if the Government change their policy in the way that the Bill suggests: vaccination rates will drop and children will die. The Government are doing the right thing by following the advice that they have been given. I just wish that the hon. Lady and her supporters would be a bit more open minded about looking at that evidence and taking a rational approach.

We have a busy day ahead of us and I have no reason to take up hon. Members' time with a Division. However, it is important to put on the record that the Government are doing what their scientific advisers are unanimously telling them to do. For them to do otherwise would be irresponsible in the extreme. Opposition Members should now and again admit that perhaps the Government are getting all the advice and have taken the right decision.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Miss Julie Kirkbride, Sir Patrick Cormack, Dr. Ian Gibson, Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, Mr. George Osborne, Mr. Bill Wiggin and Mr. Gregory Barker.

VACCINATION OF CHILDREN (PARENTAL CHOICE)

Miss Julie Kirkbride accordingly presented a Bill to allow parents to choose to have their child vaccinated separately against measles, mumps and rubella; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 June, and to be printed [Bill 122].

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [18 April].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

(1) That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance.

(2) Subject to paragraph (3) below, this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for any relief, other than a relief that—

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.

(3) Paragraph (2) above does not exclude the making of amendments with respect to value added tax providing for relief on the acquisition from another member State of any goods in relation to which, if they were imported from a place outside the member States, relief would be given by an order under section 37 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994.—*[Mr. Gordon Brown.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

3.51 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Budget reflects the fundamental values at the heart of the modern Labour party and the Labour Government: the belief that all human beings are of equal value; the conviction that we all deserve the opportunity to find and fulfil our potential; the belief that together we can achieve far more than we can alone; and the recognition that in our modern knowledge-driven economy, the policies that we need for social justice and equal opportunities are, at one and the same time, the policies that we also need to create a successful dynamic economy. This Budget, like the five earlier Budgets presented by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, is based fairly and squarely on our commitment to enterprise, prosperity and opportunity for all.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Does the Secretary of State recall appearing with me on a programme called "Powerhouse" on 29 May during the general election campaign? At that time, she said:

"We've got no plans at all to raise that ceiling on National Insurance contributions . . . It is not going to happen."

Can she explain why that has now happened?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman will recall that reference had been made to Labour's 1992 shadow Budget in which we proposed the complete abolition of the national insurance ceiling and the imposition of full national insurance contributions on all earnings above that ceiling. I remind him that we spent about a week of the election campaign making it clear in response to repeated charges by him and his hon. Friends that we had ruled out any increase in the standard rate and the upper rate of income tax, but that we would not commit ourselves in advance on the hundreds of other rates and allowances that operate within the tax system.

The priority in our first term was to create a strong and stable economy and to get more people into work. We succeeded in those aims to an extent that almost no one thought possible five years ago. Britain is enjoying the lowest inflation and interest rates for 40 years and the lowest public sector debt for 10 years. More than 1,250,000 more people are in work and there are 75,000 more businesses than there were five years ago.

The tough decisions that we made five years ago have been tested in tough times. Of course, we have not been able to cut ourselves off from the downturn in the rest of the world economy, which began with the collapse of the hi-tech sector in the USA. Our manufacturing industry, especially, has suffered with a fall in output of 7 per cent. over the past year, but other countries—our major competitors such as France, Germany, America and, worst of all, Japan—have all experienced the same or even worse difficulties and falls in output in their manufacturing sectors.

Now, we are seeing signs that manufacturing and the world economy as a whole are turning the corner. Indeed, last week the British Chambers of Commerce reported a sharp upturn in business confidence in the manufacturing sector.

The proof of our economic policy in these tough times is that at a time when Japan has been in recession and likewise America, and when the economy of the rest of Europe has hardly grown, Britain has been the fastest growing economy in the G7. Next year, the OECD, the IMF and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research all expect the United Kingdom to be the fastest growing major economy in Europe.

To create greater prosperity for all, we need to do two things. First, we must continue raising the level of employment. Secondly, we must improve the quality of those jobs by raising our productivity.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): The right hon. Lady talks of the need to raise the level of employment. Some of my constituents who work in the North sea oil industry have been made redundant, or are being made redundant, to make their industry more competitive, to attract inward investment, so that it might compete with other fields around the world. Will she explain to them how the Chancellor of the Exchequer taking more money out of that industry for the Treasury will make them more competitive?

Ms Hewitt: That sector and every other sector of our economy is under constant pressure to be and to remain competitive. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that profits are high in the North sea oil sector and we have been examining for years the fairest system of taxation for that sector. Alongside the increase in the special rate of corporation tax, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced last week the introduction of 100 per cent. first-year capital allowances for investment

[Ms Hewitt]

in North sea oil. After consultation, my right. hon Friend has set a date for abolishing royalty payments, which the hon. Gentleman will know are especially unpopular within the sector.

Sir Robert Smith: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Hewitt: No. I shall make some more progress.

Our achievement in delivering economic stability and rising employment must now be matched by a new achievement in narrowing and then closing the productivity gap.

We have many outstanding companies, both large and small. Our best manufacturers are among the best in the world. However, across the economy as a whole, we still lag behind. Every hour that is worked in Germany, France and America produces 25 per cent. more than an hour worked in Britain. That difference is not because British workers lack drive or determination. Indeed, working hours in the UK are longer than those for full-time workers in the rest of Europe. However, thanks to decades of underinvestment—the direct result of decades of economic instability—too many British workers have to do without the modern tools and technology that our competitors enjoy. Far too many lack even the basic skills that they need to succeed in the modern work force. Too many employees work in firms that are failing even to keep up with best practice in their sector, let alone to lead the way in new products and new production processes.

This productivity gap may sound like an abstraction but it directly affects us all every day of our lives. If we could create wealth as effectively as the US, we could grow our economy by an extra £6,000 a year for every man, woman and child. We could deliver a better standard of living, better public services and more leisure time. That is the scale of the productivity and prosperity challenge.

I shall refer to the Budget measures that seek to meet the challenge by promoting enterprise and innovation, which are the key drivers of productivity. I shall begin by focusing particularly on the impact of small firms; in terms of job creation, small and medium-sized enterprises are vital to our country.

Between 1995 and 1999, businesses created almost 2.5 million extra jobs. It was small and medium-sized businesses that created 85 per cent. of those new jobs. We can forecast quite confidently that in the next 10 years, it will be those small businesses—indeed, there will be almost 1 million more of them—that create the new jobs in our economy. That is why this Budget builds on what we have already done to encourage entrepreneurs and support start-up and small businesses. We are taking 150,000 small companies out of corporation tax altogether and cutting the starting rate of corporation tax from 10 per cent. to zero on the first £10,000 of profits. We are cutting tax for another 300,000 companies by reducing the small firms' rate of corporation tax, which is already the lowest in Europe, by another penny in the pound.

I know that it has been a real frustration for many small businesses—hon. Members will have spoken to them directly—that because they are not incorporated, they do not benefit from corporation tax cuts, although they are benefiting from other changes. That is why I shall announce later in this Session the Government's response to the report of the company law review and its admirable recommendation of a complete overhaul of company law based on the principle of thinking small first. By removing the unnecessary costs and complexity of incorporation, we will help owner-managers to choose the right structure for their businesses and enable more businesses to benefit from those lower corporation tax rates.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ms Hewitt: My goodness—un embarras de richesses! I give way to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant).

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her good choice in selecting who to give way to. While she rightly mentions benefits to smaller businesses, she will be aware that in my part of the world, there are many manufacturers connected with the automotive industry that have profits of more than £1.5 million—an amount that sounds large, but is not a lot in terms of the capital that they employ. She will know that they will not benefit from cuts in corporation tax, but will suffer a 1 per cent. increase on employers' national insurance. What can she do to ensure that those firms, two of which have already gone out of business in Dagenham and Luton, can continue to thrive or at least survive in the west midlands?

Ms Hewitt: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, about £3 billion of new investment has been going into the car industry in the past few years. We are seeing considerable success in many of our motor car companies, which feeds through to business in the supply chain. Many of the supplier companies are limited companies. The average small company will see its corporation tax bills reduced by £700 a year, almost matching the increase in national insurance contributions on the wage bill. I shall return to national insurance contributions in a moment.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. She has answered one of the questions that I was about to ask by telling us that the national insurance increase will exceed any benefit from a reduction in corporation tax. Furthermore, is it not the case that corporation tax is payable only on profit, while national insurance has to be paid up front, whether or not a company makes a profit? That is what is damaging to the small business sector.

Ms Hewitt: I shall come in a moment to the issue of national insurance contributions and why they are the fairest way of funding the long-term increase in national health service resources that almost everybody in our country—I am not sure about Opposition Members—agrees is needed.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): My right hon. Friend will know that I have a particular interest in small business. Does she agree that one of the key drivers for improving the productivity of small business is the investment that we are putting into health? If there is one thing that keeps back a small company with a few people acting with enterprise within it is somebody being sick,

in pain and perhaps unable to get an operation. This strategic investment in the health service will boost enormously the productivity and output of small business in Britain.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know well that the decision of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on employers' national insurance contributions came as an unwelcome surprise to many businesses. As I have just said, however, almost everyone—including almost every business person I have spoken to in the last week—agrees that, as a country, we need to put more investment into health care and to reform it. The British Chambers of Commerce, for instance, has estimated that more than 200 million working days are lost through illness every year in Britain. That is about 400 times more than the number of days lost to strikes last year. The Institute of Directors says that an efficient health care sector is as vital a part of the infrastructure for business to survive as education and transport. The CBI, reflecting the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) has just made, has estimated that absence from work due to sickness costs British businesses nearly £11 billion a year.

Some Conservative Members have said that we should have looked instead at private insurance to fund increased health costs. If we look at the United States of America, what do we find? The average premium for private health insurance is £100 per family. That is an appalling imposition on businesses, when they have to pick up those costs, and people on very low wages or who are not in work at all get very poor-quality health care. Conservative Members have also said, "Let us have social insurance." When we look at France, which we are told is a model to emulate, we see employers paying 12.8 per cent. contributions for health care alone, never mind what they are paying for unemployment and pension provision. That represents an average of £60 per employee per week. That would be a real imposition on business. We are very clear that there is a strong business case for better health care, and that the best way to meet the long-term need for increased funding for the national health service is to have most of the NHS funded from general taxation and to have this additional funding, provided by a modest 1 per cent. increase in national contributions, paid by all contributors.

Regulation and administrative burdens are an issue for many who run small businesses, and a favourite theme of Conservative Members. This Budget includes measures that have been widely welcomed by business and by business organisations. By increasing the VAT threshold, for instance, we shall take another 4,000 smaller businesses out of the VAT system altogether. More importantly, the radical simplification of VAT that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has introduced will benefit 700,000 businesses.

We are also acting to simplify payroll administration. The review by Patrick Carter concluded that electronic payroll filing was much the best way to cut through the difficulties faced by small employers in coping with the complexity of payrolls.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Chancellor's response to the Carter report will simplify the payroll burden, but not reduce it by a single jot?

Ms Hewitt: I recommend that the hon. Gentleman has a look at electronic filing systems, including those available directly from the internet. The fact is that they will save hours of work for employers who currently use manual payroll systems. They will be able to concentrate on getting on with their business, instead of on administration. They will have greater certainty that the payroll has been calculated accurately, and they will face fewer inquiries from the Inland Revenue into their end-of-year returns. That will mean less administration, less time spent on form filling, and more time to run the business. We have also extended the time given to the smallest employers to comply with the proposals for electronic filing. Firms with fewer than 50 employees will have until 2009–10 to complete the move to electronic filing of their returns, although they will get the incentive payment of £250 from 2004–05 onwards.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I hear what the Secretary of State is saying about payroll tax, and I agree with colleagues that she is not helping enormously. Will she consider the impact assessment of the Budget on small businesses? Most people in business say that it will add to bureaucracy and the red tape burden. Nothing significant has been taken away.

Ms Hewitt: Of course we shall publish a regulatory impact assessment for each measure and of course we have already consulted many small businesses on payroll administration. It is clear that effective software dealing with all the different parts of the payroll and contributions and taxes makes life much simpler.

On top of those measures, I shall shortly consult on a national strategy for business start-ups, including proposals to make it much easier for people who are setting up a business to find out exactly what help is available to them and exactly what the Government need from them.

The Budget also takes smaller combined heat and power generators out of the climate change levy—a measure that is particularly welcomed by many of my hon. Friends—and exempts the use of coal mine methane for electricity generation. Indeed, it freezes the levy itself.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): My right hon. Friend is arguing that the climate change levy may be ignored or set aside for energy generation that does not create greenhouse gases. Acting on that precedent, when will we get movement in the nuclear sector?

Ms Hewitt: The announcement that we made in the Budget was welcomed, not least by Corus, with which I spent last Friday morning. The tax treatment of nuclear energy is considered in the recent performance and innovation unit energy policy report and we shall examine it as we prepare the White Paper in response to that review.

As we support enterprise, so we must encourage innovation. Our country has an extraordinary history of innovation, invention and scientific success. We have 1 per cent. of the world's population, but we make nearly 5 per cent. of the world's investment in science and produce 8 per cent. of the world's scientific papers, 9 per cent. of citations and 10 per cent. of Nobel prize winners. Last Friday, with my hon. Friend the Member for Amber

[Ms Hewitt]

Valley (Judy Mallaber), I saw the difference that effective innovation makes to the bottom line when we visited Denby Pottery, the Derbyshire ceramics company.

People are all too quick to write ceramics off as one of the traditional manufacturing industries that supposedly have no future. Denby Pottery has existed for almost 200 years, but half its revenue comes from products that did not exist four years ago. By investing in design, marketing and the creation of new products and by driving through production process efficiencies, it has pushed revenues up from £12 million 10 years ago, to £38 million last year and still growing.

Denby Pottery is a successful, innovative, profitable business, but we do not always put our innovative ability to such good effect. British manufacturers invest less in developing new products than manufacturers in competitor countries and we are in the bottom half of the European league for manufacturing turnover accounted for by new or improved products. We also lag behind our international counterparts in resources devoted to innovation.

Over the next three years, the science budget is to increase by an average of 7 per cent. a year in real terms, which will help to overcome the underfunding and neglect of our science infrastructure during the Conservative years. We have also multiplied threefold the commercial spin-offs from universities, turning "Invented in Britain" into "Made in Britain". As a result, we are beginning to see the signs of a brain gain rather than a brain drain.

The research and development tax credit that we introduced last year for small and medium-sized firms will be matched by the extension of that incentive to large companies—one of the most important recommendations made by the CBI and the TUC in their joint work on productivity.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): Those measures are welcomed in particular by large companies such as Rolls-Royce, which employs many people in my constituency. However, they expect increased state research and development funding in areas in which they are most interested, as they must compete against competitor companies in the United States, Canada, Germany and France that receive such funding.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Indeed, I have been examining investment in R and D in the aerospace industry in the United States and in Canada. I hope that in next few years we will be able to increase direct Government support for R and D, as well as private sector investment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): The Conservative Government discouraged research and development through a lack of incentives. Is my right hon. Friend aware that Governments such as the Canadian Government stepped in, and R and D moved from this country to Canada and other countries.

Ms Hewitt: I am certainly aware of the Conservative Government's neglect of the importance of research and development, and their complete contempt for the manufacturing sector. *[Interruption.]* It is true. Despite incentives from Canada, we continue to have a higher rate of investment in R and D—just—than they have in Canada. We must increase that, and the new R and D tax credit for larger companies will make a real difference.

The way to greater prosperity for all of us is to create more jobs and to raise the quality of jobs that people have. A crucial part of the challenge facing us is to extend opportunities for enterprise and employment, especially to people in our most disadvantaged communities. Like many of my hon. Friends, I see in my constituency the devastating effect on people's lives of the disappearance of traditional manufacturing jobs. We all know of communities that have been blighted by long-term unemployment and poverty, by illness and family breakdown, by crime and drug taking, and by a shocking level of educational disadvantage. All of us, at least on the Labour Benches, know that it does not have to be like that.

I am particularly proud of what the Government have begun to achieve by investing in disadvantaged communities. With the new deal for communities, the single regeneration budget and programmes such as sure start, we are giving the real experts in disadvantaged communities—the people who actually live there—the resources to change things.

Above all, people living in the poorest communities need economic opportunities. They need skills, jobs and local businesses. That is why I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement in the Budget of further support for enterprise and investment in disadvantaged areas, the abolition of stamp duty on non-residential property transfers and the creation of a new community investment tax credit.

I am also delighted that my right hon. Friend has recognised the role that social enterprises can play in neighbourhood regeneration. He has made it clear that the tax credit will apply to co-operatives and community-owned enterprises as well as for-profit businesses.

Finally, I shall refer to our policies to make it easier for women and men to balance work and family, which, as my right hon. Friend said, is a crucial challenge in a world in which the work force have been transformed. Now, almost half the work force are women. In the past 10 years, men's employment rates have stayed much the same, whereas those of women, especially mothers, have grown rapidly. Indeed, in the past 10 years there has been an almost 10 per cent. growth rate in employment for all women, and the employment rate of women whose youngest child is under five has grown by a third over the same period. That is the biggest increase in the rate of women's employment in our country since wartime.

In an economy that depends above all on the skills and talents of our people, we must not allow old-fashioned ways of organising work to damage the potential for economic success. That is why we must make it much easier for parents to choose how they balance bringing up children with earning a living. We need to make it easier for parents who have been unable to find any work to start earning a living. We also need to make it easier for parents in work, especially those working long hours, to spend more time with their families. Perhaps all of us in the House who are parents should declare an interest in that issue.

We are therefore introducing a mentoring service for lone parents who want to return to work so that there is one person to offer them confidential support and advice

in finding a job. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has ensured that a lone parent working part-time will have a guaranteed income of £179 a week and, on top, help with the cost of eligible child care.

Similarly, for mothers who want to stay at home, the working tax credit will give a guaranteed income to the family with children and only one earner. To ensure that the cost of child care does not deter parents from returning to work, there be will a new child tax credit from next year, available to families earning up to £58,000 a year.

We recognise that every family has different needs, and in recognition of the need of families to make choices we have extended the child care tax credit element of the working tax credit to those who use approved child care in their own home. That will especially help the parents of disabled children and parents who work outside conventional working hours.

The Budget is designed to extend prosperity and opportunity to men and women and to families and communities throughout our country. It will help to raise productivity and to bring greater prosperity for all of us. I commend it to the House.

4.21 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): As I listened to the Secretary of State, it appeared that she was talking about a completely different Budget from the one that was delivered by the Chancellor of the Exchequer last week. It was certainly not one that many people in the business community will recognise.

I begin by reminding the House of the Budget that the Chancellor delivered just over a year ago, in which he announced tax cuts of £3.6 billion for this financial year and of £4.1 billion for the next financial year. They were, he said,

"tax cuts we can afford".—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 308.]

Just in case there was any doubt, on the following day the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that the Budget contained "prudent tax cuts".

What happened between then and now? The answer, of course, is that the last Budget came a few months before a general election and the present one has come nine months after a general election. During that election Ministers repeatedly denied that they had any plans to put up tax. The Labour manifesto for that election stated that the basic and top rates of income tax would be left unchanged. It was an election during which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) has already reminded the House, the Secretary of State said that Labour had no plans to raise the ceiling on national insurance contributions; she said that it was not going to happen.

Nine months later, in the Chancellor's first Budget of this Parliament, he has raised taxes by more than £6 billion by adding 1 per cent. to the amount of tax paid by every person in a job. The president of the Chartered Institute of Taxation said that

"there is no getting away from the fact that we are going to have a 41 per cent top rate of tax from next year onwards."

The Chartered Association of Certified Accountants said that

"he has also effectively raised the top rate of income tax to 41 per cent and broken the Labour party election promise."

That is the tax rise that, according to the Secretary of State, was not going to happen.

Michael Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend realise that the situation is worse than that? When the Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked whether there might be a further rise in national insurance, he said that he could neither confirm nor deny that that might happen.

Mr. Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is correct. We shall look forward with even greater trepidation to future Budgets under the Chancellor.

Given what has happened, it is no wonder that every poll shows that people think that Ministers have lied and that the Government are guilty of breaking their promises. Having broken their promise, we can no doubt expect further increases in the levy in future years, as my hon. Friend has just suggested. Having removed the upper earnings ceiling, it will be all too easy for the Government gradually to continue to increase the amount that will be charged. Normally, I would ask the Secretary of State to give an undertaking that that will not occur but, given her track record on that issue, I see little point in doing so.

Of course, the Budget did contain some good news; indeed, the Budget speech consisted almost entirely of good news. Some 10 columns of *Hansard* are devoted to spending commitments and tax cuts, yet tax rises totalling more than £8.5 billion take up less than half a column. The Chancellor spent more time announcing a £15 million cut for microbreweries than he did on the freezing of personal allowances, which will cost taxpayers an extra £700 million. Even then, he got it wrong. The sales manager of the Crouch Vale brewery—its product is much enjoyed in my own constituency—said that,

"if we are expected to pass on the tax reduction to customers in time for the World Cup then he has misunderstood everything he has been told over the past fifteen years."

Of course, there are some measures in this Budget that we support. The tax credit for research and development by large companies is welcome, even though this is the third time that it has been announced. The cut in corporation tax for small firms is also good news, even if it is of little use to those that happen not to be making a profit. Small firms have campaigned for a long time for a flat rate for calculating VAT payments, although they may be less enthusiastic when they discover that, initially, it will apply only to a limited number of businesses. The amount of red tape and form filling that it will save is already in some doubt. One commentator, writing in Accountancyweb, said:

"In practice, there is only one way to treat this new scheme, which is a bit of useless spin produced by people who have absolutely no idea of what they are talking about, and can't think from the requirements of one tax to another."

The Chancellor also boasted in his speech about measures to boost the use of combined heat and power, and about his welcome decision to exempt CHP from the climate change levy. However, the Secretary of State, who has referred to those measures, will be aware that that will not be enough to put right the damage already done to CHP. In the past 18 months, investment in CHP has collapsed. Four major companies have pulled out of the industry and 1,500 jobs have been lost because of the way in which CHP is penalised under the new electricity trading arrangements. The Budget has not changed that, and until the problem is addressed there seems little likelihood that the Government's CHP targets will be met.

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Although one part of the energy sector was indeed helped by the Budget, another was most certainly not. The decision to impose a new 10 per cent. tax on oil and gas companies' profits has caused horror throughout the industry. According to the Red Book, the cost to oil producers will rise to £600 million by 2004, but others have already estimated that the cost is likely to be far higher. According to a forecast by Wood Mackenzie, it will rise to more than £1 billion by 2005.

As has already been predicted, the tax increase will discourage investment. The United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association has said that many small companies considering recovery projects on mature oil fields may now have second thoughts. Moreover, the increase was almost entirely unexpected by the industry, and it undermines all the good work done through the pilot programme to establish long-term confidence in the industry. Indeed, I should be interested to know if the Secretary of State is willing to confirm that her Department learned of the proposed tax increase only the day before the Budget was announced. Yet again, it appears that the Department of Trade and Industry has no say in decisions affecting industry, which are taken in the Treasury.

As a sop to the industry, the Chancellor also promised to abolish North sea oil royalties, subject to consultation. However, it is not clear why consultation is necessary, given that the industry has unanimously called for abolition for a long time.

Sir Robert Smith: Interestingly, in choosing to trot out the same lines as the Chancellor, the Secretary of State failed to recognise that he is taking away revenue, which makes an operation more expensive. On royalties relief, where a particular project becomes difficult to proceed with, exemption can already be applied for.

Mr. Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman, who represents a Scottish constituency that is bound to be extremely badly affected by this measure, is absolutely right. Those in the industry will be alarmed to hear that the Chancellor has been talking about consulting on abolishing royalty payments, but they will be even more alarmed when they read the Red Book because they will find that figures for receipts of royalty payments continue in the projected revenues until 2007. At best, that suggests that the Chancellor does not envisage that the consultation will be carried out very swiftly.

It seems pretty clear that the only reason for the consultation period is to provide an excuse to defer abolition. It is no wonder that those in the industry have reacted extremely badly; they feel that they have delivered their side of the bargain in terms of investment and that, in return, they have been clobbered by a totally unexpected 33 per cent. tax increase, which is bound to damage confidence, investment and jobs.

Not only the oil industry, but every employer in the land was clobbered in the Budget. For 50 minutes, they heard the Chancellor distribute favours in all directions. Then, in the last 10 minutes, they got hit with a tax increase of nearly £4 billion. Even before the Budget, industry was pointing to the damage done to our competitiveness by the tax increases that have taken place under this Government.

The Confederation of British Industry has calculated that the tax burden on business has increased by £29 billion as a result of the tax measures in the Chancellor's first five Budgets. It has said that, from having been one of the lowest taxed countries in Europe, the burden on business in the United Kingdom is now higher than that faced by most of our key competitors and that, of our five top trading countries, only France now imposes a bigger tax burden on business—and that was before the latest increase.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): If the Government have rendered such huge damage to industry, can the hon. Gentleman explain why we have the lowest unemployment in the developed world and why we were the only country to weather the last global slowdown and still manage to keep our economy growing?

Mr. Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman refers to our unemployment record; I merely ask him whether he thinks a tax on the payroll—a tax on jobs—will help to improve our record on creating jobs and reducing unemployment.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Can the hon. Gentleman also explain why the number of unemployed people in his constituency has fallen from 1,630 in 1997 to 720 now—a 55 per cent. cut? Does he not welcome the cut in unemployment in his constituency?

Mr. Whittingdale: Of course I welcome the cut in unemployment, especially in my constituency, but I shall also explain to my constituents and those of every other hon. Member that the Government have now put a direct tax on their jobs, which will make it more likely that they will lose them in future.

The CBI said before the Budget that the priority should be to cut business tax. Digby Jones, the director general of the CBI, said that the Budget would be a defining moment in the Chancellor's relationship with business, and he was absolutely right. Once again, the Chancellor has chosen to impose the single biggest tax increase on business and, moreover, he has done so in the most damaging way possible.

Instead of taxing profits, the Chancellor has chosen to tax jobs, by imposing an extra 1 per cent. in tax on the wages bill of every company in the land, and it does not matter whether the business is making a profit or a loss, or whether it is large or small. Even unincorporated businesses or simple one-man operations will have to pay more as a result of that measure. It is hard to think of a measure that will do more to damage industry's profitability and competitiveness.

Mr. Prisk: I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend mention the self-employed and unincorporated. Not one word about the self-employed—all 3 million of them—came from the Secretary of State or the Chancellor. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a disgrace, especially for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry?

Mr. Whittingdale: I entirely agree, and many self-employed people will think it particularly mean that they were also clobbered as a result of that measure. The self-employed have to bear ever-increasing burdens and none of the employment measures that go through the House helps them. They have had a steadily harder time

under the Government and the Budget will make things considerably worse, yet the Chancellor had the cheek to say that the Budget was about building a Britain of greater enterprise. So what did those who actually work in enterprise think of the Budget? The CBI said that there will be deep dismay at a tax burden that impacts directly on the cost of employing people at a time when UK competitiveness is being put to the test. The British Chambers of Commerce, which was quoted at least twice by the Secretary of State, called the measure a step backwards, and its head of policy has said:

"Is it a Budget for enterprise? No, it is not".

The Federation of Small Businesses says it is a tragedy that the self-employed will also pay higher national insurance contributions, adding that

"this undermines any attempt the Chancellor has made to help the low paid."

The Forum of Private Business calls the measure a

"£2 billion sickener for small firms that will destroy jobs."

One analyst has calculated that company profits will be cut by as much as 4 per cent. A small firm employing 10 people will face an increased national insurance bill of about £25,000.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Michael Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: I will give way to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) first, then to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bryant: Such generosity—I thank the hon. Gentleman. Would any of those whom he is quoting prefer to pay for the national health service through American-style private insurance or French-style social insurance, which would probably be far more expensive for business? What does the hon. Gentleman himself think?

Mr. Whittingdale: Once again, the hon. Gentleman displays the wholly closed mind of Labour Members. They believe that the only way in which to put more money into the NHS is through general taxation. The reason why some other countries have better standards of health care and better standards of performance in their health services than us is that they spend more money on those services, but not money from the taxpayer. We have a lot to learn from such countries, and I shall not follow the Chancellor of the Exchequer by closing my mind and refusing to accept that anything could be improved.

Michael Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend realise that the national insurance premium is a double whammy? I am told by the leader of Lichfield district council that it will cost an additional £78,000 to employ people in that small district council. Such increases across the country will inevitably cause an increase in council tax payments.

Mr. Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is right. My local authority, Essex county council, estimates that the measure will add £4.5 million to its wages bill, which will inevitably lead to an increase in council tax next year. Council tax payers will pay twice as a result of the Budget. Of course, businesses and local authorities are not the only ones affected: the health service, police authorities and local education authorities all face a huge increase in their wages bill as a result of the Budget, which will deprive the public services that the Chancellor claims he wants to help.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Has the hon. Gentleman read the Institute of Directors' comments on the Budget which describe it as having laudable aims and containing several worthwhile tax measures? The IOD is one of the organisations that he appears to have missed out.

Mr. Whittingdale: I do not disagree that the Budget has laudable aims; I just do not think that they will work. The IOD also says that without fundamental reform of the NHS, simply pouring in more public money will not lead to any improvement. On that point, I entirely agree with the IOD.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I agree that the reason why Germany and France have better health care is that they spend more money. How would the hon. Gentleman produce the extra resources that the health service and other public services require?

Mr. Whittingdale: The difference between this country and other European countries is that they spend more on their health services but the money does not come from the taxpayer. They have a far greater private sector and more private money going into their health services, with the result that they are able to spend more overall on health care. That is a model that we might do well to emulate.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): Where does the money for private insurance and health care come from if not from taxpayers?

Mr. Whittingdale: The difference is that the taxpayer chooses to pay it. No one is compelled to put money into private health insurance: people choose to do it. That is something I thoroughly commend.

Almost as bad news as what was in the Budget was what was not in it. There was nothing to help to relieve manufacturing industry from the burden of the climate change levy. Indeed, the Budget tore away the fig leaf that Ministers have used in the past to defend the levy—that it is overall revenue neutral due to a compensating cut of 0.3 per cent. in national insurance contributions. It was never revenue neutral for almost all manufacturing companies; now they will have to pay the levy as well as higher national insurance contributions.

No wonder the director general of the Engineering Employers Federation said:

"Did the Chancellor help manufacturing? He did the opposite. He has done something negative at the worst time. It is the wrong thing to do."

Despite what the Secretary of State said, nor did the Budget do anything about the burden of red tape and regulation. On top of the £29 billion of extra tax that business now has to pay, the CBI has estimated that employment legislation alone has added another £12 billion. The latest red tape audit by the British Chambers of Commerce puts the total cost at more than £15 billion. Last week, I received a written answer stating that in 2001 the amount of time spent by businesses filling

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in forms issued by the Office for National Statistics was estimated to be about 617,000 hours—and that takes no account of all the other forms issued by Customs and Excise, the Inland Revenue and all the other Government agencies.

The result is that our international competitiveness is being slowly eroded. Having been a low tax, lightly regulated economy, over the past five years we have steadily become a highly taxed, highly regulated economy. We are no longer automatically the first choice for investment and our position in the international league tables of competitiveness is slipping. In the table produced by the World Economic Forum we have fallen from fourth to twelfth, in the Heritage Foundation's table we have slipped from third to ninth, and in the Centre for Management Development's table we have fallen from ninth to nineteenth. The Budget will do nothing to change that; in fact, it will make the position much worse.

Last Wednesday, the Chancellor claimed that the Budget would help enterprise, and this afternoon the Secretary of State said that it demonstrated the Government's commitment to enterprise. I can do no better than quote the economics correspondent of *The Sunday Times*, who said:

"With a tax hike on business like that, Brown's sixth Budget was about as enterprise-friendly as Stalin's sixth five-year plan."

The Budget represents a betrayal of industry and shows that the Government have learned nothing. They intend to go on pouring public money into the health service without undertaking the reforms that are vital if there is to be any chance of real improvement, and, yet again under this Government, it is business that has to pick up the tab.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches in this debate, and that applies from now on.

4.43 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I suppose that it is inevitable and right that the debate on the Budget, certainly on the Labour Benches and among the public, has concentrated on the Chancellor's thinking on the crisis in the national health service and his proposals to deal with it.

Beyond the massive refinancing of the health service—the Chancellor's most welcome injection of £40 billion—lie other questions, which I should like to address in the short time that I have. I hope to be able to comment on the importance of training, on globalisation and on wealth and redistribution. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) could not find time to cover any of those issues, but perhaps we shall hear Opposition Members' views in the course of the debate.

First, I want to deal with health. I realise that the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford is being disturbed by one of his colleagues, but as I am going to refer to him, and am even prepared in a 10-minute speech to give way to him, perhaps he could give me a few moments of his time.

I believe that Government's responsibility to industry and commerce is to set the climate for discharging responsibilities to the people of this country, including providing essential services such as the NHS. A healthy approach to the economy such as that taken by the Government means that we tackle the problems of manufacturing, consider the opportunities of a technological age, and take our chances in marketing to spread our products throughout Europe and the rest of the world. In doing that, we should give ourselves the opportunity to invest in the health service and other services in a way that has not been done previously.

Does the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford genuinely believe that large and small industrialists and companies, concerned—as we all are—about the health service, are so unfair and limited in their view that they ignore the Government's economic successes? Does he want to return to the days of high interest rates and inflation, when negative equity was a regular factor? That did not help anyone's health or British industry. He cited the CBI. I put it to him bluntly that he should consider the problem of absenteeism from which industry in Britain suffers. One newspaper today reported that it costs the country £23 billion a year.

The hon. Gentleman quoted Mr. Digby Jones of the CBI, and made his views on national insurance contributions clear. The country is entitled to know where the Conservative party stands. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have had time since the Budget to think about it. We know that they do not like it, but I will give way now if the hon. Gentleman answers a question. If the Conservative party forms a Government, will it repeal the measures in the Budget? There is no response; I shall explain why. He knows that not only the country but, according to the Sunday press, to which he referred, the vast majority of Conservative supporters support the Budget. There is therefore no incentive for him to repeal the Chancellor's measures.

Does the hon. Gentleman believe, even in the context of the comments of Mr. Digby Jones, that people do not notice that the Government have dealt with low income earners, for example, by introducing the minimum wage? But are the Opposition considering those in the top income brackets? There is not much sympathy for the fact that, for example, the principal of St. Andrews university, who earns £145,000 a year and will get a rise of 11.5 per cent., will be asked to pay a limited amount to help our health service. The hon. Gentleman, through his comments and his quotes from Mr. Digby Jones, showed that some people live in a time warp. It does not help to talk Britain down. The G7 nations would not be impressed with a member country that did not believe in investing in the health service, which is so vital to every aspect of our nation's welfare.

I want to deal briefly with globalisation and wealth distribution. How effectively is the United Kingdom being prepared to compete and prosper in globalised markets? How effectively is wealth being redistributed? I believe that the British people are fair-minded, and the answers to my questions tell us something about the economy and society that we are becoming.

I desperately want the Government to continue to challenge poverty at every level and for every group in society. That includes the poverty of ambition, which is why I want to focus on the crucial issue of training. I welcome the fact that there has been a growing and

intensifying recognition within Government of what the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has called the nation's long-term failure to raise skills.

Even after so many years of strong and focused regional policy in the United Kingdom—and I see this in my own county of Lanarkshire—it remains the case that not enough of tomorrow's skills are being put into the hands and the heads of tomorrow's work force. In some regions, only around 10 per cent. of the labour force have degree-level qualifications, while 20 per cent have no formal qualifications at all. I do not see that as being competitive, so the Government are right to invest in education again and again.

As a matter of priority, the Government have to address what is now known, in the inevitable jargon of the times, as the low skill equilibrium. That is all the more true if we are to make a decision on the euro, and the Chancellor hinted at that in his Budget speech. One of the arguments about the benefits that could arise from that relates to the commitment to improve our skills and training. We would not gain the full benefit of harmonisation if we did not set ourselves that priority.

I welcome the initiatives in the Budget, and I am not alone in that, despite the views of the Opposition. Mike Brewer and Alissa Goodman of the Institute for Fiscal Studies said:

"If the Government had chosen to monitor a poverty line fixed at its 1996 level, instead of a relative one, it would now be able to claim that child poverty had fallen by around 1.3 million."

That is a tremendous achievement. A lot more remains to be done, but on that and on many other aspects of his Budget and his policy, the Chancellor is entitled to be congratulated and we are entitled to feel proud. We are entitled to commend the Budget to the British people and, when we debate international development on Thursday, to examine the lessons that we offer, in our priorities, to the rest of the world.

4.52 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): After five years, we know the Chancellor's style of Budget-giving. His Budgets are always delivered with great flair, eloquence and style. There is a lot of good news and the first impressions are always very good. It is only after looking at the small print that we begin to see the problems.

I want to try to strike a balance between the good news, which the Budget undoubtedly contained, and some of the negatives. The Budget contained important themes that Liberal Democrat Members have already acknowledged. We strongly support the increase in tax finance for the NHS, and we stick by that. We support the principle, which the Government have belatedly acknowledged, that personal taxation has to rise to some degree to pay for that. The Budget contained what is effectively a 1p rise in income tax, although the measure is not called that, and we have endorsed that.

It is also important to acknowledge that probably the most important single determinant of business behaviour is the overall macro-economic climate, and that is very good. There is low inflation and unemployment, and that is at least partly attributable to good monetary and fiscal stability. All that is good news, and we acknowledge it.

There was, however, major sleight of hand in the Budget. As soon as most of us opened the Red Book and saw the first big table, it was apparent where the money was coming from. Of the £6 billion net increase in taxation, approximately £4 billion comes from business, almost all in the employers' national insurance charge. We need to be clear about what that tax is. It is not a tax on business men and women; it is not a tax on profits; it is not a tax on shareholders; and it is not a tax on wealth. It is a tax specifically on business costs and labour costs. It is a very bad and damaging tax that will have far-reaching consequences.

I have the luxury that the Conservative spokesman does not have of being able to suggest an alternative way of funding the Government's proposals. We suggested explicitly that the Government could have raised an equivalent amount of taxation by increasing the marginal rate of tax for people who earn more than £100,000 a year to 50 per cent. That, of course, would have taxed not merely salary incomes but investment incomes, which this Budget has not touched. I would be interested to hear why Labour Back Benchers regard that as inferior to taxing labour costs, which is essentially what this Budget entails.

The reaction to the Budget in the popular press and Parliament has been something of a phoney war. The argument has been that, through the Budget, the Government are taxing middle-income middle England. In some ways, I am reminded of a professional wrestling match in which one fighter gives the impression of a vicious kick at the head of his opponent, who pretends to writhe in agony on the ground—in practice, it has not happened. The Government have not launched a lethal blow to middle-income taxpayers, let alone upper-income taxpayers. They have launched a very severe tax burden on business costs.

It is important to think through logically what will happen. What are the effects of an increase in employers' national insurance contributions? Enterprises in the south-east of England that operate in a buoyant economy and do not compete internationally—most of the service trade—will pass on national insurance costs in higher prices, because they can shift the burden. In the overall economy, that will mean that prices will be a little higher than they would otherwise be. Consequently, when the Bank of England considers the inflation outlook, it will be less likely to cut interest rates and more likely to raise them, thereby making the problems of the exchange rate and the manufacturing sector worse than they would otherwise be. That is a very indirect consequence.

The most damaging consequence will be for manufacturing industry, because it operates in a traded environment with narrow margins and fierce price competition. Employers in the sector cannot pass on higher labour costs to their consumers: they have to absorb them, and they can do that in one of two ways. They can cut wages, so that a pay increase of 4 per cent. would become one of 3 per cent., resulting in lower real wages for their employees. Alternatively, and this is the more likely consequence, they can absorb them through higher redundancies. The main direct consequence of the Budget is that the increased tax on jobs, will cause higher rates of job displacement or job losses in the traded part of the economy—manufacturing—than would otherwise have been the case. That is the palpable conclusion.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): Will the hon. Gentleman take into account the growth in the economy predicted by the Chancellor? Instead of a shrinking

[Mr. Iain Luke]

economy, in which such labour costs will have an impact, we will have an expanding economy, in which they can be contained by increased growth.

Dr. Cable: The logic is exactly the opposite. By making business less profitable and increasing its costs, the growth will be less than the Government have anticipated. One of the other sleights of hand in the Budget—to which I had not intended to refer, but the hon. Gentleman has prompted me—is the Government's assumption of a growth rate 0.5 per cent. higher than was otherwise the case. Much of the Budget arithmetic hinges on that very optimistic assumption. If one of the consequences of increasing taxation on business is to reduce investment and expansion of output in industry, it will wholly undermine the arithmetic on which the Budget is based.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, last year, according to the Confederation of British Industry report, £11 billion was lost through days of sickness? Does he agree that improving the health service will dramatically reduce that burden on business, and that it could be a benefit to business if we succeed?

Dr. Cable: Of course we favour a better NHS and more health spending, as I made clear at the beginning of my speech. We entirely support that and have made suggestions about how it should be financed.

I sense from several interventions by Labour Members that they do not appreciate the fact that business already makes substantial direct contributions to the cost of funding public services, including the NHS. In international terms, there is already a relatively high national insurance charge on employers, who pay mandatory and voluntary sickness benefit. The business sector already makes a substantial contribution to the costs described by the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan). The Budget will have perverse consequences if it undermines the economy, creates more unemployment and weakens economic growth, which is why business groups have been critical of it.

I know that some hon. Members wince at the mention of the Confederation of British Industry, but in many respects it has been supportive of, and complimentary about, the Government. The old days when the CBI supported the Tories and the Trades Union Congress supported the Labour party are long gone. In many ways, the CBI has been indulgent of the Government; its anger on this occasion is genuine and, importantly, has been echoed by small business groups such as the Federation of Small Businesses. Two thirds of the increased revenue from the employers' national insurance charge will come from the small business sector and the self-employed, to whom reference has already been made. This is not a tax on big business, but very much a tax on small business.

The taxation on business does not involve only employers' national insurance charges, although they are by far the most important component. There are two more elements, one of which has been mentioned: taxation of the oil industry. My hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) knows much more about that than I do and I hope that, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will talk about it. However, I worked for some years in the oil industry, so I know something of the complexity of the problem.

The fundamental issue about oil taxation is that when oil prices are high—they are relatively high at the moment—the oil industry earns excess profit—that is, economic rent. It is reasonable that some of that excess profit in periods of high prices should go to the Exchequer; anybody in the oil or mining industry accepts that principle. However, how can that be accomplished sensibly to maintain incentives for new investment and exploration? The system should be transparent, clear and up front. When a retrospective windfall tax is imposed on the oil industry, incentives are damaged. If the industry knows in advance that it has to pay a percentage of its excess profits to the Treasury, it can factor that into its investment calculations. When decisions such as the one to impose a tax are made, they only undermine confidence in the country.

I trust that the Department of Trade and Industry is now looking in detail at the final element of oil taxation. My understanding is that the new tax applies to existing fields, which are relatively high-cost in that the oil industry has to invest substantially, both in new technology and to get the oil out. We need to study the small print, but the tax may seriously undermine efforts to increase yields from declining fields in the North sea. The Government may unthinkingly have done quite a lot of damage to the economics of the North sea. I am sure that we shall hear more about that in Committee.

The other big tax change affecting the economy which has not been mentioned is the tax on foreign investments in branches of foreign companies. The measure is complex but, particularly in the banking sector, it is a major disincentive to inward investment. In the past year, there has been quite a lot of evidence that inward investment in the United Kingdom is slowing relative to that in other countries. There are many reasons for that. It may have something to do with the euro area, or other factors may be involved, but it is certainly happening and the tax will not help.

Germane to the argument about foreign investment is the relative level of tax in this country compared with that in other countries. For some years, the Government have been buoyed by the idea that Britain is highly business-friendly, but taxes have been imposed on the business sector when countries such as Germany are beginning to realise the disadvantages of a high-tax environment. If one adds together all the different business taxes as a share of gross domestic product, the burden in the UK is now higher than it is in Germany, let alone the United States. More and more companies will begin to take that factor into consideration when they make investment decisions.

Dr. Ladyman: Will the hon. Gentleman jog my memory? The famous 1p on income tax in the 1997 Liberal Democrat manifesto was not for the national health service but earmarked for education. The increase in spending that the Liberal Democrats then proposed for the health service was to be funded by a change in national insurance contributions. Why have they suddenly become such a bad thing?

Dr. Cable: The hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to think of that intervention about a quarter of an hour ago.

If he is asking how the Lib Dems would deal with the revenue implications of my remarks, which are about the revenue costs of foreign investment, I will tell him.

One of the undesirable consequences of the idea that it is possible to raise lots of revenue by plugging the loopholes in respect of foreign investment is that the investment flow simply slows down and corporation tax is reduced. Many of the supposed revenue-raising measures are nothing of the kind.

Let me finish on a slightly more positive note. There were elements of the Budget on the business side—we are discussing the business aspects of the Budget—that we welcome and which have been helpful. The research and development tax credit has been widely welcomed in the high-technology industries. One company that I consulted said that the Government had got it about 95 per cent. right and listened to representations that it should be volume based rather than affecting marginal R and D. In other words, the measure is based on the Canadian rather than the American model.

Several companies stressed that the 5 per cent. that the Government have not got right could be a serious problem. It relates to the Inland Revenue's definition of R and D. The Government must listen to representations made to them about the way in which, for example, the tax rules help new R and D, as in the drug industry, but do not help engineering companies, where much R and D is incremental and small scale. The Government, and particularly the Inland Revenue, must take note of the way in which innovation is supported, as opposed to scientific R and D further up the chain. Those issues can be pursued further in Committee.

I welcome the recognition of the burdens of red tape associated with the value added tax system. That is good news and I hope that it brings real benefit. The Federation of Small Businesses estimates that the savings that a small company makes from the new VAT rules will be wiped out by the national insurance charges, once a company has more than four employees. That puts the change in its modest context.

There are one or two other revenue measures that are positive. One admirable measure that has not yet been noted, let alone commented on, has nothing to do with economics, but much to do with ethics. For the first time, the Government are to outlaw bribery as a tax relief. The Liberal Democrats have argued for that and I am delighted to see it in the Budget. It appears in very small print and I hope that it survives the passage of the Finance Bill through Parliament.

The Budget contains several small but useful measures, but they are swamped by the negative effects of the increased national insurance surcharge on employers. That will be the lasting legacy of the Budget. It will do harm. It will not have an immediate effect on people's pockets, except for those who are made unemployed, but in the long term, it will act as a serious drag on the country, its growth and inward investment. We warn about the consequences of the measure.

5.8 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): There has been much discussion this afternoon about the impact of what is, in effect, a payroll tax. I have two points to make. If the Government accept, as they do, that the funding of the NHS should be organised on the basis of national insurance contributions and taxation, they have probably chosen the best way in which that can be done. There is never a right time for the imposition of any tax, but if there is to be a payroll tax, it is probably better to introduce it when unemployment is very low than when it is very high—a situation of which we had examples during the Tory years.

I well remember the lies and deceptions that were the hallmark of the 1992 election campaign, and the abuse that the late John Smith had to suffer when he was arguing for changes in national insurance contributions. For many of us, this measure is the completion of unfinished business—an expression that John used in another context, but which in this one is just as relevant.

In talking about the increase in expenditure on the NHS in a trade and industry debate, may I ask the Secretary of State to keep tabs on expenditure on equipment as a consequence of the added resource that the health trusts, hospitals and the health service generally will receive. It is vital that British manufacturing gets as big a share of that as possible. I am not suggesting some chauvinistic "Buy British" campaign, but there ought to be a unit available to the industry, supported by a plethora of interested organisations, to ensure that British business can best take advantage of the opportunities to which the largesse will give rise.

I am conscious of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) about the North sea oil industry. I shall not cross swords with him because I know of his expertise in the matter. With characteristic modesty, he said that others in the House are more experienced than him. I should have thought that a former Shell economist had a little to teach some of us, but perhaps I could remind the hon. Gentleman of one or two significant points.

If a barrel of oil in the North sea costs $7 to $9, it is just about worth extracting. If it costs around $11, a profit is made. If the figure is $13, it is worth the company investing. If it costs $15, the profits roll in. I was not one of those who argued two years ago, when the price of petrol at the pump was rising, that we should punish the oil companies, because there had been a prolonged period of low prices so there was not as much investment as there could have or should have been, and the upstream activities of a number of oil companies were suffering from losses.

However, the truth of the matter is that since June 1999, the monthly average price of oil has never been less than $17 a barrel. Indeed, throughout 2000, the price was $29 a barrel, and in 2001, it was $26 a barrel. Today, it is $26 a barrel. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the oil and gas exploration industry will somehow be deterred by a windfall tax when the price is $26 a barrel? I think that these people are having us on. The hon. Gentleman will know that, like farmers, those in the oil industry are never in a good position—if parent companies are not hammered on the upstream, they are hammered on the downstream.

Dr. Cable: The arithmetic that the hon. Gentleman sketched out is absolutely right. He may recall that I said that I thought that it was entirely fair in principle to tax excess profits. Is not the logic of his argument that if the

[Dr. Cable]

price of oil fell below, say, $17 a barrel in the next two financial years, the Government would have to withdraw the measure?

Mr. O'Neill: I suspect that this measure has not been introduced in perpetuity. We are talking about it as we would a windfall tax, which should be levied only once or for one year. It would not be sensible to burden the industry if it became clear that the price of oil was falling. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) want to intervene? He is a big man, so when he is sitting down it looks as if he is on his feet and talking.

Sir Robert Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that there is therefore no planning horizon for those considering investing in the North sea, and that they would be better off investing in Angola, Azerbaijan, Venezuela or north-west Australia, where at least they might have some confidence in the Government knowing their plans from one year to the next?

Mr. O'Neill: I am sorry that I let the hon. Gentleman intervene, because that is the kind of repetitive claptrap that we hear from every industry when taxation is imposed on it. We are still talking about prices that are substantially higher than the minimums required to get a reasonable return. It is not unreasonable that the British taxpayer should in such a way get back some of the money that they have to pay at the pump. The fact is that the oil companies upstream have been doing extremely well for the past three years. However, I shall move on because I know that hon. Members have difficulty agreeing on that.

Much has been said about supporting industry through tax credits and the like. Many of us have argued for years that the microbrewery industry was one small business that was important to our constituencies. I accept that it is sometimes a lifestyle business. There are four such breweries in my constituency. They employ small numbers of people and have never been able to enjoy the economies of scale that have been available to even the medium-sized breweries. In many ways, they have been unfairly treated by the system and I am pleased to welcome the improved support for those businesses. Such help has been available in countries such as Germany for many years. The change is a classic example of a small business lobbying as a trade association for several years and eventually getting the Government's ear. It probably means that every small trade organisation will ride its hobby-horse into our surgeries over the next couple of years, but many of us are happy to deal with problems of that nature.

I welcome the Government's decision to sustain the winter fuel payment until the end of this Parliament, whenever that may be. However, people who are unfortunate enough to be born after the end of September in any calendar year do not receive the payment. There was a solid administrative reason for that: it was thought too difficult to provide the payment to everyone because no one knew what it would be. We now know from the Chancellor that it will be £200 for the next three years. So I hope that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General will give us a positive indication that people whose birthdays are after the end of September will be entitled to get the winter fuel allowance.

If my arithmetic is right, only 75 per cent. of the possible new beneficiaries will receive the payment. There is nothing more galling than to be confronted by an irate woman—it is usually a woman—who, having just passed her 60th birthday, gives us hell in our surgeries on a Friday or Saturday because of the winter fuel allowance. We are asking for a wee bit of assistance on that because the payment is a great idea and reflects a tremendous expression of support by the Government for the elderly and disadvantaged. A number of people are denied that help, and by God do they feel bitter.

I hope that that is not seen as carping criticism. There is no reason for not extending the payment to everyone who is entitled to it. I like to think that the Government will address the issue in a spirit of largesse—perhaps not tonight, but certainly a little later on. I will write to the Minister about that because it is a problem that we need to consider. Although it is a small matter, we would make a sizeable number of people very happy were we to sort it out.

5.18 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I draw the attention of the House to the business interests recorded in the register.

The hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) did us one service: he gave the most honest description of the Budget that I have heard when he referred to it as the John Smith memorial Budget. We have certainly not heard members of the Government Front Bench calling it that, and it might have been more honest had the Chancellor cast it in those terms.

The Budget is based on a series of deceptions, the first of which is that the Government are responsible for the strength of the economy. Every time the Chancellor takes credit for the economy, I am reminded of that miners' grace from the Durham coalfield: "What we are about to receive has nowt to do with the Duke of Newcastle." The success and strength of 60 per cent. of the economy has nothing to do with the Chancellor; it has far more to do with the structural reforms that we carried through, which the Chancellor opposed night after night in the House when he voted against me throughout the 1980s, and with the guidance of the Monetary Policy Committee, which has managed to control inflation—a task that the right hon. Gentleman gave away when he came into office in 1997.

There are ways in which the Chancellor can help, but they are not to be found in the obsessive micro-tinkering that he is so good at. For example, he backed the film industry in 1998 and 1999, but in this Budget he is withdrawing and clamping down on the tax relief for films. He should concentrate his efforts instead on encouraging productivity and saving: Our productivity is not improving anything like fast enough; the manufacturing sector is clearly struggling; and we have the lowest savings ratio for a decade.

The second great deception behind the Budget is that the Government are somehow business-friendly. There has never really been any evidence for that. Of course, there is plenty of evidence that the Government are businessmen-friendly. It has been becoming pretty clear over the past few months that there is a process of

political serendipity whereby nice things seem to happen to Labour donors—but I shall not be drawn down that path. Any pretence that Labour backs business has now been blown away. It has now been clearly revealed that 80 per cent. of the new tax burden falls on business. Jobs will now be taxed more heavily than people. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) rightly said, the burden of the Budget will fall on jobs. The taxation increases will be paid by those in manufacturing, those who work for Corus, those in labour-intensive industries.

It is not enough for the Chancellor to talk about enterprise when he does so little to support it. We hear the right hon. Gentleman banging on time and time again about his admiration for entrepreneurship in the United States. He goes there, but it is not enough to be a political tourist and spend a couple of weeks playing tennis at Cape Cod. That is no substitute for understanding why the United States is so productive. It does not have our working practices. It does not have the TUPE regulations, the employment tribunals and all the other stuff that we have had to import from Brussels.

The US seems to have found the trick in the past 10 years of substituting capital for labour while having a growing work force and encouraging new jobs to be created. If the Chancellor were serious about backing enterprise, he would recognise that our economy is still much closer to the continental model than we would like to admit. If we really want to improve productivity in the UK, we must change the culture and the regulation of employment.

The third great deception is that we can improve public services by chucking money at them—that more people on the payroll necessarily means reform. The Government have a poor record in planning public spending. There was supposed to be a three-year cycle. We have had two comprehensive spending reviews, and I remind the House that just three weeks ago we entered only the second year of the CSR 2000, which began in April 2001. We are just three weeks into the second year of the three-year cycle, and suddenly we are told that none of it is sufficient. The plans have to be torn up and started again.

There were supposed to be targets. There were supposed to be public service agreements. First, there were 600 agreements; now there are only 60 or so. There were supposed to be penalties but there are none: if services do well, they get more money; if they do badly, they get more money and more interference. We have had endless reorganisation. Every year since I returned to the House in 1997, I have received papers saying that one trust is to merge with another, or that one health authority is to merge with another, or that one ambulance trust is to merge with another. Now we have primary care trusts. None of this endless reorganisation and tinkering with bureaucracy improves the lot of patients.

Public service managers are at the beck and call of Whitehall and of every initiative. They are now to be subsumed under layers of audit, inspection and accountability, instead of being given the freedom to manage, instead of being allowed better and stronger working practices, instead of being free to make more effective use of resources and to manage their own budgets properly.

I would like to see a clear commitment from the Chancellor that hospital managers, head teachers and area police commanders should be given freedom to manage their own budgets and to manage their own people, so that they can respond effectively and locally to what their communities are asking. Instead, the Government are going down the route that a previous Labour Government bequeathed to the Thatcher Government, which was a series of public sector pay awards. This could be the son of Clegg—an explosion of public sector pay increases and jobs without necessary reforms in delivering the services that should have accompanied it.

The fourth and final deception is on tax. The Government claimed that they needed no increase in taxation. They did so not once, but twice, in 1997 and 2001. They claimed that they needed no increase in income tax, but national insurance is a tax on income. As I pointed out earlier, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who shared a television studio with me at the time of the election, said that she had no plans to increase the ceiling, but they have increased it. Clearly, she cannot have been telling an untruth, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so it must have been a broken promise, although when I challenged her earlier, she failed to explain or apologise.

Indeed, one of the most dishonest sentences in the Red Book is this:

> "Save for this 1 per cent. contribution, the ceiling of £30,420 will remain in place, and will be indexed in line with inflation to £30,940."

The ceiling does not remain in place even until the end of the sentence. It has now been breached, and we learned this weekend that it could well be breached again. The national insurance increases will be borne not only by the higher paid, but by the lower paid as well, and by those who work in the national health service and for local government. Of course, they will be borne by the hard workers of middle England. We will have two different and increased tax rates: 33 per cent. for the basic rate and 41 per cent. for higher earners.

Those are very substantial increases in taxation and also in public spending. Public spending cannot indefinitely grow faster than the economy as a whole. It certainly cannot do so comfortably if the economy begins to slow. It would have been more honest of the Government to have spelt that out, but I have given up expecting honesty from them.

5.27 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): Many hon. Members—most recently the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable)—have paid tribute in our debates on the Budget to the remarkable economic success of this Labour Government. Only the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) could seek to take that credit away from the Government.

Whichever way one looks at our time in office, one can see that it has been a period of the most remarkable and sustained success. We have now reached our sixth Budget, and it is clear that we can at last begin to reap some of the rewards of the very difficult decisions that had to be taken because of circumstances in 1997, which the hon. Member for Sevenoaks mentioned. They were caused by the Tories' reluctance to increase interest rates on the one hand, and their failure to reduce the national debt on the other. The hon. Gentleman was a member of the Opposition team at the time, so he will recall that they opposed every single measure that we had to take to rectify those two basic deficiencies with which the Tories

[Mr. Geoffrey Robinson]

left us. Whether it was the windfall tax, getting rid of tax credits or advance corporation tax, they fought those measures tooth and nail, yet they were necessary to rectify the inherent imbalances in the economic situation that we inherited.

A raft of other such measures were introduced, but even while we were implementing them, we always had our eye on the need to create a more entrepreneurial set of measures to accompany them. It was in the same period—in those first three Labour Budgets—that we introduced our audacious reform of capital gains tax, which laid down the basis and took us further towards the measures announced last week by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

From the very beginning, the two strands of fairness and enterprise ran together. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry spoke about them most effectively when she referred, among other measures, to the massive incentive that the Budget provides for research and development. That is important to Labour Members, because we know so well that, apart from problems in the general areas of investment in plant and machinery, it is also the underlying and continuing failure of British industry sufficiently to invest in R and D that has led to our falling progressively behind our major competitors.

Now, after five years of Labour Government, unemployment is right down and the minimum wage—so bitterly opposed by the Tories—is a proven success. Youth employment measures such as the new deal have been successful beyond any of our dreams. Interest rates and mortgage rates are the lowest for 40 years, and, as a result of what we have achieved in reducing the national debt, we can now ask what we can do to further the aim of rebuilding our public services in which there was under-investment during the long years of the Tory Government. That we are now able to do so is thanks in no small measure to the great, measured and mature judgment of the Chancellor and his chief economic adviser.

Two areas of social policy are of particular interest to the present team that shapes policy within the Treasury. These two issues are right at the heart of what the team cares about, and what the Labour movement cares deeply about. They are child poverty and the national health service. I do not want to get involved in the rather silly argument about whether 500,000 or 1.1 million children have been helped out of poverty. Everyone in the House knows in their heart that the measures that we have introduced, the increases in child benefit that we have put through, and the further benefits that will come from the integration of tax and benefit have made possible a massive improvement in the welfare of our children.

There is certainly more to come as the benefits of the integrated child and working families tax credits come through. They represent one of the most major changes in the way in which we tackle poverty and deal with those who are less well off in society that any Government have introduced since Lloyd George. That is how important and far-reaching they are, and all we ever hear from the Opposition is that the measures introduce an element of complexity. If that is the small price that we have to pay for something so far-reaching, effective and redistributive, I am sure that Labour Members are willing to accept it.

The national health service was clearly the centre point of the Budget. It has been a major issue since the first months of the Labour Government, when we decided—quite rightly, although it was a difficult decision—to stick to the spending figures that we had inherited from the Tories. I wish that we had then just taken that other £1.25 billion that the present Paymaster General may remember was available from the then Paymaster General's office to alleviate matters, but even if we had taken that money, it was clearly going to be an extremely difficult period.

Now, however, we are in a position to rectify that underspending. We commissioned an inquiry to determine the best way to do that. The Wanless inquiry was commissioned before the last election and reported after it. The report stated quite clearly that the present system of funding the national health service out of direct general taxation was the cheapest, fairest and most efficient one. The response of the Opposition was, of course, to set off on a series of quixotic travels in Europe, from which I do not suppose they will ever return with a decision or a judgment, as the Chancellor has remarked. They have ignored the considered report that has been put before them, on the basis of which the Government are now prepared to invest more heavily than has ever been done in the history of the national health service.

I hope that I will have the agreement of hon. Members on both sides of the House when I say that the one big danger relating to the money is not that we shall not get improvements; of course we shall. Nor is it that we shall waste huge amounts of it; we shall not. There is, however, this wretched preoccupation in the NHS and in its executive with always changing the organisation. We need, in the simplest way, to reduce that—particularly at the top—and to make sure that the money goes into hospitals as efficiently and directly as is intended. If we can make that happen—frankly, it cannot be that difficult to achieve and no major management feat will be involved if the objective is clearly established—we shall be able to say proudly that a Labour Government introduced the NHS and a Labour Government saved it.

5.35 pm

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): The Budget must be the most expensive job application in British political history, for it is a blatant attempt to play to the Labour MPs, and members of the union movement and the wider Labour movement who may vote in the next Labour leadership election. That tells us that the Budget is from a real Labour Chancellor—the tax-raiser general who is now unambiguously committed to high tax and high spend. But that explicit tax and spend agenda was not so clear during the general election campaign.

At that time the Labour party was much more coy about its tax intentions, and the Prime Minister told the *Daily Express:*

"We are not going to clobber people on higher incomes. We have not the slightest intention of hammering people on £30,000 and £35,000"

a year. Yet following the Budget, we know from the tax tables that a nurse consultant on about £34,000 a year will pay £24 a month more in national insurance and a police inspector on, for the sake of argument, £37,000 a year will pay £27 a month more in national insurance.

Buried away in the Red Book is box 2.1, which is entitled, with, I think, unintentional irony, "Informing households about tax and spending decisions".

Some electors might suppose that the information has come a year too late, because it was not flagged up in the election. The Government's reticence on tax last June probably reflected their lack of confidence that the public would buy such a Budget.

The Government have said clearly that the Budget has been well received, that the public are happy to pay more tax and that it will all work out okay in the end for the good old British taxpayer and, indeed, this Labour Government. However, disillusion will set in swiftly among Ministers, for two reasons.

First, the public will understand that the tax increases are simply not over. We have a 1 per cent. stealth tax for those over the top rate ceiling, but that is the beginning of a long series of increases—the thin end of the wedge—and the Chancellor has his foot in the door. The measure is a nice little earner for him, and perhaps his successor in this Parliament. It will raise more money from national insurance, which has always been his aim.

Mr. Siôn Simon (Birmingham, Erdington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ruffley: Time does not permit; the hon. Gentleman will understand.

The Chancellor wanted to jack up top rate income tax liability in 1997 and 2001, but the Prime Minister prevented him from doing so. He has had his way this time, but he will have to revisit his top rate national insurance measure, because the Wanless projections clearly imply that that is necessary. Assuming no increase in private medical insurance take-up, by 2022, in cash terms at today's prices, £154 billion a year will be spent on the health system. As the *Financial Times* said on 18 April,

"the issue will certainly have to be reopened . . . these tax rises are only the first in what will have to be a continuing series if Mr. Wanless's blueprint is to be followed."

It is clear that this is not the end of the tax-raising escalator.

Never mind 2022, in 2006–07 and 2007–08 there will be big increases in funding for the health service, which will have to be covered by reining back non-health service expenditure. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has sensibly said that that implies tight control of other politically sensitive programmes, such as law and order and transport, to name but two. It is far from confident that, on past record, any Government, let alone this Government, will be able to rein in those demands. Given the projections for economic growth, it seems highly likely that in the short term, never mind the medium and long term, tax will have to rise.

The second reason why disillusion will set in is that the promised improvements in public services are unlikely to be delivered. The Chancellor has talked about reform, but we have heard that one before. Since 1997, the Government and the Chancellor have talked about injecting market disciplines and enterprise values into the school system and the NHS, but that has not come about. We were promised free enterprise incentives and penalties in the school system, but all that has happened is that troubled local education authorities have had their payroll administration and grass cutting privatised. That is not structural reform of the things that count.

We have also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) about the shambles of public service agreements, which are not open even to an audit of their assumptions by the Audit Commission. They are often soft targets. Many of them that are not soft are missed. We were promised that performance against public service agreements right across the public services would result in good performers being rewarded and less good performers having sanctions imposed on them. Not one of those sanctions has been applied. I am afraid that on this, as on so much else, the Government are just talking without delivering anything of substance. We are on a pointless paper chase with all those structures and systems, and it simply will not wash.

I have counted more than 30 new quangos that regulate and oversee the national health service. We will now have the new and hastily cobbled together commission for healthcare audit and inspection, although we do not know when it will be up and running—probably towards the end of this Parliament, just in time to miss a general election I fancy.

What is most troubling about the NHS reforms is that there has been no serious, intellectually respectable, careful, detailed analysis of the alternatives to the 100 per cent. taxpayer-funded model. If we think that that model is adequate, we should consider the statistics. Since 1997, there has been a 40 per cent. increase in spend, but activity has gone up by barely 6 per cent. In 1999–2000 alone, there was a more than 9 per cent. increase in spend, but the number of cases dealt with increased by 1 per cent. There has to be something wrong with the system. It will not wash for the Government simply to say that they will reform it using means that are not clear in the Budget or from any of the debates that we have had so far.

We have heard criticisms about the expensiveness of alternative models in Germany, France and Australia. Those systems have at least two things in common: they deliver better outcomes—survival rates for coronary disease and cancer are much better—and they provide greater responsiveness to the patient. They are market led to an extent, but the results are what we should be most concerned about.

We have had lots of ducks, feints and dodging. The national insurance increases, which are tax increases, have been linked with the health service by calling the NHS the best insurance policy in the world, but there is no true element of insurance or responsiveness through insurance. The social insurance models that have been examined by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench deserve serious analysis, not some half-baked report from the witless Wanless, who did not cover himself in glory in his previous job. The health service is too important to be entrusted to such a shoddy and shallow piece of work.

The Chancellor is moving closer to the European high tax, high regulation model. He is miles away from the American model he prates on about so assiduously. The reality is that the Budget gives us cause for hope in one respect, and we welcome it for that. It marks the end of banal, post-ideological politics. The battle lines are clearly drawn between the Conservative party, which stands for free enterprise, and Labour—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time.

5.45 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): The financial consequences of meeting the ambition of this country to modernise and invest in a world-leading national health service were not dreamt up in a moment of emotional gush by someone with an urge to be philanthropic with other people's money. Mr. Derek Wanless was chief executive of the National Westminster bank. He is well known and respected in the City. His conclusion is that for a given level of health care, all other systems of finance are likely to be more expensive than funding through general taxation.

Why cannot the Conservative party accept that? It could be a golden moment: we could take the financing of the national health service out of political controversy. In those circumstances, many might be willing to forgive the Opposition for past mischief towards the national health service. However, they refuse to accept that escape route, because they are still addled by dogma.

We can see that in the vocabulary used by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen to condemn the Government's plan. The national health service is a Stalinist organisation, they say. Despite the bureaucratic failure of the infamous internal market, the US experience of personal payment when need arises and the burden that would fall on employers from social insurance, the Opposition are toying with those ideas. Like the Bourbons, whom they resemble in so many ways, they have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

The Conservatives are not the only people who are confused as to the logic of their position. Mr. Digby Jones, the director general of the CBI is a gentleman with a somewhat shaky grasp of arithmetic, judging from the unfailing way in which he seems to get things out of proportion. I say that in the true spirit of new Labour—more in sorrow than in anger. I know that CBI members will advise him to distinguish between what he says late at night in the bar of his golf club and what he pronounces as the settled view of the CBI.

This Sunday, in an article in *The Observer*, Mr. Jones had the grace to say:

"UK business has never had the macro-economic stability in which it currently operates, and the Chancellor has been a major contributor."

Sadly, that followed his comment that the

"increase in . . . NI contributions will be another body blow to the UK's global competitiveness".

However, the UK has the lowest rate of corporation tax among OECD countries. It is enhancing competitiveness with the Competition Act 1998 and the Enterprise Bill that is currently going through Parliament.

Let us put that national insurance contribution increase in proportion. It is not 20 percentage points, nor 10, nor even five: to Digby Jones it is one percentage point—something that might have been conceded in the annual round of wage negotiations. It is hardly a body blow, unless the body is particularly puny, and Mr. Digby Jones appears far from puny.

Elsewhere in his article, Digby Jones states:

"We don't have the transport infrastructure, skills base or historical investment in industrial resources of our rivals."

Well, you said it Digby; we are saying it, too. The only difference appears to be that Digby Jones does not want to pay for it, but we know that we must.

I do not want to be too solemn about Mr. Jones, but I wish that he and other spokesmen for business, and indeed business men generally, would recognise that we are all part of the same society. Business is not a separate caste that confers favours on society; it is part of society. In his article, Mr. Jones said that

"the Budget has seriously undermined the confidence that business has in the Government's genuine understanding of how business works".

Too often, the pronouncements of business undermine the confidence of the rest of us in its genuine understanding of how modern society works. I promise that I will never again make fun of Mr. Digby Jones and the CBI if its members will recognise that they are not just business men—members of UK plc—but citizens of the United Kingdom, one of the most innovative, benevolent, free and fair societies that the world has ever known.

Let me turn to an issue that ought to concern the CBI, and which concerns many of its members, even though Digby Jones overlooked it. Productivity—the amount produced per person or per hour of employment—is a measure of the country's capacity to generate new wealth, and thus of its ability to pay for community services. Given that we are achieving high levels of employment, it is productivity that will determine the UK economy's ability to grow. There are two aspects to productivity: doing more efficiently what is already being done, with inducements to make necessary changes; and innovating in order to produce something useful that was not available previously. Having spent many years during my career promoting innovation, I should like to address that aspect of productivity.

In January 2000, the Select Committee on Science and Technology concluded its report on engineering and physical science-based innovation by saying that,

"if Britain is to remedy its declining capacity for science based innovations, large companies will play the major part."

That is now recognised in this Budget. The report continues with this welcome statement:

"There is, therefore, a strong case for extending tax credits to them too. Market research and the provision of demonstrators of the final product are recognized as critical to innovative success. It would substantially reduce industry's risks and encourage innovation if the costs of market research, demonstrators and product launch were included in such an R&D tax credit."

There is a very strong case for Ministers' taking that conclusion seriously. Through research councils, much Government support for science rightly goes to fundamental or early-stage research. However, if such inventions are to be converted into economic advantage, they must be developed into practical products and processes. Development is a painstaking process that ensures that products and processes operate reliably and consistently, and, above all, satisfy a market demand. That process is far more expensive than earlier research, and involves major risks. All evidence shows that, for those reasons, many inventions are abandoned at that stage—a stage that industry alone can carry out because it has an intimate understanding of the potential market.

However, in recent years the Department of Trade and Industry's R and D scoreboard has shown that business spending on research and development—as opposed to Government spending—is falling behind that of our international competitors. That decline must stop, because business is the only source of development. Unless development expenditure comes into line with research

expenditure, more and more good ideas discovered in the United Kingdom will be commercialised in the United States or Japan. I hope that the welcome new research and development credit for larger companies will be used as a lever to encourage persistence in development.

The modern Labour party is dedicated to the view that economic strength and social justice go hand in hand. This country does not prosper when one political party pursues economic strength to the exclusion of social justice, while another spends money on social justice without nurturing the economic development to pay for it. That zig-zag approach has put this country behind our international competitors, and as a result our public and social services are poorer than they should be. The policy of the third way is working. This Budget is distinct, not as a mythical return to tax and spend, but as a practical example of such a comprehensive approach to social and economic policy and life in Britain.

5.54 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): This Budget is just more talk, more taxes, no change and no difference, and the British people deserve better.

Mr. Bryant: That is what the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) said yesterday.

Mr. Syms: The hon. Gentleman will hear it again and again, because basically it is true. As some of my colleagues have suggested, we have witnessed a big change, in that politics is returning to tax and spend. People are happy to pay more tax if they feel that such spending will deliver better services, but the difficulty for this Government is that, although they have demanded substantially more money, they do not know how to make the NHS or other public services work better. In the past five years, taxes have risen but in many instances public services have got worse. Britain deserves world-class public services, but I am afraid that this Government seem to tax more, waste more and fail to deliver. Often, as they fail to deliver, they move the goalposts—they change the means of assessment—or introduce new targets and plans for 10 years or much longer. People will judge this Government in terms of delivery, and unless they seriously reconsider how they deliver many public services, I am confident that at the next election the British people will re-evaluate their support, and they may well determine that the Government have run their course.

I should have pointed out at the beginning of my speech that I am a director of a family building business that may be affected by Budget measures. That interest is declared in the Register of Members' Interests.

The national insurance surcharge will hit business hard. As many of my hon. Friends have pointed out, it will be paid by all businesses, regardless of whether they make a profit. Reduced rates on company taxation are somewhat hypothetical if, just to stay in business, the amount of money going out of a business has to go up. A figure of 1 per cent. may not sound much to Labour Members, but such an increase can sometimes determine whether a company stays in business. The Government have hit business hard through that increase.

The national insurance increase imposed on many of those in the public sector is also significant. A nurse consultant on £34,000 a year will be £24 a month worse off; a police inspector on £37,000 a year will be £27 a month worse off; and an employee on £20,000 a year will be £13 a month worse off.

Mr. Bryant: We have just heard all those figures.

Mr. Syms: If the hon. Gentleman had listened in the first place, perhaps he would appreciate that hard-working people who are trying to deliver better public services are being taxed higher through this increase. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) said, this Government have taken £29 billion off business. In terms of the economic outlook, they inherited a golden legacy from the previous Government, but if they continue to load taxation on business, this country's competitive position will prove much more difficult to sustain in the long term. When a downturn does occur—I do not believe that this Government have abolished the business cycle—the cost of keeping people in employment will prove substantially higher than is necessary, leading to high unemployment.

This Government seem to be in favour not only of higher taxes, but of more red tape. New regulations are introduced every 26 minutes of the working day. UK companies are spending more time filling in forms, and less time managing their business. Even before the Budget, £6 billion-worth of extra taxation was in the pipeline, along with extra regulations costing some £5 billion. Meanwhile our competitive position is declining. In 1997, Britain was ninth on the world competitiveness scoreboard, but this year we have fallen to nineteenth. Britain's productivity growth has slowed under Labour. Under the Conservatives, average growth in the UK was faster than in the US, but under Labour the reverse is true.

In the first four years of the Labour Government, the UK's economy grew at a rate slower than America's, and slower than during the last four years of the previous Conservative Government. Britain's share of world exports has fallen from 5.1 per cent. in 1997 to 4.5 per cent. in 2000. The Chancellor had little to say in his Budget speech about the appalling, and apparently growing, balance of payments deficit.

Research carried out by the Library also shows that 4,642 new regulations were introduced in 2001—the highest figure on record. Many of those regulations have to be implemented by the owners of small business, who spend more time form filling and less time managing their businesses. Despite the Government's protestations about what they are doing for manufacturing, 400,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost since 1997. The economy has kept growing, but that has concealed the fact that so many businesses and sectors of the economy have suffered.

The Conservative party believes in the ideals of the NHS, but I am afraid that we are moving further away from them as time goes by. Last year, 250,000 people without insurance paid for their own operations. I suspect that all hon. Members have seen people in their surgeries who have been faced with either waiting lists or mortgaging their homes to pay for an operation that may well ensure that they live longer. None of us who believes in a service free at the point of delivery can be complacent about that.

All that my hon. Friends and I are saying is that we ought to be a little bit open-minded about how we deliver health services. I believe that health care will be delivered

[Mr. Syms]

principally through the tax system in future, but that does not mean that we cannot consider the methods adopted in other countries—in particular, those on the continent—to discover whether there are other funding alternatives that will increase the pot so that we can deliver what we want: decent health care for our citizens.

The fact of the matter is that the national health service employs more than 1 million people. It is not an easy service to manage, so we should consider ways in which to ensure that the service is more creative in future, and many of those in the NHS to whom I have talked appreciate that. One of the biggest frustrations of working in the public sector is that those involved want to deliver a better service, but they sometimes feel that the system conspires against them. If we could unlock the potential of NHS staff, I am sure that we could deliver better health care outcomes for our citizens.

North sea oil has already been mentioned. The North sea oilfield is now moving towards maturity, so it is important to ensure that we get the most out of it by encouraging firms to maintain investment. It was widely thought that a stable tax regime had been agreed, so that people knew where they were and could invest in the future. But the Government are desperate to raise some money, so they have hit what they consider to be the soft option. Instead of one possibility of raising money from motorists, they have decided to go for the oil companies. As the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) said, the oil companies employ many people in his constituency and are going through a rough time at the moment, but they will go through a rougher time because of the decisions taken in relation to the North sea industry.

The restrictions on film industry tax relief were not mentioned in the Budget statement. The tax reliefs introduced under the last Conservative Government were greatly enhanced in the 1997 Budget and thereafter. Indeed, the Government improved the tax position of many of those in the film industry, but they have found that the policy has been so popular that it is costing them much more than they expected, mainly because television companies have taken advantage of the film tax regime, so the Government have cracked down.

As has been said, the Chancellor spent a lot of time mentioning the Budget's impact on microbreweries, but he did not mention the crackdown on the film industry tax regime. Although that change will raise only £15 million in the current year, it will raise £225 million and £295 million in the two years thereafter. Those large sums did not so much as rate a mention in the Chancellor's speech.

I would give the Chancellor more credit for providing tax relief for the climate change levy if he had not introduced it in the first place, because it did great damage to much of our heavy industry. It is one tax that our European competitors do not impose, and I am afraid that it impacts heavily on the United Kingdom and has a regressive effect on our competitiveness.

There is no doubt that the Budget will have an impact on local authorities. Poole borough council—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has had his time.

6.4 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): I venture to suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) has been dropped from Digby Jones's Christmas card list, as I may well be at the end of my speech. We shall see.

As has been said, this is without doubt a defining moment, and there is now clear water between us and the Opposition. I am not sure whether it is blue or red water, but the simple fact is that there is now an ocean between us in our approach to remedying the ills of the NHS. Despite what Opposition Members have said, I am confident that, coupled with the record funding and the reforms that have already been put in place in the NHS, we will see the benefits. I suspect that Opposition Members will still be sitting in the same place in a few years' time and that they will have to make a good lunch of the words that they have just spoken.

People in any constituency often see headlines about job losses and company closures, but behind those headlines, we find the headline figures. In my constituency, there has been a 47 per cent. drop in unemployment since 1997. The decrease in long-term youth unemployment is even more significant at 62 per cent. Those figures are not to be sniffed at. We are talking about youngsters getting jobs through the new deal and having realistic expectations of long-term careers. That is to be welcomed. New business set-up and survival rates are improving. That stands in stark contrast to what we saw before 1997: boom-and-bust economics and a lack of the stability that employers want.

During my daily reading, I looked at the *Financial Times* the day after the Budget, just as many people in Ogmore do when they sit down to their breakfasts. I took exception to the fact that its editorial referred to

"the idle poor who take their pleasure in bingo halls and clubs."

I hope that that was said tongue in cheek, but I suspect that the *Financial Times* has now been removed from every working men's club throughout the Garw, Llynfi and Ogmore valleys.

The *Financial Times* also referred to the welcome news of the research and development initiative. Ian McCafferty, the CBI's chief economic adviser, and Rob Margetts, the former chairman of the Royal Academy of Engineering, welcomed the research and development tax credit. Peter Cotgreave of Save British Science said:

"UK firms invest less than their competitors in research."

The Budget is designed to increase research, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford that that needs to happen.

We need to encourage more investment and innovation because that is the way to turn around areas such as my constituency. In contrast to what the Opposition parties are saying, Stephen Plender said:

"Competition policy has been an unexpected strength of new Labour."

He made particular reference to the Enterprise Bill which is going through Parliament.

I welcome the measures for communities such as mine. The community investment tax credit is specifically geared towards disadvantaged areas. The disadvantaged areas stamp duty relief will provide us with more investment in premises. I also welcome the streamlining of the VAT regime for small firms.

Ogmore is almost a constituency of two halves. The M4 corridor has rightly received massive inward investment, but other areas have been left behind because the Conservative turned their back on them when they were in power. Labour Members welcome the investment in research and development and in deprived communities, and I hope that Opposition Members will welcome them as well.

Investors in People is to be encouraged for small firms. Small firms are important in places such as Ogmore because we have to turn back the culture that the Tories instilled in those communities. The Tories said that they were not worth it and that they could not live up to the expectations of other areas. We are clearly saying that we have confidence in people, so they will be able to turn their communities around, and we have put in place the economic measures that will allow them to do so. Small companies corporation tax has been reduced by 1 per cent. to 19 per cent. Those who quibble over 1 per cent. should remember that the starting rate has been cut from 10 per cent. to zero—not halved or reduced to 2 or 3 per cent., but cut all the way down to zero.

All that has been done on the basis of a Labour Government who have developed economic stability. No wonder people have totally lost faith in the Conservatives' ability to deliver on the economy—they have seen the Labour party do it 10 times or 100 times better. We have low inflation, stable interest rates and continuing economic growth. The distant nightmares of Tory boom and bust, of unemployment being a price worth paying in my communities, and of "on your bike" policies that forced people to travel away and turn their backs on where they were brought up are—please—long gone.

I mentioned that we have reached a pivotal point, and it is a seminal point not only for politics, but for the society in which we live and for business. Now comes the question that will get me struck off the CBI's Christmas card list. Would it not be nice to read in the headlines of the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Observer* that the CBI had said, "We take responsibility for our stake in society as well. We are willing to put the money in as well, because the health of this nation goes hand in hand with the wealth of the nation."? The enterprise economy has nothing to do with cutting people off in the business jungle and saying, "Let them get on with it. It's a hard game out there. Let them do their own thing." Businesses have a stake in civic society, just as Labour Members of Parliament, the people back in Ogmore, and every citizen of this country do. Let every person play their part.

As for the 1 per cent., it will not break the back of every company in Britain. Let me tell hon. Members what it will do: it will help the Labour Government to turn the national health service around, invest properly in public services and build the sort of future for our communities that the Conservatives were never interested in.

6.12 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): As we have heard from the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), the extra money raised is to be pumped into the national health service, and that is welcome, but I am sure that after such an increase in taxation, we will want to see some change fairly soon. Following all the hype surrounding the Budget and the promised injection of cash, change will now be expected, and, for the sake of all our constituents, I sincerely hope that it happens. Unfortunately, according to many sources, unless there is root-and-branch reform, the increased investment will do little to improve the service but will merely limit further decline.

Because of Labour's election manifesto pledges, no rise in income tax could be allowed without—God forbid—the Government breaking a promise, so to raise enough income to cover all the promises that the Government have made, other appropriate means have to be used, one of which is national insurance. Despite the warnings given by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) in his well-argued speech, I do not oppose that approach in principle. However, because of the relatively low ceiling on national insurance contributions, those on higher incomes do not pay proportionally as much as those on lower incomes.

In the days preceding the Budget, the press was full of speculation that the Chancellor would raise that ceiling significantly, but he did not. My party would have been happy if he had, as would many people outside, because now the net effect is that lower earners pay proportionally more in NICs than high earners. It can therefore be argued that the change is regressive. I refer hon. Members to the well-argued case made by the hon. Member for Twickenham, but continue to believe that raising NICs is a step in the right direction, subject to the caveat that I mentioned.

There is a problem, which is that the increase in national insurance will hit the public sector hard, almost with the effect of giving with one hand and taking with the other. It is estimated that the change will cost almost £1 billion per annum. Plaid Cymru believes that a more progressive system of taxation is needed in the United Kingdom. We think that the abolition of the national insurance ceiling would be helpful—

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): It has gone.

Mr. Llwyd: Not absolutely. It has been raised, not abolished.

Increasing the personal allowance for those on the lowest incomes, increasing by 1p the standard rate of income tax, and setting a new 50 per cent. top rate for those earning more than £50,000 would have been more progressive. Such measures would have raised more than £20 billion throughout the UK, making an additional £1 billion available for use in public services in Wales.

Hitherto, the Chancellor's tight economic policies have helped to drive up the value of the pound, boosted the booming service sector, and rewarded big business and those on higher incomes, but we in Wales know that there are problems. Welsh agriculture is badly squeezed, in part because of the strength of the pound, and manufacturing and tourism are suffering. The Chancellor's seeming infatuation with the service sector has put more traditional industries at risk. Again, he has failed to target incentives to help business in deprived areas.

Wales needs a strong and targeted regional economic policy. Lowering corporation tax and employers' national insurance contributions in objective 1 areas would boost investment. Wales stands at the door of probably the greatest opportunity for economic resurrection since the end of the coal era, but objective 1 funding is an unfortunate sign of how bad things really are. If the state

[Mr. Llwyd]

of Wales's economy were as good as Labour Members like to believe, it would not have been given objective 1 status.

Unfortunately, getting our hands on the money to take full advantage of that status has not been easy. To be fair, the Chancellor has awarded Wales extra money above the Barnett block in the current comprehensive spending review, but regardless of all the spin and reports, no match funding has yet been made available. Before 2000, grants from the European regional development fund were paid by the Scotland Office and the Wales Office out of the Barnett block, but no adjustment was made to the block to cover the extra cost. In effect, money from the ERDF was paid to the Treasury in London for projects in Wales but not passed on via the Barnett allocation. In other words, ERDF grants never reached Wales and the funding of all ERDF projects was at the expense of the core budget. I believe that the story is similar in Scotland.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Llwyd: No, I have only 10 minutes.

The practice was exposed in the National Assembly for Wales, and the subsequent comprehensive spending review allocated £421 million for the three years 2001 to 2004 in addition to Barnett, to cover part—but not all—of the European grants earmarked for projects in Wales. That allocation is a fixed amount that does not fully cover the European grants actually paid out by the National Assembly. That coverage could easily have been achieved by making the budget line an annual managed expenditure—thus passing on 100 per cent. of the money received from Europe for projects in Wales—rather than a departmental expenditure limit.

No contribution was made from the Treasury to public sector match funding, which increased substantially with the start of the objective 1 programme in January 2000. As a result, next year, £65 million of itemised expenditure will be taken out of the Assembly budget to supplement the match funding already in the system. As that money comes from the Barnett block, the budget available for core responsibilities such as health and education will have to be cut correspondingly. After 2004, it is predicted that the total match funding specified directly in the Assembly budget will increase to £90 million, and unless that increase is fully covered in the funding allocated to the National Assembly, further inroads will be made into the core budget for services such as health and education.

Although the Chancellor has cut corporation tax to record lows, those cuts are not targeted: they are not aimed at certain sectors or areas. Deprived areas need direct intervention to help to promote their businesses, entice investment and retain existing jobs. The Chancellor announced tax credits for businesses across the board—universal benefits for an uneven playing field. There is a two-speed economy in Britain: first, the booming south-east of England, and good luck to them; and, secondly, the rest of us. It might be more correct to say that there is only a one-speed economy, and the rest of the country is beginning to slip into reverse.

There is a strange dichotomy in the Chancellor's thinking. On the one hand he favours targeted tax credits in his social policy but on the other, he favours universal benefits for companies. He is willing to target poorer families, but unwilling to target poorer regions. If the Government lowered corporation tax and national insurance contributions in objective 1 areas—the most deprived in the UK—businesses in those areas would have a slight advantage over those in more prosperous regions. That would entice more investment and make conditions more favourable for success. Tax cuts and credits should be aimed at the areas that need them most. That is where we have lost out. For example, research and development tax credits are welcome, but, regrettably, few companies in Wales will benefit from them.

Unfortunately, Wales lies at the bottom of the UK competitiveness index. Nine of the 20 lowest-paid areas are in Wales, and the highest average wage in Wales by constituency is still lower than the UK average. The gap between the south-east of England and the rest of the UK is still growing, and the Government have missed an opportunity to do something to alleviate that grave problem.

Since 1979, when the Barnett formula was introduced, Wales's gross domestic product has fallen from 88 per cent. of the UK average to 80 per cent. A new formula is needed to replace Barnett, but there is no time to discuss that now.

Wales faces further problems caused by long-term ill health and a particularly high proportion of senior citizens.

According to the figures, over the next five years, Wales will receive an extra £300 million a year for the NHS. That is most welcome. However, the British Medical Association in Wales estimates that Wales is short of approximately 100 doctors, and a recent survey shows a shortage of approximately 800 nurses. Waiting lists have shot up—there has been an increase of more than 900 per cent. in patients waiting for their first appointment with a consultant. According to the Library, it costs more than £250,000 to train a doctor, so training the necessary 100 doctors will cost £25 million. Training the necessary 800 nurses will add an extra £28 million—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

6.22 pm

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): This has been an interesting debate. I intend to focus a large part of my comments on research and innovation, so it is appropriate to begin by declaring an interest in that I am an unremunerated member of the Kent Innovation Centre, an organisation set up by Thanet district council to support innovative and knowledge-based start-up industries. That is an example of a Labour council working hand in hand with a Labour Government to ensure that we have industries for the future.

Listening to the debate, I wondered whether Conservative Members even understand why we have public services. I urge them to look at page 7 of a handy little Treasury document called "Budget 2002: a summary leaflet", which gives a breakdown of how taxpayers' money is spent. Having done a few sums, I discovered that the national health service costs about £1,200 a year per person—in other words, £100 a month. Do Conservative Members believe that a private or social insurance system could provide the benefits of the NHS for £100 a month? We have public services because they

leverage in benefits of scale, of fairness and of innovation, and that gives us more bang for our buck. They enable us to deliver services to the people who need them, as they need them. It is time that Conservative Members learned that lesson.

I was also interested to hear Conservative Members' comments about the state of the country in 1997. Frankly, I have to wonder which country they were living in. I became a Member of Parliament in 1997, and I remember the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), who spoke earlier but is unfortunately no longer in his place, telling the House in the Budget debates of that Parliament about the mess that the Government were making of the economy by plunging it into recession and doing nothing to bring it out.

I remember Conservative Members opposing every one of the measures that the Government introduced to build the stable economy that we have today—the strongest economy in the world, and the only one in the developed world to avoid last year's global recession. We have the lowest interest rates for decades, the lowest unemployment in the developed world and the highest employment in UK history—and we are still a week or two short of the Government's fifth anniversary. By any stretch of the imagination, that is a catalogue of achievements of which the Chancellor, the Prime Minister, the Government and all Labour Members can be proud.

Conservative Members can take no credit for those achievements, because they opposed all the measures that were needed to implement them. When they said that the national insurance increase was a tax on jobs, I was reminded of the last time they used that phrase—when we were introducing the national minimum wage, and they kept telling us that it would create 1 million unemployed. In fact, 1 million jobs have been created since we introduced the minimum wage.

From the beginning of 1997, the Liberal Democrats demanded extra expenditure on everything. They wanted to start spending money that we did not have before we had earned it or were in any position to do so.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does the hon. Gentleman think that it would have been better to be in year five of the 10-year investment plan for the NHS, as we should be, or in year one, as we are?

Dr. Ladyman: I would agree with the hon. Gentleman if we had had the current economic position five years ago and it had been possible to begin this expenditure, but we have to start from where we are. In 1997, we inherited a country that was going into recession—as Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members said at the time—so we were not in a position to spend the money that we can spend today.

I remind Liberal Democrat Members of the pledge that they made in 1997—not to spend the sums on the NHS that we are about to spend, but to make a change to national insurance contributions that would have yielded precisely £250 million a year extra for the NHS. That was the total largesse that they would have provided. All the strength in the economy has been achieved since 1997. Every Budget since then has been opposed by Opposition Members and forced through by Labour Members. It is to our credit that we are in the position that we are in today.

I want to focus on how to maintain that position. The way forward must be through innovation, knowledge-based industries and science and research. The days when this country could compete against countries in the far east and the developing world on low unit costs are long gone. Businesses in sectors such as the pharmaceutical industry, in which I was employed before I entered the House, are key. Before the 1997 election, the chairman and chief executive of Pfizer, the company that I worked for, said that we were getting close to throwing away any advantage that we had in such innovative industries, because higher education was being allowed to erode, insufficient attention was being given to skills and training, and support was not being provided. A few weeks ago, I had lunch with the new chairman and chief executive of Pfizer, and he said that in his view Britain was once again the best country in the world for pharmaceutical investment. He did not mean that the situation was perfect, and he had some ideas about how it could be made even better. Nevertheless, we are now the best in the world, and we must maintain that position.

That is why the Roberts report commissioned by the Government is so important. The report identified a significant decrease in the number of students studying maths, engineering and physical sciences. It highlighted the negative image of science and engineering and the inadequate information in schools about careers in them. I especially condemn the anti-science attitudes of many hon. Members. They are a reason for people's lack of interest and the lack of respect for scientists.

The report underlined the difficulties of many students in applying their technical knowledge in the workplace and made recommendations to which we should pay special attention. We need to interest more kids in sciences, including maths, physics, engineering and all the technologies. We need in particular to interest girls and women in science and research and find ways in which to make that more practical. The Budget included measures to help get women back into the work force.

I especially welcome the volume- based credit for research companies. It will go a long way towards making investing in research more acceptable. However, if we do not accept the recommendations in the Roberts report, we will lose what we have: genuine opportunity to exploit technology and knowledge-based industries. We have always been good at that. We have created a base, and we can continue to expand it and make our living from those industries. The Budget does much to help that campaign, and the Chancellor should be congratulated on that. The comprehensive spending review, which will be completed shortly, should go even further. I hope that the spending review will accept and act on all the recommendations in the Roberts report.

The Government have done a tremendous job in difficult circumstances. They have built the strongest economy that we have ever had. We must make it sustainable and based on knowledge, innovation and high-tech industries. We are only starting the process; I hope that we shall go the rest of the way in the next three years.

6.31 pm

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): As hon. Members may have noticed from my interventions, I feel strongly about one aspect of the Budget

[Sir Robert Smith]

about which my constituents are concerned. First, I do not wish to incur the wrath of the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), but I shall mention that my constituency depends not only on oil but on farming, tourism and other industries, and that in my view the value of the pound in relation to the euro is a growing problem that we need to sort out.

I want to concentrate on the aspect of the Budget that was a bombshell and shock to many of my constituents. Let me explain the reason for that. It is estimated that at least 40,000 jobs in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire are in oil companies or companies that provide services that are directly related to oil production. That does not include all the spin-off jobs in the north-east that service the people who work in the oil industry. Some 250,000 jobs—a large number—in the United Kingdom stem from investment in North sea oil.

I want to stress the extent to which the oil industry is part of the fabric of north-east Scotland. I went to university in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many of my contemporaries now work in the industry, and I pick up a lot from them and others who work in all parts of it. I hear not only from lobbyists and people in London, but from neighbours and the people I meet in church and in the pub. They work in the industry and I hear about all aspects of it. Jobs in the oil industry are challenging; people enjoy doing them, but they are risky and many fatalities have occurred. Those jobs involve a lot of hard work.

Not only do my constituency and others throughout the country benefit from jobs: security of supply for the United Kingdom is also important. Having energy that feeds into the national grid on our doorstep rather than buying it from abroad is comforting. We know that we can ensure that the lights go on and that gas comes out of the gas tap. Security of supply is a great benefit of maximising the potential of our resources.

The oil industry has contributed £175 billion in taxes since the 1960s. At the moment, £4 billion to £5 billion of taxes derive from activities in the North sea; £200 billion of investment has been made. There is more to come; that is crucial. There is as much oil and gas left in the North sea as has already been exploited. There is a long-term future if we get things right. I believed that the Government understood that, and that they were working to make the North sea a success story.

When the Chancellor first came to office, we heard terrifying stories of immediate windfall tax, but he engaged in dialogue. People, including me, praised the Government for setting an example to other sectors by engaging in dialogue, setting up a taskforce, establishing PILOT and working together. Department of Trade and Industry Ministers acknowledge the importance of getting it right. The Minister for Industry and Energy said in an interview with *Holyrood* magazine, which was published this week, that our main challenge

"is to slow the pace of decline"

in the North sea.

The North sea is an expensive place in which to operate. It is physically challenging because of the deep water and hostile climate. It requires leading technology, which is not cheap. It is important to acknowledge that there is cheaper competition elsewhere: it is cheaper to operate in the gulf of Mexico, and many constituents commute to Azerbaijan. There are bigger fields in those countries, so they are more attractive places for investment.

The Chancellor had his eye on the North sea. It seems an easy hit to the casual, lay observer. The right hon. Gentleman appears to be hitting big London businesses that charge a lot for petrol at the filling station. In fact, however, he is not taxing big London companies, but the profits in the North sea, and only the North sea. As the hon. Member for Ochil said, when the companies are not making profits downstream, they make them upstream. Perhaps the Chancellor thought he could aim at that. But he is not taxing companies' profits from investing in the gulf of Mexico. He is taxing only those that decide to make profits in the North sea. He has charged a third extra on current taxation.

When will the tax start? The right hon. Gentleman gave no warning to enable people to plan for it. It began on Budget day, and no one can work round it. We live in an open, free market in which capital flows and looks for its best return. When the Chancellor decides to take increased revenues from a closed field such as the North sea, he makes it less competitive. He may have dressed things up in talk about future royalties, but that does not apply to the present; it does not affect the bottom line now.

The Chancellor is offering capital relief, which will be welcome, but he is taking extra revenue. Leaving aside the capital relief, imposing tax means that more money will come out of the North sea. He estimates that it will be £100 million this year and that the figure will increase to some £600 million a year. That is not only a breach of trust. Earlier in the debate, I made the point that some of my constituents face redundancy to make the industry more competitive. The industry is making people redundant to reduce the cost base. Their salaries are no longer paid to them, but are contributing towards making the industry more competitive. However, the Chancellor is now taking away people's salaries to help him collect his taxes.

The message to my constituents is depressing. It is also worrying for other industries that are considering investing in this country. When will the Government change the tax regime for them if they prove successful and the Government believe that they have captured them? I am worried about the short-termism of the Government's approach. If we get it right and encourage investment in the North sea, we will make more revenue in future. Every barrel of oil and every cubic metre of gas left in the North sea means revenue for future generations. It can pay for future health care, but it will be lost if the Chancellor does not get it right, work properly with the industry and acknowledge the need for investment.

The Budget was meant to be enterprising and fair. For those who have lost their jobs to make competitive an industry that the Chancellor, by taking tax out of it, is now making even more uncompetitive, it is neither enterprising nor fair.

6.39 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): Obviously we welcome more money for the national health service, and it is interesting that two or three times tonight the Opposition have declined to say how they would fund it. We hear vague statements about other systems, but it is about time that their criticism became constructive and

they told us exactly which system they would use. I am certain that Members on both sides of the House want to make sure that NHS staff get their just rewards and receive their fair share of any extra money going to the NHS. That issue, I know, is likely to be the subject of negotiations; nevertheless it should be flagged up in the House.

Obviously we welcome the continuation of the £200 chill weather payments. Some of us who were in the House prior to 1997 know of the battles that used to be waged here on a Friday morning. The debate was not about £200 then; it was about an increase in the £10 allocation that had been made for several years. I am glad too that the Chancellor is doing a little more for pensioners—a subject to which I shall return.

Hon. Members have not touched on the fact that there is more money to tackle crime. I always thought that crime was a big priority, but the Chancellor has now allocated more money to the Home Office to fight the various facets of crime. We could all give the House a catalogue of statistics on crime. I do not want to do that, but I think that the debate should have been more concerned with crime.

Another issue that caused a great deal of controversy in the run-up to the general election—I am surprised that I have heard no one mention it tonight—is the freeze on fuel duty. Some hon. Members will remember blockades by road hauliers. At that time, I was a member of the Trade and Industry Committee, which took evidence from road hauliers. We should welcome the freeze on fuel duty because it demonstrates that the Government are listening. Whether they can always meet the demands that are made of them is another matter, but they have gone some way to address those grievances. Road hauliers also raised the question of lorries coming from abroad, which use our roads but make no tax contributions. There will be a charge for that. Anybody who knows anything about industry knows that haulage and transport are the biggest costs after research and development, and together they can build up to a considerable amount.

That leads me on to the next measure that I welcome. As somebody from an industrial background, I appreciate the fact that, as I said, the bulk of a company's expenditure goes on research and development. I therefore welcome the tax credit for research and development, based on volume. Obviously, I should like that measure to go further, but I know that it will certainly be welcomed by companies with which I have corresponded and whose delegations I have met. Before 1997, I used to accompany numerous delegations to meetings with Ministers of the then Tory Government, who were not very happy, to say the least, about the idea of giving any concessions on research and development. That issue was raised with us in meetings with the chairmen of various companies. There are a number of measures in the Budget that have not been touched on in the debate, and which I think are vital to the British economy.

It is well worth reminding the Conservatives that, before 1997, when there were arguments about whether taxes would go up, they indicated that there would be no increase in VAT on fuel, but we all know what happened. They demonstrated that it is not only on one side of politics that people are forced to do things that they do not want to do—it happens to every Government. We talk about the enterprise economy, and I am sure that people remember negative equity and the lives and businesses that it wrecked. It would be interesting to compare the number of businesses that went bust under the previous Conservative Government with the number which it is alleged are going bust under this Government.

Not much has been said about the minimum wage. When it was introduced, the Opposition said that it would cost about 1 million jobs. Anyone from the pre-1997 Parliament could highlight cases—I certainly know of one—in which people were being paid £1 an hour, which is amazing. There was a lot of publicity about that. The Conservatives were never able to demonstrate that they were good managers of the economy, although if this Government have any success, the Opposition are the first to rush to claim it. I am sure that hon. Members remember when interest rates were between 17 and 20 per cent., and the Conservative Government had to pull out of the exchange rate mechanism.

The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) mentioned the amalgamation of health authority trusts. That started under the Conservative Government. I have never been too happy about that, and some hon. Members will know that I introduced a ten-minute Bill on the subject. I wanted trusts to have patient representatives with sole responsibility for patients' interests, and that is an area that needs reform. There were a number of hospital closures under the Conservative Government. It is well worth reminding the Opposition of their record in government.

I welcome the move to do something about the thorny question of VAT for small businesses, which is a step in the right direction. For turnover below £100,000, businesses will be charged VAT at a flat rate. I am sure that in future Budgets the Government will want to do more about that.

No one has touched on the climate change levy. I welcome the fact that there will be certain exemptions from that for companies that take environmental issues into consideration. However, we must do more. I also welcome the 7 per cent. increase in the science budget. Anybody who talks to university chancellors and vice-chancellors knows that there is tremendous pressure on university budgets.

I want to draw the attention of Ministers, including the Minister for Pensions, to the fact that the pension schemes of companies such as Peugeot face problems with deficits caused by falling investment returns. Peugeot has a shortfall of about £85 million, and the people on the receiving end of that are the employees who make contributions, which Peugeot intends to raise by about 5 per cent. Some hon. Members may have read in the newspapers that a west midlands company called Caparo Group is to abolish its pension scheme, which could affect about 500 workers. I think that my right hon. Friend will be hearing a little bit more from us about those two issues.

I have already indicated that I welcome what the Government are doing for pensioners, but I still think that travel provision is patchy throughout the country. Pensioners in the west midlands can get free bus travel, but those in other parts of the country cannot. That issue will not go away, and nor will the question of pension payments. Most pensioners would rather be paid through the post office than through a bank. I am sure that Ministers will address those issues. Some pensioners who own their own home have difficulty getting a grant for repairs. We have debated those matters before, and I am sure that we will do so again.

[Mr. Jim Cunningham]

Returning to the health service, I welcome some of the new measures, particularly on bed blocking, about which there is considerable concern throughout the country. I welcome the 6 per cent. increase in resources to tackle that. However, I suggest to my colleagues that, as with all the other resources that we are putting into the health service, we have to look at how that money will filter through. There is a structural difficulty concerning chief executives and local authorities, and I hope that Ministers will consider that because Coventry has had major problems with bed blocking.

I support the Budget, but we still have to take action on those areas that I have highlighted.

6.49 pm

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) and the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith), which makes this a tripartite Scottish treble. I am the first Scottish Conservative to respond to a Budget proposal since 1997, and that represents both an honour and an opportunity to set this Budget in a Scottish perspective, and particularly to assess how it relates to the progress made since 1997.

The Scottish economy has always been driven by trade and commercial activity. My area of south-west Scotland is centred around Glasgow, which was the heartland of the Commonwealth, the trading capital and the second city for many years. Two snapshots of the Scottish economy, however, give the lie to many of the rose-tinted perspectives on the economy that we have heard from those on the Government Benches this afternoon.

Scottish unemployment is now rising. The International Labour Organisation rate is now 6.8 per cent. as opposed to 6.4 per cent. only a year ago. Suddenly, therefore, the great fiction of constantly reducing unemployment—which we have heard from numerous Labour Members today—is shown in perspective and, regrettably, it has some chance of being reversed. Scottish manufactured exports have fallen throughout 2001. The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine knows only too well the importance of exports to the Scottish economy, but the rate for the third quarter of 2001 is 5 per cent. below the rate only a year prior to that. There has been a collapse in its contributions in the UK. As has been mentioned, the UK economy has slipped, in terms of competitiveness, from ninth to nineteenth in the world, and the balance of trade—a figure that is quoted ever-decreasingly—has been in deficit in every quarter since the fourth quarter of 1998.

Scotland's progress is not looking terrific. Sadly, the "Silicon Glen" view of Scotland—the progress that we made in the 1980s—is part of history. We have an image of a fast-track economy, but over the past 30 years the Scottish economy has grown by an average of only 2.1 per cent. per annum compared with a UK average of 2.3 per cent. There is therefore a history of underperformance in the Scottish economy, but it has been deteriorating. It has not exceeded the UK rate in any quarter since 1997. We are falling further and further behind. Our GDP fell by 0.4 per cent. in the third quarter of 2001, while that of the UK increased. The Budget did nothing to reverse the trends that are now emerging in the Scottish economy. Fuel tax continues to cripple residents north of the border, and, to take one tax proposal at random, the aggregates tax looms like a death knell on the horizon for many of our small economies.

I want to focus on the use of national insurance contributions to raise revenue for the public sector, particularly for the health service, as such contributions have a special effect in several ways. They are, without question, a tax on jobs and on employment opportunities. They are not a tax on savings or on investments; they are a tax on employing people. They cut in at a lower rate—those earning a low salary per week start paying national insurance before they start paying tax. They are top-limited—there is a level of earnings per week beyond which employees do not pay any more national insurance. Crucially, however—I want to concentrate on this—they are paid in increasing percentages by the struggling self-employed. This area has been totally ignored by the Government. The smaller the business, the greater the significance of this tax, particularly for those who are self-employed. Importantly, however, this is a very good public relations exercise. The Government quote a figure of 1 per cent., but it is actually 2 per cent.—1 per cent. levied on the employer, and 1 per cent. on the employee. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley)—who, sadly, is no longer present—mentioned, it is a stealth tax. My hon. Friend was queried by Labour Members, but it is a stealth tax, because 1 per cent. is actually 2 per cent. It is also a double whammy, because it has an effect on our public services. The increased cost of national insurance to the health service in Scotland is estimated at £100 million.

As I said, the increase in the national insurance contribution is an extra burden on the self-employed. The Government seem fixated on big business at the expense of small business. They forget that only 27 per cent. of businesses in Scotland are incorporated. The average self-employed income in Scotland is £13,890. The average employed income is £21,800. People who are earning less are therefore paying more as a result of this Budget. There are 3 million self-employed people in the UK, and I suggest to Labour Members that this action will not be forgotten easily.

I welcome the review of company law to which the Secretary of State referred earlier. The matter requires consideration, and we should no longer penalise the smallest businesses—those who can afford it least. Since the Enterprise Bill has turned out to do nothing for enterprise, I hope that, when the company law Bill is introduced, it will deliver what is promised.

Clearly, the national insurance increase impacts significantly on small businesses in my constituency, particularly those struggling to cope with foot and mouth disease. Small farmers, most of whom are self-employed, are now paying national insurance at a higher rate than previously, even though their farm incomes are 70 per cent. less than in 1997. Tiny family businesses in the tourism sector, which have been given nothing in compensation for the losses that they faced last year, are now in an even worse situation than they were in a week ago.

It is no surprise that fewer businesses are being formed in Scotland. In the fourth quarter of 2001, the number was 3,856, which was down 3.8 per cent. on the year. It is no coincidence that Labour Governments are delivering fewer new company formations, more receiverships and a threat to Scotland's entrepreneurial history. Small firms are also in dismay at their new rôle in delivering the Government's welfare agenda. Changes to working families tax credit and children's tax credit are imposing new burdens in terms of red tape and the down time in managing businesses. Firms are delivering benefits when they should be earning money.

On e-filing, the Secretary of State made the incredible suggestion in her opening remarks that a form is not a form if it is e-filed. That is a ridiculous proposal. E-filing does nothing to reduce the burdens for small businesses. It only changes the method by which red tape is delivered to Government.

In the few minutes remaining to me, I want to flag up a double whammy that faces Scotland. We are paying the extra national insurance and the extra tax burden that has been levied on us by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Who is to say, however, when tax is mentioned beside spend, and investment is mentioned beside innovation, that the reform in public services that is being promised south of the border will be delivered in Scotland? Taxpayers in Scotland are coughing up, but will they receive from the Scottish Executive the reforms that are being promised by a Secretary of State south of the border? So far, the indications are not promising. There is no requirement to spend the Barnett formula amount on health north of the border as there is south of the border.

More importantly, however, the Secretary of State for Health's reforms, limited though they are, are being rejected north of the border. Only 10 days ago, the Scottish First Minister was in Perth to sign a concordat with the unions and the health service, and to sign a memorandum of understanding, as if they did not understand each other well enough. North of the border, the Scottish Executive's idea of working with the private sector is to nationalise hospitals. It was announced on Budget day that negotiations are under way to buy the Health Care International hospital in Clydebank. The Scottish Executive's great idea about working with the private sector on health is to buy the hospital—its bricks and mortar—rather than to treat the patients who are there in the first place.

I conclude that this Budget will do nothing for Scotland's economy.

6.59 pm

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): It is possible to exaggerate the benefits and disbenefits of a Budget; we have heard a fair array of such speeches this afternoon. In my business career, the key issue was the macro-economic environment within which my business operated. Individual Budget measures, while interesting, challenging and requiring further thought, were as nothing compared with that environment. The main factors were low inflation and low interest rates; linked to that was a low public debt, because a high public debt tends to force up interest rates, and broadly predictable terms of trade.

I did business under Conservative Governments, and there were many times when I did not feel entirely happy with the environment in which I operated. The position now is that most businesses know where they stand and can plan clearly into the future; they can judge investment decisions realistically and reduce the risks of those decisions. Those are critical factors in deciding whether the Budget continues the trend of a number of the Chancellor's Budgets to strengthen our country's business environment. It easily passes that test. There is limited fiscal tightening, which should be of some comfort to the Monetary Policy Committee in any judgment that it makes about raising interest rates in future; that benefit is modest, but of some value nevertheless. There are steps, in the short term at least, to reduce slightly the public debt in the next couple of years, as we would expect, although predictions of borrowing and spending by the Government and, for that matter, all previous Governments, are subject to large margins of error; that is stuff to which we will return later, with substantial amendment and correction to the Red Book. The key issue for me is whether the macro-economic environment within which business operates is satisfactory for planning into the future; it is.

There are useful supply side measures, including further support for training; in an intervention, I commented on research and development assistance, which is excellent and will help a number of companies in my constituency. There are lower tax rates for smaller businesses; lower compliance costs for dealing with VAT; a simplification of the regime of buying and selling businesses, which has not been referred to in our debate, but is of value to people who run small businesses and seek to trade in the skills that they have built up and the enterprise that they have created. Those are all positive changes.

The impact of increased national insurance on business costs has understandably been raised by Opposition Members, and I appreciate that it certainly falls into the category of challenges that I would have had to work out how to deal with if I were running a business. However, it is also fair to say—I do not necessarily offer this as an argument in favour of the change—that if one looks carefully at the Red Book, as well as this country's record on labour productivity and the low level of capital investment on which several Members have commented, the change will alter the balance between the employment of labour and the employment of capital in the economy. Whether that is good or bad is a matter of judgment; we shall no doubt return in future to the question whether it has had a positive impact on productivity. Nevertheless, people will grapple with that issue when deciding how to run their businesses in the future.

The first key risk for the Budget in the macro-economic environment is that the recovery of the United States, on which a fair number of assumptions have been based, may turn out to be not as fast or extensive as expected. Personally, I judge that to be a relatively low risk, but it is nevertheless significant because of our country's unusually large dependence on trade across the Atlantic. The second risk is that the disturbance and violence in the middle east will have an impact on oil prices, which will have an effect on the global economy. That is not something that we can predict accurately; everyone in the House prays that it is not the case, but none the less we can see that it is a possibility in the current climate. The third key risk, which has not been touched on, is the impact of convergence with the euro. A hidden benefit of the fall in the euro—certainly a well hidden benefit for any exporting business—is that a low euro supports low

[Mr. Mark Todd]

inflation in this country. If the euro rises against sterling in future, as has been predicted for a number of years although it has not substantially proved to be the case, there will be an impact on inflation which will require the attention of the Monetary Policy Committee.

If we look ahead to the challenges, as opposed to risks, of the next year—all challenges, however, are risks if they fail to be met—the first, touched on in the Red Book, is the need for increased market and labour market liberalisation in Europe. In spite of grim warnings from the Opposition, we still have significant advantages in many sectors which cannot be fully exploited in the restricted marketplaces of the European Union, so any rapid progress on liberalising those markets and persuading some of our European partners to adopt reforms that we have already accepted here would be greatly to our benefit.

Secondly, we face the continuing challenge of skills improvement in this country. Under this Government, we have made significant progress in primary education, which needs to be driven right the way through the learning range—essentially, our whole working life—but that process has only just begun. I very much welcome the fact that Derbyshire learning and skills council has been named as part of a pilot programme, allowing it to experiment with the best way of delivering training at work. We still have a great deal to learn about how best to develop skills in employment.

The third challenge on which I want to dwell in the last couple of minutes of my speech is public sector delivery. There is no doubt whatever that many people fully recognise that paying for a quality health service costs money. People are not fools; I met quite a lot of people at the weekend and no one suggested that improvement could be had for nothing or, as is commonly said, by saving a few bob on what we wasted on the dome. Most people recognised that big money was required. However, there is scepticism about whether that money will in fact deliver change. One difficulty is the confusion surrounding the word "modernisation", which, in relation to organisational change, is often cited with efficiency. It is essential to move away from damning the management and bureaucracy in some of our key public services and recognise that many of those people are required to deliver complicated change in extremely complex organisations; they need our assistance and support, rather than the backhanded criticism that we are used to handing out. There are therefore three messages: focus on a narrow range of objectives, thus reducing the number of goals in performance improvement, and empowering people closest to those goals to make sure that they deliver. I hope that those watchwords stay with the Ministers who have to deliver the objectives of the Budget.

7.9 pm

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I refer hon. Members to my declaration of interests.

Unfortunately, the Budget will cause more harm than good over the longer term, for yet again taxes are being raised by a Government who believe that they know best how to spend our money. History suggests that that is not the case. Since 1997 every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom is paying £30 a week extra in tax, yet Labour has failed to deliver improvements in our public services.

As we know, NHS waiting lists are rising again, with more than 100,000 people waiting to get on the waiting list. Teacher vacancies doubled last year and truancy has risen. Street crime and particularly violent crime are rising fast, with an increase of about 33 per cent. in Essex over the past three years.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that according to the national crime statistics, under the present Government the level of overall crime has dropped, rather than doubling, as it did under the last Conservative Government?

Mr. Baron: What concerns people most as regards crime, certainly in my constituency, is the level of street crime and violent crime. There is no denying that that has risen significantly in the past few years. People are asking why, when they are paying more in tax.

In addition, our rail network is deteriorating, with train—

Mr. Jones: I repeat my question. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the level of overall crime under the present Government has gone down rather than up—yes or no?

Mr. Baron: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, that figure is debatable. From the point of view of my constituents—I am in the House to represent my constituency—crime overall is increasing. If the hon. Gentleman does not believe that, I suggest that he comes and visits my constituency. Street crime, violent crime, burglaries and car crime are significantly on the up and are causing great consternation to my constituents.

One of the main reasons why improvements have not been forthcoming is that the Government believe that the state always knows best, so they legislate, regulate and interfere far too much. Such an approach makes for much waste, bureaucracy and red tape. That is perhaps no better illustrated than in the case of small businesses. When I speak to the owners of small business in the constituency and at Parliament, it is clear that their main concern is the rising burden of regulation and taxes.

I undertook a constituency-wide survey asking businesses their views before the Budget. The overriding wish was for less Government interference in the running of businesses. Indeed, 40 per cent. of the respondents spend between one and five days a month dealing with red tape and bureaucracy, and a further 20 per cent. spend one week or more doing so. That is time that could be spent chasing orders. And no wonder. Research shows that more than 4,600 new regulations were introduced in 2001. That is the highest figure on record and represents a 50 per cent. increase since 1997. The Budget does nothing to relieve the red tape and tax burdens on business, particularly small businesses.

The Chancellor made much of the fact that this was a Budget for small business—a Budget for enterprise. However, as we have heard, employers will not be impressed by the 1 per cent. rise in national insurance contributions, which is the equivalent of a 3 per cent. increase in corporation tax, once both measures are equated. That single tax increase more than negates all the Chancellor's other supposedly business-friendly measures.

As a business man myself, it seems to me that the Chancellor misunderstands the importance of cash flow, as opposed to profits, to a small business. By imposing a tax on jobs, the Government have made a mockery of a Budget that was aimed at enterprise. As Nick Goulding, chief executive of the Forum of Private Business, said immediately after the Budget:

"National insurance is a tax on jobs and comes straight out of the bottom line. This will be a further disadvantage to employers."

John Mann (Bassetlaw): Does the Budget improve or worsen the cash flow position in relation to VAT?

Mr. Baron: The measures relating to VAT have been broadly welcomed by business, but they do not make that much difference. What does make a difference, to employers in particular, is a rise in national insurance contributions. That affects cash flow.

John Mann *rose—*

Mr. Baron: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I must make progress.

In a letter to the *Financial Times* on Friday, the Foreign Banks and Securities Houses Association warned that the change to the tax treatment of UK branches of foreign banks

"will result in business going abroad and short term gain and long term destruction of the best industry in the UK. Our competitor countries must be laughing with anticipation."

There is already evidence to suggest that growing Government interference and taxes are beginning to damage our economy. We have heard statistics showing how we have slipped down the competitiveness league table from ninth to nineteenth since 1997, while our productivity growth has fallen. We are storing up problems for ourselves, and those chickens will come home to roost.

The subject is important to me because one of the main reasons why I sit on the Conservative Benches is that I believe that the relief of poverty should be one of the main priorities of politics. That can be better brought about if we foster personal freedoms within the rule of law, if we encourage enterprise and if we allow businesses, especially small businesses, to breathe and thrive. Such an approach will create a more prosperous economy and more wealth, from which the Government can take their rightful share in order to help the truly disadvantaged in society. That will not happen if the Government pile regulations, costs and taxes on to businesses, because that will hinder enterprise and eventually our ability to help those most in need.

Unfortunately, the Budget continues to make life difficult for entrepreneurs. To what end? Simply throwing money at the NHS, which in its present form suffers from too much bureaucracy and waste, and which is in need of great reform, is not responsible government. We know, for example, that for the first time in the history of the NHS, there are more bureaucrats than beds in the system. We also know from the NHS's own audit that about 15 per cent. of its budget—some £9 billion—is being wasted. In any other business, there would be a major restructuring if such figures came to light.

If money alone were the answer, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should all have a better NHS than England, but they do not. In terms of total health spending as a percentage of gross national product, all three countries spend more than England, but their health outcomes and system performances are in many cases worse than in England. For example, in terms of expenditure per person, whereas in England the figure is £740, in Northern Ireland it is £819 and in Wales £822, yet waiting lists there are worse than in England.

Mr. David: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that in Wales, for example, there are more people who are sick than in England?

Mr. Baron: I do not see how that contradicts what I said. More money is spent per head of the population on health, yet waiting lists are longer. That is the simple fact.

Money alone is not the answer. Even in England, where spending on the NHS has been rising, as we well know, the system has not been getting better. Waiting lists are rising again; people are waiting longer in accident and emergency departments; there has been a 50-odd per cent. increase in cancelled operations since 1997; and the odds of surviving cancer in Britain are among the worst in Europe.

Contrary to the scaremongering of Labour Members, we Conservatives do believe in the ideals of the NHS—first-class health care available to all, regardless of the ability to pay. We have been looking with an open mind at the ways in which we can learn from abroad, for health care is better in other countries. That compares with a Chancellor who appears to have a closed mind on health care. He says that we have nothing to learn from other countries, despite the fact that, for example, Germany has no waiting lists, and in Denmark patients have a legal right to treatment within four weeks of seeing their GP. That is why the Budget is a wasted opportunity.

In conclusion, there is one thing for which we can be thankful with regard to the Budget. We now know what Labour stands for. The Government have reverted to the old habit of tax and spend. In many respects, Labour's intentions are clearer now than they have been for many years. The Chancellor is the first Labour Chancellor since the 1960s to raise taxes on income through conviction, rather than necessity.

Since 1997 we have never really known what Labour stood for, but now the issue has been resolved. By throwing money at the NHS, the Government have adopted a political approach more akin to the European social model than to US economic liberalism, despite all the evidence to suggest that European growth rates have been far lower and European unemployment far higher than in the US. That is why the Budget is bad news for this country, and why I cannot support it.

7.19 pm

Mr. Siôn Simon (Birmingham, Erdington): I am grateful for being called. I hope that you will bear with me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I start by noting the following. Although the Secretary of State and the Economic Secretary are not in their places, the Paymaster General is, and I could not help but observe that she makes the third member of the ministerial team from economic Departments on the Treasury Bench today who is a woman—unlike all the Front Benchers and Back Benchers of all the Opposition parties for at least the past several hours. It occurred to me what an excellent

[Mr. Siôn Simon]

example that was of the difference between the genuine commitment to real, constructive change among Labour Members, and the meaningless, [illegible] rhetoric of Opposition Members, which is remarkably [illegible]matic of debate on the Budget.

Somebody asked me this morning what I was going to talk about this afternoon—

Mr. Heath: And the hon. Gentleman still has not decided.

Mr. Simon: I was about to say that the question was handy because I had not quite decided. Having thought about it for a second or two, I said that I thought that I wanted to say something that was staunchly pro-business and equally staunchly anti-whingeing. Having heard the shameless splurge of special pleading, particularly from the Opposition Front Bench, I realise that that was a sound judgment, with which I am happy to continue.

The Prime Minister used to be well known for frequently offering the trade unions a principle for their edification. The very same principle could be equally soundly offered to Conservative Members and the business community: what they can and ought to expect from a Labour Government is fairness, which they are getting, but not favours. To listen to Conservative Members, one would think that the Budget contained revenue-raising measures targeted solely and exclusively on the business community that nobody else will pay and that are apocalyptic and unprecedented in their scale and style. The truth is that business will pay an extra 1 per cent. in national insurance contributions—and so will employees and the self-employed.

That reminds me that I was a little confused by the arithmetic of the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan), who is the Scottish parliamentary Conservative party. He said that the increase was really 2 per cent. because it was 1 per cent. for employers and 1 per cent. for employees. If he adds the self-employed, that makes 3 per cent; if he takes account of the fact that I pay the extra 1 per cent., that makes 4 per cent; if he adds one of my hon. Friends, that makes 5 per cent. Before we know it, we have reached billions of per cent. That is very strange arithmetic.

It is equally amazingly strange to describe the national insurance increase as a stealth tax. It is a stealth tax only in the sense that a stranger in the street sticking a £50 note in somebody's ear is a stealthy gift, or another stranger dropping a fridge on somebody's head is a piece of stealthy refrigeration. Whatever tax or non-tax it is, it is certainly not a stealth tax—and nor is it a tax on jobs. It is a tax on employers and employees, and not a tax on those who do not work, as Opposition Members know perfectly well but choose not to recognise.

I heard somebody on the radio the other day whom one might describe as a business leader saying that it is not the responsibility of business to pay for health care. That pretty much underlies where Opposition Members have been coming from and, fundamentally, is not only not true but nonsense. What does that gentleman think his existing national insurance contributions go towards? What does he think happens to his corporation tax, business rates or the VAT that he helps to collect? The notion that business is somehow separate from the services that the Government are charged with providing for the state is illiterate.

Since Germany began to follow what hon. Members will find Germans call the Blair model and instituted what the House will find the Germans call Blairite reforms, it may have overtaken Britain as the European country with the lowest business taxation. We are almost certainly second.

Mr. Baron: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Simon: No, I will not because, fortunately, when I tried to intervene on the much more experienced and knowledgeable hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley), he explained to me that there is no time on these occasions to take interventions. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) is not as experienced. A more experienced Tory showed me the way earlier. I can only take my lead from those who have been in this House longer and who doubtless know much more than I do.

We already have one of the very lowest business taxation environments in Europe. Both key rates of corporation tax have been cut. In addition—

Mr. Baron: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Simon: No, I have just explained that I am not going to.

In addition, as has been extraordinarily resolutely ignored by Conservative Members, the business community in this country pays a massively lower contribution to the health care of its employees than business communities in comparable countries such as France, Germany and the United States. The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) refused to address that when hon. Members pressed him, and that is because there is no answer to it. Conservatives' arguments are special pleading, illiterate, self-interested and absurd.

Mr. Baron: What about German unemployment?

Mr. Simon: That does not bear any response. *[Interruption.]* German unemployment is two and a half times that in the UK—and that is supposed to be a problem for Labour Members? I think not.

To continue with the specifics, as a former VAT-registered small business, I am perfectly well aware how naturally resentful many small business people are at being the unpaid and entirely unthanked collection agents for Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. There is no doubt that it is thankless and irritating. Ministers might do well to consider the point, which is rarely raised but has often occurred to me. In that context, a Budget that lifts 700,000 small businesses out of the VAT environment can only be welcome and positive.

I shall not go on at great length about all the other pro-business measures in the Budget, because others have done so and will do so. Suffice it to say that, as well as the things that I have mentioned, there are a volume-based research and development tax credit, an extra £30 million for training and development, a community investment tax credit, a community development venture fund, changes to the limits on non-residential stamp duty,

implementation of recommendations on e-filing, reform of the business incubation fund, and so on. Those are just the tightly defined, enterprise-specific elements of the innovations in this Budget alone.

The notion that we have had other than a business-friendly Budget from a business-friendly Government is nonsensical. The bottom line is that the best economic indicators for generations are the best thing for business in this country. That is what it really comes down to. They make far more difference than anything else, and are proof of a business-friendly Government. If we were not business-friendly, we would not be able to deliver such economic success. Economic success, as one would have thought Conservative Members might realise, derives from business.

7.29 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this important debate. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), I welcome the main thrust of the Budget to increase investment in the national health service. Indeed, that can be no surprise because my party has campaigned for that for many years. The Red Book is entitled "The strength to make long-term decisions", and our only regret is that the Government did not have the strength and purpose to make these decisions earlier in their time in office.

Although I want to concentrate on NHS reform, I have two other issues to raise. The first relates to the Government's borrowing targets and projections. The second concerns the increasing tendency to complicate the tax system. The Chancellor said that he is trying to build in an additional measure of prudence in his projections for the public finances. As a consequence, he has raised his projection for the surplus that he will have for the next few years. However, when we consider the reasons for the increase in surplus on a current balance basis, we see that it is largely a result not of a fundamental improvement in the projection for the economy, but simply of the fact that the Government have decided unilaterally to revise up their forecast of the projected growth of the economy over the next few years. That development can hardly be described as prudent, especially in the light of their failure to make progress on their agenda to improve productivity. Although the National Audit Office has loyally done its usual job of rubber-stamping the changes in the assumptions in the Budget, it noted that the change to the growth forecast was less prudent than the previous projections.

We also notice that in spite of the fact that the European Union criticised the Government in January for their Budget projections—in particular, for projecting that they would borrow to fund their overall position during the next few years—they have moved further from achieving a balance. Specifically, they have increased the borrowing figures in 2005–06 and 2006–07 from £13 billion, which was set in the pre-Budget report, to £17 billion or £18 billion. The Chancellor still has work to do to persuade his colleagues in the EU that the growth and stability pact needs fundamental reform. There is no doubt that the Government are a considerable way from meeting the requirements of the pact. Indeed, they are moving in the wrong direction.

I support a reconfiguration of the growth and stability pact. It is wrong that it should limit our room for manoeuvre on fiscal policy, especially when we have a strong budgetary position. The Government need to address that problem with our European partners if they are not to be cautioned yet again for their projections over the next few years.

The Chancellor is increasingly obsessed with complicating the tax system. He claimed once again that he was abolishing a tax in the Budget and referred to measures to reform betting duty. However, the thrust of the rest of the Government's tax policy since 1997 has been geared towards complicating, rather than simplifying, the tax system. It is easy for hon. Members to welcome each individual measure that the Government introduce to increase the number of allowances and reliefs in the tax system. For example, it is tempting to welcome the vaccines tax credit, the research and development tax credit, the small brewers tax reliefs, the film tax reliefs and the additional corporate gains tax loopholes that have been introduced over the years. What we perhaps fail to recognise when we welcome each of those measures is the way in which they not only make the tax system more complicated, but require higher levels of other taxes to fund them.

When we consider what has happened this year to one of the Chancellor's favourite wheezes, we see how such measures can go disastrously wrong. In 1997, the Government introduced tax reliefs for the British film industry, supposedly at a cost of £50 million a year. In 2001, further changes were made to that tax relief that were forecast to cost an extra £50 million. The annual cost of the measure is now forecast to be £360 million, an extraordinary increase since it was conceived, and the Chancellor expects us to give him credit for introducing measures to rein in the effects of that tax relief by reducing it by £295 million in the year ahead. I would prefer it if the Chancellor did not introduce greater reliefs and allowances, but concentrated his resources instead on taking people on the lowest incomes out of tax all together. I hope that that will be part of his agenda for future Budgets.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the Government's measures on the NHS. When Conservative Members talk about the failure of the NHS and the perceived inability of investment to make a difference, they should remember that the major problem for the Government in the last Parliament was that they stuck to the spending plans set by the Conservatives. There was little increase in NHS expenditure for the first two years and what there was was swamped entirely by the costs of increased pay, technology and dealing with an ageing population. Those are regular cost increases and it is clear that the NHS needs money that covers more than inflation for it just to stay as it is.

We have yet to try a properly funded health service. However, I would rather the investment announced by the Government than the policy described by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron). He said that the Government were irresponsible to put money into the NHS. In the absence of a serious policy from the Conservative party either to reform or to invest in the NHS, my constituents would consider it far more irresponsible to stick with the existing funding of the NHS. Although many people have to wait excessively long times to receive treatment, and in some cases die before they get it, we cannot wait for the Conservative party to come up with a policy.

[Mr. David Laws]

The Government should be conscious, however, that in giving an impression prior to the general election that they did not need to increase taxes and in attempting in the Budget statement to find mechanisms for raising revenue that do not involve breaching their promises on income tax, they have damaged their reputation with the electorate, who believe that promises on taxation have been broken. They have also been forced to introduce a mechanism—the increase in national insurance contributions—that is far less sensible than an increase in income tax. A day after the Budget, the editor of *The Idler* magazine—one of the people who the Secretary of State said praised the increase in national insurance contributions—commented that the move to tax employment rather than income was

"a step forward on our mission to return nobility to pursuit of idleness".

It is odd, as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham said, that the Government are determined to tax employment rather than income. The newspapers over the weekend reported some of the effects that that will have on those very rich people who will not pay the national insurance contributions and will, as a consequence, be better off when they should be making a bigger contribution through income tax.

Parliament should continue to debate the NHS and its funding. The Government should pay more attention to some of the measures included in a document issued by the Treasury. Although it did not receive much attention on Budget day, it compares various forms of health funding worldwide. We should consider measures such as social insurance when we think about how we fund the NHS beyond the current injection of finance. However, I infinitely prefer the concrete measures set out in the Budget to improve the NHS to the policy vacuum in the Conservative party.

7.39 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): Over the long years of parliamentary history, the raising of taxes, the setting out of spending plans based on Government priorities and people's needs, and finding the financial means to tackle issues of public policy have provided many of the major issues of debate and controversy heard in the Chamber. It might be worth while saying that the onset of my contribution stems from the way in which the introduction of national insurance was fought tooth and nail by the Conservative party in 1909. It is not surprising that we find Conservative Members still battling against any increases in national insurance contributions, even if there is to be spend on the national health.

The Budget, the financial focus of the nation's public life, means many different things to different constituencies, communities, businesses and interest groups throughout the United Kingdom. We as Members all come to the debate with different demands and agendas. However, at the end of the day, if the many appetites seeking succour at this supper are to be satisfied, one underlying premise has to be met.

The overall health of the economy must be sound and capable of sustaining and satisfying the many credible claims made on the Treasury's chests. Whatever one's political persuasion, it is mischievous and misleading to argue that the United Kingdom's economy is not sound at present or that the Government's economic management has not been a major factor in creating the unparalleled economic stability that we now enjoy.

All the economic indicators put the sophistry of the Conservative party to the sword—be they interest rates, inflation, employment, house prices, job creation or Britain's ability to cope with the global economic downturn. The Government and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer have set a standard that has rarely been met by previous Governments in creating a macro-economic climate. It is one that has seldom been enjoyed by the inhabitants of these islands. This achievement has put in place the foundations that will enable Parliament to work with other organisations in civil society, including the trade unions, to build a society that will aim to achieve social justice and a better life for the many, rather than the privileged few.

Like many Labour Members, I have at the top of my agenda the need to ensure a more prosperous country for my constituents to share in. The mainstay of the prosperity enjoyed by so many so far during the Government's first term has been the creation of 1.5 million new jobs, and that job creation must be maintained. We must ensure that that prosperity is sustained. Job creation must bring a better future for many more citizens.

In the run-up to 17 April, I was looking for a better and more conducive tax regime to allow the smaller to medium-sized enterprises in my constituency to flourish, to create more growth and therefore, as a consequence, to create more employment. I believe that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is doing that through his Budget.

Employment issues and the creation of jobs are an area of prime concern to the area that I serve, with its unemployment rate standing at 7.2 per cent., which is significantly higher than the national average. It is therefore vital that we create a financial structure that enables entrepreneurs and enterprise to establish themselves and to create new forms of economic activity. Given the measures that the Treasury are introducing, it is clear that for economic growth to mean anything it must be shared equally throughout the country.

I am happy to acknowledge the real economic benefits that will accrue to Dundee with the location of the new Department for Work and Pensions offices and the Inland Revenue's new call centre, which will bring in total 1,000 new jobs to the city. That will be much welcomed.

I hope that the Budget will help Dundee build on its considerable success in promoting itself and on its continuing efforts to capitalise on the academic endeavours of its two universities to bring new jobs into the market, especially biomedical research technology and computer games.

Only recently, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visited Glycocel Ltd. in Dundee, a new concern which is a good example of the fruits of a biomedical research programme that has flourished at Dundee university. Indeed, it has been encouraged to grow through a joint university/city council-promoted incubator project. It is providing a crucible for the promotion of economic production based on successful academic research.

The restructuring of the business incubation fund announced in the Budget should, I hope, enable further success in the vital restructuring of Dundee's economic base. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has introduced measures to assist manufacturing in general.

At a positive meeting in February, which I think the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) missed, the Scottish chamber of commerce at Dover house presented statistics that showed an encouraging snapshot of the Scottish economy during the last quarter of 2001. The statistics produced by the Fraser of Alexander institute clearly underlined the success of the Government's management of the economy, with the figures showing encouraging levels of consumer spending, increasing house prices and improving tourism figures.

There have always been the problems clearly identified in manufacturing—in Scotland, Wales and the United Kingdom generally. I welcome the proposal contained in my right hon. Friend's pre-Budget statement last year, and I applaud the steps that he has taken in the Budget to help British industry to become more competitive and more productive by reducing the tax burden, by promoting research and development and by encouraging training and a greater ability to invest in people. With the additional funding of £30 million being made available to small firms to help them in gaining Investors in People awards, this will be extremely helpful.

I hope that this will help British business to become more competitive and more productive, and as a result safeguard jobs.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the freezing of petrol and diesel duties. When the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) asked why we had not replaced the levy on oil in the North sea by increasing the tax on diesel and petrol he was being disingenuous in relation to the facts that pertained last year.

I argue that the freezing of petrol and diesel duties is welcome, not because it placates motorists in general but because fuel prices play a significant role in the cost of commodities produced at a distance from the market. Given the shambles of the rail freight industry, with the Railtrack debacle and the virtual blockade of the channel tunnel, which has seriously restricted Scotland's rail haulage contacts with the continent—in some instances it has been cut by 80 per cent. owing to the inactivity of the French authorities to police asylum seekers trying to gain access to the UK—road connections and transport costs are doubly important.

Given the proximity of the new ferry terminal at Rosyth to both our constituencies, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I will welcome the beginning of the new direct ferry services from Scotland to the continent next month, and the benefits that that will bring to hauliers and other businesses throughout Scotland.

I am confident that the steps taken by my right hon. Friend are the right ones, and the ones that will continue to promote the economic health and growth of the UK. They will continue the Government's great record of creating new jobs. The steps outlined in my right hon. Friend's Budget last week will provide the conditions and stimulants that many were seeking to ensure that the problems facing manufacturing were tackled. Small to medium-sized businesses will be encouraged to grow, and the opportunity for new start-ups will be enhanced.

I especially welcome the proposals for the new community investment tax credit, and the £40 million of community development venture funding that will be put aside and launched in May. This is a treasure chest that I and those involved in the promotion of economic activity in Dundee will be seeking to raid before too long.

Certainly the national focus on strategy for new start-ups is long overdue, especially in the area that I represent. The Department of Trade and Industry should be encouraged to become more engaged in such areas to help growth and to provide advice and support for new and aspiring entrepreneurs. The new helpline proposals and starting packs will certainly aid in the process. I hope that the telephone numbers will be widely advertised and that the packs will be heavily promoted.

In presenting the Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer aptly referred to a discussion on the health service. He said that what we decide in this debate

"will not only determine the conditions of our public service but define the character of our country."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 589.]

I strongly believe that the essence of this country's character should be a responsible and responsive nature, caring and providing compassionately for those in need—a nation with a shared and collective sense of duty and service, striving to recreate an enterprising and creative country in which access to economic and social opportunity and welfare is based on equality for all.

I believe that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has taken the necessary measures in the Budget to ensure that the citizens of Dundee and the people of Britain will share both in that analysis and in the prosperity and economic well-being that they deserve, which will be produced by the Budget.

7.49 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): In opening this debate, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry claimed that this was a Budget for enterprise that provided opportunities for all. I should like to test that claim and consider in particular the impact of the Budget on two especially enterprising groups: the self-employed and small businesses. I do so as someone who was both director of a small firm and self-employed for the 12 years preceding my entry into the House.

The self-employed are vital to the economy, not least in Scotland, as my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) pointed out. They are often the leading innovators and are usually the ones who create the jobs and wealth in our local communities. Self-employment also provides an essential flexibility in the labour market, enabling businesses to respond quickly to changes in supply and demand. More importantly, however, self-employment epitomises an enterprise culture. It means that no matter who someone is, and whatever their background, if they have the skill, the will to work and the ambition, they can be their own boss and stand on their own two feet. So if the Budget were indeed about promoting enterprise and creating opportunities for all, it would have to tackle the needs, concerns and aspirations of the self-employed. It would have to cut their taxes, end any discrimination and slash the red tape that currently holds back budding entrepreneurs.

It is true that the Budget offers some tax cuts for small businesses, but many people fail to realise that those cuts are available solely to companies. That means that the self-employed, who are unincorporated and run two thirds of all small businesses, are specifically excluded from each of the tax cuts outlined by the Chancellor last Wednesday. They are excluded for no reason other than

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their legal status. I therefore ask the Paymaster General why she has forgotten the self-employed and turned her back on the freelancer, family firm and local partnership. Are they not enterprising? Do they not merit the same tax cuts as their incorporated competitors?

It is fair to say that there was one tax change for which the self-employed were thought good enough. It is a change that affects their bottom line and which 85 per cent. of self-employed people specifically said they did not want. I refer, of course, to the substantial rise in national insurance contributions. For many self-employed people, the increase will mean a hike of anything between £250 and more than £1,000 in extra costs. No tax rise is welcome, but what a brilliant tax to choose to discourage the self-employed. If there is one Government charge that the self-employed particularly resent, it is national insurance. The reason why is that they pay twice: once through class 2 contributions for the benefits that they receive, and again through class 4 contributions, which most of them see as a tax on their enterprise. That is what self-employed people in my constituency tell me they feel about the Budget. Despite all the glossy reports and all the Minister's warm words, that is the culture that the Government are creating. They are a Government who have turned their back on so many of the entrepreneurs whom they claim to support.

I should like to turn now to the smaller businesses that are incorporated and consider how the regulatory changes in the Budget affect them. I welcome the significant increase in the VAT threshold, which will undoubtedly help and is welcome in that context. However, a minor change in the VAT regime is not enough. Before the Budget was announced, many people were expecting much more radical action. After all, manufacturing in the United Kingdom has now been in recession for more than a year. Although there are some glimmers of hope, manufacturing businesses needed real help in the Budget to reduce their costs and improve their profitability. They did not need a £3 billion hike in their costs. And it may even be £4 billion—who knows? As the director general of the Engineering Employers Federation said, £3 billion of extra costs is £3 billion less to invest.

One of the main complaints that businesses raise with me is that they now have to administer the Government's social welfare programme through the pay-as-you-earn system. The payroll burden, which has been mentioned by one or two hon. Members, has grown substantially since 1997, ensuring that in addition to wages and non-wage costs, a business is required to spend its time and money running the complicated system of credits so loved by the Chancellor. That includes the working families tax credit, the stakeholder pension, student loans, attachment of earnings orders and child support tax credits. Together, those measures represent a serious drain on business resources. Of course, for small businesses, the burden is completely disproportionate. Even the Inland Revenue reckons that it costs a small business with up to about four employees £288 per person per year simply to administer the system, never mind wages or national insurance.

While I accept that the Chancellor acknowledged that problem in his Budget, I point out that he failed to act decisively. Instead of seeking to reduce the burden, the Government are planning merely to encourage firms to file the same returns electronically, as the Secretary of State confirmed. Furthermore, the new tax credits, which are intended to be more responsive, will be more complicated and difficult to administer.

Will the Paymaster General please look again at the payroll burden, which is her direct responsibility? The system needs to be completely overhauled. Most important of all, the Government themselves and not business should now administer their social policies. Such an approach would have significant benefits, including reducing business costs, making Britain more competitive; cutting the cost of employing people without affecting their wages; and helping productivity by releasing people to do business rather than filling in forms—a special benefit for small businesses. Currently, the average small business spends up to 31 hours every month merely complying with Government regulations. Given that there are approximately 3.5 million small businesses, if such a change managed to reduce that time by only four hours a month, 21 million working days would be released back into the economy every single year. That could make a significant difference to the productivity about which the Chancellor claims to be concerned. I hope that the Paymaster General will respond positively to that point.

The Chancellor began his speech last Wednesday by promising a Budget that would create a culture for enterprise. Yet, as I have shown, he has excluded either by mistake or by intent the very entrepreneurs whom he praises from receiving the tax cuts, and then added insult to injury by raising the one tax that they all despise. Equally, the right hon. Gentleman's acknowledgement of the burden on small businesses is contradicted by the heaping on of ever more bureaucracy and costs. Far from promoting enterprise, the Chancellor has taxed it; far from creating opportunity for all, he has excluded 3 million self-employed entrepreneurs. More talk, certainly, and more taxes, of course, but there is no real help in this Budget. That is the reality of this Budget for business, and that is what business will remember this Government for.

7.58 pm

Dr. Hywel Francis (Aberavon): I intend to speak about the importance of the principles of fairness and enterprise that are enshrined in the Budget for disabled people and their carers. I therefore wish to declare my membership of the Down's Syndrome Association and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, the community union, which now includes the National League of the Blind and Disabled.

I warmly welcome the Budget as a major step forward for enterprise and fairness in Britain. As the TUC said recently, it is

"a defining moment in the future of the British health care system and the history of the present Government."

The Budget is therefore a step change on a journey of hope for the British people. The Chancellor is right that our task is to address through reform three challenges: enterprise, family prosperity for all and the renewal of our public services. We all endorse those challenges. To borrow from Raymond Williams, they are journeys of hope. As he said, we need resources to sustain those journeys, and I believe that the Chancellor has provided us with the intellectual, political and fiscal resources that we need. We must now use and develop those resources

imaginatively and in a truly Bevanite way, with pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will and a passion for social justice.

In that spirit, the challenge of enterprise needs to be accessible to all, as do family prosperity and improving public services. Too many people are still excluded from the full opportunities of enterprise: the homeless, ethnic minorities, school leavers without qualifications and disabled people. I would like to speak in the House on all those groups in the near future, but tonight I wish to focus on people with disabilities.

Many people with disabilities desire to go on that journey of hope from welfare to work. It is a precarious and difficult journey that requires learning and training opportunities as well as advocacy and professional support. If ever we needed to embed the enterprise culture in the culture of social justice, we need to do so with and for people with disabilities. I welcome the attention given to such people in the Red Book, in its commitment to help "those who can and wish to work make a successful return to employment."

That is an enabling statement, rather than a prescriptive one, and it underpins the new deal for disabled people. Can we, however, learn by listening to the "forgotten army" of disabled people, as they have recently been called? Listening to such admirable organisations as the National League of the Blind and Disabled, we learn that too little is currently allocated to sustaining and developing this excellent new scheme, which will address the needs of 3.3 million people of working age who are not currently working. The most startling statistic that I have come across recently is that only two out of five people with a learning disability can expect to work during their lifetime. What can the spirit of fairness and enterprise do for this forgotten army?

The Government have supported such bodies as the Shaw trust, which has done much in recent years to assist disabled people towards independent living and new learning opportunities. The trust believes, as I do, that disabled people who have been out of work for a long time need more than changes in the law and tax breaks, important though those may be. They need new learning opportunities—negotiated by them—professional support and advice, and an advocate to convince employers of their worth. The new deal for disabled people and the supported employment programme will provide a major start, but far more investment is needed in such schemes, particularly given that disabled people make up nearly half the total of economically inactive people of working age in the United Kingdom.

Recent research at the university of Nottingham has shown the real value of the personal adviser system in the new deal for disabled people. It has shown that it is really working, as is the supported placement scheme. Only last Friday in my constituency, I saw the work of such schemes at the opening of the Karten computer training, education and communication centre in Llandarcy, where young disabled people will gain confidence, self-worth and a new quality of life through new information and communications technology learning opportunities, and support and advice systems. All this should lead to quality work opportunities. That is a true example of synergy between fairness and enterprise in my constituency. More of this needs to be done across the country.

Dr. Kevin Fitzpatrick, the commissioner for disability rights in Wales, has emphasised many times that when a disabled person works, there is a significant reduction in benefit take-up. There is a positive contribution from tax and national insurance, and a reduction in calls on health and social services. Carers can return to work. The disabled person has greater power as a consumer, becomes an equal and valued citizen, grows in confidence and—most importantly—contributes positively to the life of the community and the economy in new ways. All this has started to happen since the return of the Labour Government in 1997.

Labour Members agree that the first step change as a result of this Budget will be the rebuilding of the national health service. The next—before the next Budget, we hope—will be to ensure that disabled people have the opportunity to be at the heart of our new enterprise economy, and to provide substantial new learning, advisory and advocacy support for the millions who wish to work.

I welcome the Chancellor's recent commitment that, in the coming spending review, education will receive the priority it requires to deliver further substantial improvements. I am sure that he had in mind a high priority for disabled people in general. When we begin to achieve all this through his present Budget and the next spending review, we shall provide the real resources necessary for that essential journey of hope towards an enterprising and fair society for all. We have made a great start with this great Budget.

8.5 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): Before the Budget, I wrote to more than 1,000 businesses in my constituency to find out the issues that they faced, and the action that they wanted to see in the Budget. The overwhelming message that came back was about the burden of taxation—both in terms of the level of taxation and of the administrative burden. It was with that in mind that I listened to the Chancellor's speech last Wednesday afternoon. Yes, there were measures in that speech that the businesses in my constituency might welcome. The optional flat rate for VAT is something that many businesses tackling VAT administration would wish to see. The lower corporation tax rate for smaller businesses was also a welcome change.

In a way, I welcome the money that the Government are providing for the electronic filing of Inland Revenue returns. It is a recognition of the problems imposed on business by the Government that they have had to introduce the payment of that money. The problems facing businesses include the administration of measures such as the working families tax credit, and the collection of repayments of student loans. Those are burdens that have been imposed by this Government. I welcome, therefore, their conversion to the recognition that businesses need help in this area, but it would have been better if the Government had tackled the causes, rather than the symptoms, of the work load that they have imposed on small businesses.

The Government's failure to grasp the issues facing businesses was demonstrated by the imposition of the tax on jobs—the increase in national insurance contributions. That will hit the cost base of businesses and erode their profitability, and they will, of course, adjust their pattern of performance depending on how much they use labour. I am conscious that banks and supermarkets with very thin profit margins will be particularly impacted by the

[Mr. Mark Hoban]

increase in employers' national insurance costs, and will seek to restructure their organisations to bring about the shift from labour to capital that was mentioned earlier.

I am particularly concerned about the plight of small manufacturing companies. Many of those in my constituency exist because they have been able to target a niche market, perhaps one that requires a short lead time for production or short volumes. Because of the nature of the niche in which they operate and the techniques that they use, those businesses are dependent much more on labour and less on capital. I fear for the small manufacturing sector in this Budget, which was presented by the Chancellor as a Budget for enterprise. The effect that the increase in national insurance contributions will have on every employee, employer and self-employed business demonstrates that it is definitely not such a Budget.

The tax increases in the Budget were introduced to fuel the growth in public spending. I want to talk briefly about health and education. On education, the Chancellor announced that an increased amount of money was to go directly to schools. I do not know what strings are attached to that money, but it is very rare for this Government to give schools any money directly without specifying its purpose.

John Mann: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoban: I will not give way. I have only 10 minutes to speak.

Having talked to many of the head teachers in my constituency, I know that they are increasingly frustrated by the extent to which funds received from the Government are ring-fenced. A few weeks ago, I spoke to a head who was complaining that she had money in her capital budget, but nothing to spend it on. Meanwhile the resources that she received for the national grid for learning had almost been exhausted by the broadband access fees that she had been forced to pay. That epitomises the Government's failure to trust heads to spend money wisely. They are for ever interfering with how heads spend money, forcing them to become either creative accountants—

John Mann: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoban: I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

The genuine needs of schools are not met, because the money is not in the right pots.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Hoban: I am not giving way.

To spend the extra money wisely, we must consider public services reform, and no sector requires change more than the health service. The Science and Technology Committee, of which I am a member, reported last month on how money earmarked by the Government for cancer care is not reaching front-line services. That shows the need for change.

Parts of the Secretary of State for Health's document "Delivering the NHS Plan" appear to have been written by right-wing think tanks, as they are full of covert references to free markets, choice and enterprise, cloaked in the language of partnership, diversity and pluralism. Reading the document shows the conversion that the Government have undergone. Chapter 6 refers to encouraging overseas profit-making health companies to come to this country to supplement NHS provision, which shows that the Government are embracing the market to an unexpected extent. We should welcome that.

I suspect that Labour Members and the trade unions will have an extensive debate with the Secretary of State about the conditions in which those private sector profit-making companies will operate and on what terms and conditions they will employ staff to provide services. Notwithstanding that, "Delivering the NHS Plan" shows that the NHS alone cannot deliver the health care that this country needs and that the Government recognise that the private sector's role will grow.

The document also suggests that primary care trusts will have genuine commissioning power, but I suspect that the reality will be somewhat different. Paragraph 4.11 says that the Government will

"ensure that adequate safeguards exist so that the system encourages appropriate activity growth."

The autonomy of PCTs will perhaps be undermined by a Secretary of State who cannot resist the urge to meddle in the health service. If the Government want to devolve power to the front line as they say, they should trust PCTs to spend the money that they give them wisely. The reforms will fail if PCTs are not given the financial muscle to meet needs and deliver the health care that people in their area want.

That example shows that the Secretary of State has lost his nerve, and there are others. PCTs may buy services from acute hospital trusts on the basis of volume, quality and appropriateness, but no price competition will be allowed. I find that slightly surprising.

A couple of weeks ago, I was in the Chamber when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that price fixing is against the interests of consumers because it inhibits efficiency, productivity and competition, but it seems that the Secretary of State for Health does not understand her message. I suggest that she remind the Secretary of State for Health that price competition is effective in delivering extra services. Another aspect of the failure to pursue the logic properly is that efficiency savings are to be retained by the hospitals and not passed back to PCTs, so how will PCTs gain the resources needed to commission the new services?

Although "Delivering the NHS Plan" is riddled with contradictions, it recognises the fact that, after five years of centralisation, power should be decentralised. However, the caveats and qualifications show that the Government have yet to grasp the full importance of change. Until they do so, the taxes raised in the Budget will not be spent wisely and we will not have the health care that Britain deserves.

8.14 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. I welcome the Budget, which is probably the most significant since our election in 1997. It sets out and offers substantial year-on-year increases in investment in the NHS—investment that has been needed for many years and which was and is possible only because the Government have successfully managed the economy.

Much has been made of the 1 per cent. national insurance contribution increase for employees and employers. The Conservatives and some of their friends in the media claim that it will be the end of the world for business and, in some strange way, a tax on jobs. We have heard it all before. I recall that the Conservatives said that the minimum wage would lead to massive rises in unemployment and drive companies out of business. Equally, they said that giving workers fair and decent rights in the workplace, not to mention paternity and maternity leave, would be a disaster. They were wrong then, and they are wrong now.

Some people may have short memories, but others have not forgotten the days of 15 per cent. interest rates and mass unemployment, which did not create a fertile climate in which business could grow. Those conditions made investment precarious, to say the least. Of course, those were the years of Tory government and Tory economic mismanagement.

In contrast, under this Labour Government there has been sustained growth, a stable and expanding economy, the lowest interest rates for more than 40 years, the highest employment of any major European country and the lowest inflation in Europe. The cycle of boom and bust, which typified the Tory years, has finally been broken by a Labour Government. In this economy, business can invest with confidence and prosper.

I represent a constituency that depends heavily on manufacturing industry, so I recognise that growth in that sector is important if we are to maximise the successful expansion of our economy. Manufacturing suffered terribly under the Tories—nearly 3 million jobs were lost and output fell. For manufacturing to succeed, it must be at the forefront of innovation and change. We must be able to respond to changing demands and pressures, but we must also add value to our products if we are to remain at the front of the field.

I welcome the Government's recognition of the country's productivity gap. The problem, which has been with us for many years, results from a failure to invest in new technology and, importantly, to invest in the ongoing training of our work force. Recognising that we have a problem is one thing; doing something about it is another. We must be honest—we have a large productivity gap to bridge if we are to catch up and ultimately surpass our main international competitors.

Closing the gap requires the Government to establish the right environment for industry and business. Equally, industry and business must recognise that, if they are to succeed, they too must invest, not only in machinery and equipment, but in people—the employees. Industry's approach to training and retraining its work force has been woeful. It has too often considered training to be an avoidable cost rather than a necessary investment.

When a business hopes to expand, rather than use its own employees whom it had the forethought to train, it looks to poach from others. In essence, the management think, "Why waste money and time training our own staff when we can try elsewhere? Someone else will train them for us." Unfortunately, too many of our companies have taken that approach. Some old nationalised industries provided many trained people, but now that those companies are in the private sector they train considerably fewer.

In our expanding economy, we are all too quick to talk about how skill shortage inhibits growth and adds to our costs, but industry does little to address the problem. When times are difficult, we tend to make matters worse rather than better, but I applaud the sharply contrasting attitude of Airbus at Broughton in my constituency. Following the events of 11 September, it faced a major downturn in the industry and reduced aircraft orders, but in partnership with its employees—the trade unions—it approached the problem with a common goal in mind, which was to minimise job losses and secure the long-term future of the business.

As part of that approach, one of the company's first actions was to write to all its hundreds of apprentices, including those yet to start their training, and guarantee their continued employment with the company. It is refreshing to see a company, even in a downturn, look to the future—the long term—rather than just deal with short-term considerations. If we are to succeed in manufacturing, we must follow that approach, which is in sharp contrast to the traditional approach of British industry. According to that, a letter would also have been written to the apprentices to say that they no longer had a job or a future with the company, as they were a cost and their removal would improve the bottom line.

If we are to bridge the gap in productivity, we need to address our deficit in training and to encourage innovation. I welcome the CBI-TUC productivity working groups, which have identified key areas that need to be tackled. Their support for Investors in People is particularly welcome.

The extension of the research and development tax credit to large companies is an extremely positive development. At a qualifying rate of 125 per cent. of all R and D expenditure offset against corporation tax, that should further encourage companies to invest for the future.

However, I ask the Secretary of State to consider the Treasury's definition of R and D expenditure to ensure that it conforms to the realities of industrial investment. We must ensure that the incentives we provide are to the maximum benefit of our industry, especially industries such as aerospace. That is an important issue, and we must get it right if we are to deliver the maximum benefits that we all hope for.

For smaller and medium-sized businesses, the Budget offers further positive incentives, and shows Labour's continued commitment to that sector. The reduction in the starting rate of corporation tax from 10 per cent. to zero will benefit more than 150,000 companies. It is the lowest rate of such tax in Europe. In addition, the reduction in the small companies' rate will benefit hundreds of thousands more businesses.

I am pleased that the VAT arrangements for small business have been simplified, because we must create the right environment for those businesses to prosper.

[Mark Tami]

The problems associated with VAT returns are regularly raised with me by businesses in my area. I ask Ministers to consider the difficulties faced by small and medium-sized companies in applying for grant aid. We must simplify measures in that area to speed up the processing of applications. Time is vital, and delays to applications can sometimes lead to the collapse of the business before the grant has come through.

The Budget is a Budget for all sectors of our economy. The most important factor for any business is stability. The Budget continues to deliver that aim.

8.22 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): In her peroration, the Secretary of State said that new Labour means that all people should be treated equally. In the Budget, it did just that with the national insurance increase of 1 per cent. for every person and every employer.

Mr. Bryant: Hear, hear.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) does not have a background in industry. If he did, he would know that that increase will cost jobs. I shall come back to that later.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Michael Fabricant: I shall give way as I named the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bryant: I should point out that I was self-employed for the last three years of my employment.

Michael Fabricant: At one point in his life, the hon. Gentleman was a vicar. On his small income as a vicar, would he have wanted to pay a further 1 per cent? I suspect not. Can the Church of England afford to pay a further 1 per cent? I shall not dwell on that issue in too much detail.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) talked about the issues that were not addressed in the Chancellor's speech, for example, the climate change levy. He said that nothing had been done to cut red tape, which costs firms between £12 billion and £15 billion each year. As a debutee—if not a debutante—of the use of the internet, I can certainly say that the suggestion made by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will not save much time for business.

Some 617,000 hours are spent filling in forms for the Government. Last year, new legislation was introduced every 26 minutes of the working day. That legislation must be understood by people working in industry. While they are trying to understand it and fill in the forms resulting from it, they are not out there getting the jobs and the business that we need to keep small firms running well.

I was disappointed that there were no new initiatives or incentives to improve the rollout of broadband. Much has been said about broadband. I have said many times in the Chamber that, when the Government speak about broadband, other Governments would say that they are comparatively narrow band. If broadband is to be extended into rural areas—I know that the hon. Member for Rhondda is keen for that to happen in his constituency, and he is right—there need to be tax incentives. The Budget included nothing on that.

Nothing was said either about profit-related pay. Some 40,000 people are employed by the John Lewis Partnership. Time and again, year after year, the Labour party promised that it would restore profit-related pay for non-share options. The people who work for the John Lewis Partnership, Unipart and Baxi Boilers are real stakeholders. They are part of co-operatives, and one would think that the Labour party would welcome that, but not so. The word "socialism" is not allowed to be used any more. Labour is renowned for not keeping its promises, and it has not.

To return to the subject of national insurance, as I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford, the increase in national insurance will prove to be a double whammy—mark my words. From 2003, people will have to spend another 1 per cent. of their incomes on employees' national insurance, firms will have to pay a further 1 per cent. on employers' national insurance, and council tax will inevitably rise, because the vast expense incurred by councils is primarily on their wages bills. Even a small district council such as Lichfield will suffer a £78,000 rise in its wages bill, and the bill in Staffordshire will increase eightfold. That is a double whammy.

When council taxes go up, Labour Members with marginal seats—I am not referring to the hon. Member for Rhondda—will know why. It will be because of this Budget. In the first Budget of the last Parliament—I shall not dwell on this subject for long, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or I will be out of order—there was a huge windfall tax on pensions. Pensions have failed to reach their expected target and suffered badly.

The care home sector is in crisis. Something in the order of 50,000 care beds have closed in the past couple of years, and I think that that number will increase. The care home sector is very labour intensive, and so it should be. The increase in national insurance contributions will be an additional 1 per cent. cost.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Michael Fabricant: If the hon. Gentleman is quick and concise, I will give way.

Mr. Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the reason why many care homes have closed is that they cannot meet the new care standards? Is he suggesting that we should do away with those care standards, which are aimed at improving the quality of life of our elderly in those homes?

Michael Fabricant: It is far better to be in a care home than to be bed blocking. The Government set impractical guidelines without providing the financial resources to enable care homes to carry them out. That is why they are closing. The hon. Gentleman is wrong.

Another sector that is closing is the automotive industry. We have already seen the closure of the Dagenham car plant and the closure of Vauxhall in Luton. In the west midlands, where Lichfield lies, we have not only factories but many automotive suppliers. Yes, even

in the leafy lanes of Lichfield, people work in the automotive industry and they are operating on a knife edge. That additional 1 per cent. national insurance contribution will be a major extra burden.

I am waiting for some smart Alec to say, "Ah, but corporation tax has been cut," but that will not assist small firms in the automotive industry that are not making a profit. As has already been said, a firm cannot pay corporation tax unless it makes a profit in the first place. Nor will anyone making more than £1.5 million gain; they will suffer and there will be a major crisis.

Furthermore, no one has actually worked out the cost to the national health service of the extra 1 per cent. on the employer's contribution—or, indeed, the cost to schools. They operate their own budgets and they, too, will have to find that extra 1 per cent. from their own funding. I am sure that all hon. Members have visited schools in their constituency, so they will know that employment costs comprise about 85 per cent.—perhaps even 90 per cent.—of the running costs of schools. Those costs will rise by 1 per cent., with no additional money promised by the Government.

Of course, the Government justify all that extra taxation. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon) rightly pointed out, it is not a stealth tax; it is so obviously an additional tax—we are so obviously going back to the tax and spend of old Labour days—that it is far from stealthy. The Government's whole raison d'être is to improve the national health service. Well, the acid test is: will Burntwood hospital remain open? Just before the last general election, the fact emerged—it certainly was not announced—that that hospital was to close. That was confirmed two days after the election. It is also likely that the maternity unit in Lichfield will close. There will be no more Dr. Johnsons and no more David Garricks born in Lichfield. Under a Labour Government nobody will be born in Lichfield because the maternity unit will close. We wait with great interest to see whether the NHS will reverse that decision, made under a Labour Government, but I know damn well that that will certainly not be the case.

Having had the third way, we have returned to the old ways of Labour and another tax and spend Labour Government. We have seen taxes go up and the standard of services fall. I would like to think that the NHS will improve as a consequence of the Budget, but watch this space! I do not think that it will. All that will happen is that although in the past the Government have managed to achieve reasonably low unemployment—that is also true in other parts of the EU—this Budget will mark the time when we see unemployment start to rise. The care homes sector, schools and the NHS will suffer as a consequence.

8.33 pm

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): This Budget, based on promoting the proper funding and modernisation of the national health service, has been warmly received in my constituency and, indeed, across the whole of south Wales. In my constituency, we very much hope that it will help to bring a little closer the new hospital that we have wanted for many years.

I am sure that Aneurin Bevan would have warmly welcomed the Budget. He would certainly have welcomed the fact that major improvements in the health service are being paid for by increases in national insurance contributions.

As has been said many times, the Budget is about creating a fairer and more just Britain. It is also about creating a more enterprising Britain. It is important to remember that those two aims are not contradictory but complementary. That is shown clearly when we consider unemployment—or worklessness—which is one of the main causes of poverty and social exclusion in our country. It still blights the lives of far too many individuals, but it is also a major impediment to Britain's economic growth and continuing prosperity.

We all know that unemployment has dropped dramatically: it is at an all-time low and is also low compared with many countries in the European Union. Above all else, it is worth remembering that in the mid-1980s about 350,000 young people had been unemployed for more than one year. At present, only 4,700 young people are in that position. By any standard, that is a profound and dramatic change. However, there are pockets of unemployment that is far too high—unacceptably so.

For example, there are areas of acute deprivation throughout the whole of south Wales. In my constituency, unemployment is unacceptably high in communities such as Graig y Rhacca, the Aber valley and Bargoed. The problem is especially acute further up the valleys: in the heads of the valleys, unemployment is a major social problem. That is why I am extremely pleased that the Budget includes specific measures to promote enterprise and encourage employability.

There are proposals to extend the new deal 25-plus to jobseekers who have been unemployed for 18 months, on an "off and on" basis, and to introduce a gateway to work process for all jobseekers on new deal 25-plus in four areas—London, Manchester, Dundee and Swansea. There are other measures to help unemployed people but those two schemes will make a positive and significant difference.

In the extension of new deal 25-plus, about 5,000 unemployed people who have difficulty in holding down a job—whether seasonal or other work—will be given real life chances. There will be tailor-made job preparation courses for those on new deal 25-plus in the four cities that I mentioned. At first, they will only be pilot schemes but I believe that they will be successful and will be extended to other parts of the country.

Those two measures offer a new approach to dealing with the problem of long-term unemployment. They are about empowerment. They are about giving responsibility to individuals. They are about helping to take people off benefit and putting them into work.

The measures outlined in the Budget, as well as other measures pursued by the Government, are extremely positive. They will give people new hope for the future and ensure that they have a real stake in our developing society. For example, I especially welcome, as a complement to the Budget proposals, the recent announcement of the extension of employment zones and the creation of Jobcentre Plus, which will bring the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency together in a new comprehensive support system.

Those measures will make a significant contribution to the creation of a fairer society and a more enterprising country. The Budget takes us much, much closer to the creation of a society based on full employment. That has

[Mr. Wayne David]

historically been a goal for the Labour movement; it is now close to becoming a tangible reality. For that reason, above all else, we should warmly welcome the Budget.

8.38 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the points that have been made, particularly those which certain Labour Members raised in respect of specific health issues. Some folk criticise the fact that Scotland and Northern Ireland have received more funding per capita than England. From another point of view, some also point out that the standard of health care that we would like is not being delivered. I share in that criticism, but I do not agree with those who think that funding can be reduced. We cannot think simply in per capita terms, because we have to deal with isolated communities and a high percentage of particular types of illnesses. We might blame some people for inflicting certain illnesses on themselves, but the given environment can also be a factor, and in my view the funding for Scotland and Northern Ireland is necessary. I welcome the fact that the Budget statement made no mention of a reduction in such funding, and I look forward to its full implementation. We should remember the Treasury's sleight of hand over the years; additionality comes into play, and it tries to get back such money in other ways.

I am equally aware, however, that fault can be found with the way that the money has been used. Amazingly, when we were crying out for front-line funding in Northern Ireland, the Executive discovered £10 million in the health budget, which they had reallocated to other areas of government. I appreciate that that was their decision, but why was it not spent earlier where it was needed—on front-line health care?

On disability, I share completely the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis), and I underscore the view—recently expressed in various places—that there is a tendency to ignore those with learning difficulties and argue instead that the funds are needed for others in mainstream education. I should like to think that we as a Parliament and as a country will never forget the need to look after the underprivileged, who need extra help to enable them to take their place in our society.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) made an interesting point about apprentices and business. We are apt to blame one another, but it is interesting to note that trade unions had a part to play in the running down of the apprentice scheme. A tendency developed some years ago towards job protection, because it was felt that, if there were too many apprentices, sufficient jobs might not exist for other people. We must be careful to develop a long-term plan with some degree of understanding.

In that context, I turn to the failure of care homes to meet the required standards, to which reference has been made. I have visited small, family-type care homes in Northern Ireland which, because of the standard of care that they offered, went out of business when the new regulations came in. In private homes, fire precautions such as external escape routes are required. According to those standards, even in a home such as ours—in which we cared for a father, a mother and other family members—we should have had an external fire escape. It is ridiculous to roll out a list of standards without considering the implications for those who prefer to be cared for in a smaller home as ordinary people. Larger homes may have many facilities, but they may not provide the care that some of these people really require.

I was interested to hear the Secretary of State for Health refer to less bureaucracy in the health service in defending the setting up of an independent audit body. However, as I listened I realised that, in fact, three bodies are being turned into one. In my years inside and outside Parliament, I have never discovered bureaucracy lessening; rather, it increases. Although I would like to believe those who say that a wonderful wand will be waved and bureaucracy will decrease, I do not. I discovered that, in one good hospital where a great deal of care is dispensed, it takes 24 days to get a message from one department to another. That is worse than Consignia and the Royal Mail. We must tighten up communication within the health service. Often, GPs do not get the speedy responses from hospitals that would enable them to treat their patients outwith. I would raise that issue especially when we talk of recruitment.

How long does it take to train a consultant? The Secretary of State for Health said that it takes at least 15 years, so the Government were right when they said that the Budget will not cure the health service, because we will not have all the staff that the health service requires during this Parliament or the next unless we import a high percentage of overseas health personnel into our country. Two things arise from that. First, there will be fewer job opportunities for those young people who want to serve in health care in future. Secondly, developing countries will be denuded of health personnel, even though regulations exist to stop people coming from the most under-developed countries. The policy will rob Peter to pay Paul, without serving our health service properly.

Finally, reference has been made to pensions. Age Concern has pleaded for simpler guidelines so that people can know what their pension entitlement might be. It has been suggested that businesses are doing the Government's work, but they have been doing the Government's work for decades. I want to tell the House about one of my constituents, Mr. McAuley, who has argued with the tax authorities and the Chancellor himself since the beginning of 2000, and he has found, as hon. Members do, that it takes a long time to get an answer. In his attempt to follow the Government's guidelines to provide for his retirement, he put most of his money into long-term savings in his wife's name because her income was too low to be taxable.

Mr. McAuley took the precaution of trying to get a fair return in the long term on his wife's investments, but the bank and investment bodies have taken £500 to £800 a year more in direct taxation than she was required to pay. The law says that if someone's income is £1 over the allowance, the whole sum is taxable. That tax can be reclaimed in due course, but I am not too sure how many hon. Members would like to pay out £500 or £800 before getting it back the next year. More importantly, the money was invested in high-yield stock and the income was reinvested in that stock, so that sum could not be reinvested ordinarily because it was already taken out of the investment. David McAuley is an individual, but perhaps his case represents others. Why should individuals suffer because it suits the tax man to allow business to do his work by taking money from people?

8.48 pm

David Wright (Telford): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). The key themes of this year's Budget were rights and responsibilities. One of the alarming things that I have noted throughout this debate has been the attitude of Conservative Members, because the Budget is about rights and responsibilities not only for individuals and families but for businesses. We do not live in a world where each of those categories stands alone—we act together, as a society. Conservative Members think that business stands alone, outside society, and that it does not need to take any responsibility for what happens in society, but they are fundamentally wrong. That is the dividing line between us. As we focus on the Budget today, we have heard about the growing divide between the parties, and I shall return to that theme in a few moments.

It is difficult to make a speech after the Budget has already been debated for several hours. I shall focus on three key themes: first, the economic background against which the Budget is set; secondly, its impact on enterprise and investment in the UK economy; and, thirdly, the debate it prompts about the type of society in which we all want to live. Before tackling those themes, I shall comment on the way in which the Budget has altered the political debate in the UK, in my view, for the better.

The House will be reassured to learn that over the weekend I took a look at the Red Book—very exciting it is, too. I managed to get through the overview to concentrate, over my cocoa, on the introduction, which states:

> "The Government's objective is to build a stronger, more enterprising economy and a fairer society, extending economic opportunity and supporting those most in need to ensure that rising national prosperity is shared by all."

That is motherhood and apple pie, and until I heard this afternoon's debate, I thought that we could all sign up to it, but we have heard little of inclusivity from the Conservatives today; all we have heard is a lot of complaint. Labour Members can sign up to the political philosophy set out in the Red Book introduction, and I welcome the Budget that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor delivered last week.

Over the weekend, I was struck by the maturity of the debate on the Budget, and I pay a measure of tribute to the Opposition parties. Perhaps because of the Budget, our debates have reflected less of the hyperbole of British politics. We have exited the silly season, because this is the most serious Budget that has been presented to the country in 20 years of politics.

The nature of political debate in this country has changed radically in the past five years. For the first time, we are able to debate the structure of our public services and our collective responsibility to pay for them and modernise them. That was not the case 10 years ago. In the 1992 general election, Labour made a case for investing in public services, but the public rejected it. It has taken us 10 years to turn around the political environment to the point where the focus is now on how to improve our public services. I welcome that change.

My first core theme is the background to the Budget. The Budget is built on a platform of economic stability—there is no denying that—and the programme targets child poverty and tackles much-needed investment in health. All that was made possible by the approach we adopted during our first term in government. During that first term, we heard a lot of complaints from the Liberal Democrats about how we were not investing heavily; that complaint has been heard again this afternoon. However, we have laid the foundation for long-term investment and we will now build on that.

Last year, Britain's was the fastest-growing economy in the G7, and growth forecasts remain extremely good. Long-term interest rates are low, inflation is low and unemployment is at its lowest since 1975. In Telford, unemployment has fallen by 21 per cent. since 1997, and youth unemployment has collapsed because of the new deal. The Opposition should take care not to talk Britain down. We have heard constant talking down of our country this afternoon, and we heard it from the shadow Chancellor at the last Conservative party conference. If they want investment in this country, if they want UK businesses to be successful, if they want more companies like the Japanese companies that come to invest in Telford because of the strength of our economy to come to this country, the Opposition should talk Britain up, not run it down at every opportunity.

This country's borrowing and debt are under control, and I am proud of that. It is a reflection of the success of Labour's first term. No wonder the Tories are envious of our economic record, given how appalling theirs was. When people look at the overall tax burden—the amount that they have to pay out—they do not forget the mortgage interest rates that they had to suffer under the Conservative Government. When people assemble their household budget and see how much they are paying in tax and how much they spend in other areas, most know that they are paying out less than they were under the Conservatives. That is due to the platform of stability that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has created.

My second core theme is the topic of today's debate: enterprise and investment. Some of the proposals command consensus between the CBI and the TUC, for example, the research and development tax credit, which will give a real boost to the economy. I want to comment briefly on the Investors in People scheme. We have put in £30 million of additional funding to help small firms to attain Investors in People status. Over the past 12 months, I have visited several companies in my constituency that have secured that status, which is a way of ensuring that their organisation is dynamic and effective and makes the best use of its people-based assets. I welcome that expenditure.

In total, more than 1,500 businesses in Telford will benefit from measures contained in the Budget, especially the changes to VAT for small businesses.

I shall now join my hon. Friend the Member for 'Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), who is no longer in his seat, in ensuring that I do not get a Christmas card from Digby Jones of the CBI. I read his comments in yesterday's edition of *The Observer* with interest. He said that by increasing national insurance contributions we are placing a tax on jobs. He should focus a little more on the impact of sickness at work. I asked the Library to dig me out a copy of the CBI's report, "Pulling Together", its

[David Wright]

2001 absence and labour turnover survey. The report reveals that in 2000 an average of 7.8 days per employee were lost through sickness. It states:

"The average direct cost of absence was estimated to be £434 per employee. This is broadly similar to last year's figure of £438 per employee. If this figure were projected across the whole UK workforce, the cost to UK business would be £10.7 billion."

Yet we heard nothing from Conservative Members about the impact of sickness absence. They should bear that in mind.

Investment in the NHS will have a direct impact on the performance of the economy, because it keeps people at work and boosts productivity. Digby Jones suggested that the only economic advantage that we now possess over our European neighbours is a low tax regime for business. I do not believe that that is true. Our main advantage is the innovative and energetic nature of the British people, who work extremely hard. The healthier they are, the stronger and more productive our economy will be. They will perform best if they are well cared for by a high-quality national health service.

The investment in the health service will prompt demand for goods in the economy. It is not very trendy these days to talk about Keynesian economics, but for as long as I am here hon. Members will hear about it. Spending on public assets in the health service will lead to growing demand in the economy, and I welcome that.

My final point concerns the type of society in which we want to live. The Budget has the capacity to strengthen the institution that epitomises all that is best in our country and in delivery by a Labour Government: the national health service. That strengthening involves the investment outlined by the Chancellor coupled with reform. Opposition Members claim that health service reforms will not be effective, but the Government have proposed a platform of investment and reform that is spelt out in great detail. I welcome it and hope that it will be implemented as quickly as possible.

Effective change will take time, but it never took place under the Tories.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has had his 10 minutes.

8.58 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I start by declaring an interest. Having been an entrepreneur for the past 10 years, I am a major beneficiary of the Chancellor's recent Budgets. My dividend payments and those of my co-directors—mine are of course declared in the Register of Members' Interests—will be higher this year, directly owing to the cuts in small business corporation tax. The potential that I am sitting on in shareholding terms is now at its height, as three years have elapsed since the Chancellor introduced the changes in capital gains tax. Although those changes have not received the amount of public debate that is necessary to encourage other entrepreneurs, they have been powerful in benefiting those who take a risk through entrepreneurship. Indeed, it is fair to say that although the entrepreneurs once sat on the Conservative Benches, they now sit on the Labour Benches. Perhaps Conservative Chancellors could once claim to be the voice of business, but now the true voice of business, entrepreneurship and innovation is heard on the Labour Benches.

On Friday, I ran a well-attended, positive and successful Budget briefing, during which I asked a small business consisting of three employees how much the extra national insurance charges would cost compared with taking out BUPA's medical insurance for each person. Such insurance does not cover accidents, emergencies or GPs, but it apparently has some benefit. Can hon. Members imagine the difference between paying national insurance charges and those of BUPA? One would gather from listening to Conservative Members and reading the newspapers that the employers' national insurance payments were significantly higher than BUPA contributions. That is not the case. It would cost a three-person small business in my constituency more than £800 a year more to take out BUPA insurance than to pay the increased national insurance contributions. That puts them in proper perspective.

Michael Fabricant: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps it would be helpful if you named the speaker for the benefit of the Annunciator operators. The hon. Gentleman's name does not appear on the screen.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call John Mann.

John Mann: The phrase "five years in government" is often repeated. I therefore want to look back to 1984, when we had 2.5 million small businesses. Since the Government came to office, 1.3 million new businesses have been set up. That means that 55 per cent. more small businesses than existed in 1984 have been established since 1997. That is why employment and the economy are booming.

I asked the same business men in my constituency whether the cuts in corporation tax for small business more than outweighed the increase in national insurance. The profit account for this year alone shows that they do. There is a myth that small business has been continually hammered by red tape and taxes. That is not true. Hon. Members need not hear the message of small businesses in my constituency from me. Instead, let me quote Friday's *Worksop Guardian*, in which Phil Sibson, chairman of the Worksop chamber of commerce, described the Budget as

"a fair budget for business".

When I set up my business, I had sky high bank charges and interest rates. That hits cash flow, and it is why the same number of business start-ups and successful businesses and the same rate of employment in small businesses did not occur under the previous Government. We now have a stable economy with low interest rates. That stability is the engine of growth.

Let me give an example of the impact on small businesses of the changes in capital gains tax. Let us consider a small, family business, owned by two people—perhaps a husband and wife who work together—that retains profits of £20,000, which is not a massive figure. On the basis of the formula 5.5 x the worth of a business, the changes that the Chancellor has introduced in the past three years mean that the business will make a net £27,000 in tax savings alone on a turnover of £20,000. The small business does not have to be older than three

years to get that maximum benefit. That is a pretty good bet for entrepreneurs who want to invest in their future. It is good for audits and returns and unprecedented in any tax regime in this country.

Small business tax has been cut to such a low amount. Do hon. Members know what it was in 1984? For small businesses the entrance level was 30 per cent. and for large businesses it was 45 per cent. That shows the difference between the first five years of Conservative Government and our first five years in power.

The briefing that I held on Friday was attended by the chairman of the primary care trust. "With all the additional money going into the health service," he urged me, "don't let anyone get away with missing how much extra the NHS has been given over the last four years." That means that in my constituency alone, irrespective of the current Budget, there are costed plans for three new health centres. Bassetlaw has never before seen such a rate of progress in the NHS.

Last Tuesday, on the eve of the Budget, I went to a business forum held by the chamber of commerce at which the chief executive of the Bassetlaw NHS trust gave her vision of 2010. She described how the trust is knocking down the prefabs that have existed since the hospital was built to create land in anticipation of continued growth in the hospital's acute services, which will be funded by the state. Those are no longer pipe dreams as they were on Tuesday evening; they are real plans that can be brought to fruition for the benefit of my constituents. Bassetlaw hospital is improving and growing. It is a popular hospital and people use it. The beauty of the additional money is that it can be used to increase the range of services, specialisms and treatments that are provided.

I shall tell the House what else the money can do. Conservative Members talk of waste in the NHS. I am sick to death of people knocking Britain and its public services. Let me tell the House about waste. Waste is the postcode lottery, which means that people cannot get into Bassetlaw hospital.

Michael Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Mann: No, I will not.

Private sector solutions will never get rid of the postcode lottery. The solution is additional money for the NHS, and people in this country believe that. People who were brought up on the NHS are proud of it. They want treatment on the NHS; they want the drugs and the doctors to be the best available, and they want them paid for by the NHS.

Two or three days before my father died, the consultant asked him whether he wanted to go private—for the sake of a few flowers and a colour television. What my father said to him echoes the views of the overwhelming majority of my constituents. He said, "I was born and brought up on the NHS, I've lived on the NHS and I'll die on the NHS." Nobody in my constituency should ever be given the option of going private to get better service than they would get by going public. We demand an NHS of which we can be proud. The Opposition offer a privatised alternative. We should let the people choose. The people will say, "It is our NHS. Invest in it. We applaud the decisions in this Budget."

9.8 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Today's debate has been particularly revealing, not least because it has shown that the Conservative party is determined to prove to the nation that it has not changed and has learned nothing since the 1997 and 2001 elections. Above all, it has been particularly interesting to hear the manifest cynicism of Opposition Members. They reek of cynicism, if such a thing is possible, about the NHS. The words "Stalin" and "Stalinism" have been used time and again. It is as if the Opposition are determined to force their cynicism on the rest of the country.

It was particularly fascinating to hear the beginning of the debate, in which the Conservatives have been led by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). He first showed his cynicism in his maiden speech on 6 July 1992. Then, of course, he was trying to persuade his Government, who had engineered one of the biggest recessions that this country has ever seen, to adopt his solution for getting out of the recession and mounting an economic recovery—we have not had to debate that under the Labour Government, because we have managed to run the economy well. He argued:

"The other essential requirement for recovery is continued control of public expenditure."

A rather purple passage followed:

"It will require my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, like Ulysses, to lash himself to the mast"—

it gets a bit worrying here—

"and to fill his colleagues' ears with wax so that they do not succumb to the siren voices in favour of higher public spending."—[*Official Report*, 6 July 1992; Vol. 211, c. 65.]

The Conservatives have not changed a bit—it was the same old song in 1992. It would have been much better if they had listened to the voices of the Labour party in 1992. If they had listened to the Labour party then on public spending—on the national health service in particular—we would have more doctors, more consultants, more nurses and a better health service across the whole of the United Kingdom.

It is good to see that the Conservatives have not changed. They are still absolutely obsessed with lower public spending, whatever the need in society. It is interesting that they are still barely concerned about cutting unemployment; to them, unemployment still seems to be a price worth paying, as was mentioned earlier. I asked the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford whether he was pleased that unemployment in his constituency had fallen by 55.5 per cent. since the 1997 general election. He seemed to cast that aside as a mere bagatelle, yet his party was not able to achieve that in government.

The second interesting thing about today's debate is that, basically, everyone has agreed that Labour has managed the economy extremely well since 1997. We have achieved low inflation. Again, it is interesting that, in his maiden speech, the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford said that, in staging an economic recovery, getting inflation down was perhaps the most important thing that a Government could do. A Labour Government have been doing that—we have been keeping inflation low for longer than any Government have managed in the last 30 years.

Equally, unemployment in my constituency is now at 4.2 per cent. Many hon. Members find it difficult to believe that, in the history of the Rhondda, there has never

[Mr. Chris Bryant]

been a time since 1850 when the unemployment figures there have been within spitting distance of those across the whole of the United Kingdom. It is a significant achievement that we are creating new jobs not only in the south-east of England or the M4 corridor in south Wales but in valleys constituencies such as mine.

The third interesting thing that has been revealed today is that the vast majority of Members have agreed that this is an excellent Budget for businesses, especially those in disadvantaged areas. The cut in corporation tax will undoubtedly benefit businesses in disadvantaged areas disproportionately compared with the rest of the country. The cut in VAT administration will also be very welcome to many small businesses, especially sole traders, in my constituency. As someone who was a sole trader for several years, I know that that is a complicated matter, and I am delighted that it is changing.

The company law review that was announced by the Secretary of State earlier is very welcome, as many businesses would like to consider more efficient ways of structuring themselves. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) mentioned that nothing had been done for disadvantaged areas. The stamp duty changes, however, will have a dramatic effect on disadvantaged areas, and they are very welcome. Above all, if changes to the national health service produce a more efficient system in which employees are able to see a doctor at a time of their choosing and swiftly, we will have a more productive work force, which, in the end, will be in the interests of business.

It has also been interesting to see that the Tories still want to lecture the Labour party about how to run the economy and about what is good for business. The history behind that is fascinating. In 1992, when the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford first came to the House, there were 62,767 business failures in this country; between 1992 and 1997 under a Tory Government, there was an average of 46,796 business failures a year. Under a Labour Government, the figure has fallen dramatically to 40,949. The Government do not need any lectures on business-friendly policies; they are business-friendly, unlike the Conservatives.

The Conservatives have said ad infinitum that the increase in national insurance will be a tax on jobs. They wheeled out precisely the same argument against the national minimum wage, saying that 1 million jobs would suddenly disappear if we introduced it. However, 1.5 million extra jobs have been created in the economy.

Michael Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bryant: I fear I have only a couple of minutes, so I shall not; I am sorry.

The Conservatives have argued that the national insurance employers' contribution will be far too expensive for employers. Let us face it; they have yet to come up with an alternative plan for funding any form of health service that will be cheaper for businesses. If every business had to start paying for a private health insurance scheme, the cost for industry would increase dramatically, not decrease. Even if we adopted the French model of social insurance, there would be at least a 1 or 2 per cent. increase above the Budget proposal to provide the same service. I assure Opposition Members who want to look at the American model that many people in my constituency who can afford it have taken out private insurance. Funnily enough, the moment anything goes seriously wrong, private health companies suddenly say, "Oh no, you haven't read clause 59, point 3, which means that if you are ever seriously ill we cannot fund your health care." The Chancellor is right; national insurance and taxation are the best way to pay for the NHS that we all want.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said that one of life's lessons is that bureaucracy never decreases. In my experience, insurance premiums never decrease either. The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) will be glad to learn that, as I worked for the Church of England for several years, I was insured for many years by Ecclesiastical Insurance—"Insurance you can believe in" was its slogan—although I have now moved because it is far too expensive, to Sterling Insurance. I suspect that I may have to change again after a referendum next year.

I shall conclude with a hope for coming years. When Peter Walker was Secretary of State for Wales he said:

"The problem with the Welsh economy is that there is no word in Welsh for 'entrepreneur'."—*[Interruption.]*

Hon. Members will catch up eventually. The Welsh economy is now vibrant. The other day, I met a constituent of mine, a young man called Jamie Rowland who set up his own company called the Bicycle Doctor with a £300 loan and a £500 grant. In his first year he expected a turnover of £15,000, but he achieved one of £100,000, which betokens something good for the economy of the Rhondda and shows that a strong entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Wales. I hope that we will make sure that "education, education, education" is still the future, because it is only with entrepreneurial spirit that we win.

9.18 pm

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I welcome the Budget on behalf of my constituents in North Durham. We have heard much from Conservative Members about the damage that the Budget will cause to jobs. However, my constituents have not forgotten that they went through some terrible times in the 1980s at the hands of the Conservative party. A once great mining industry and manufacturing industry was decimated. Throughout that period, we did not hear a peep from Conservative Members in defence of industry and communities throughout North Durham which faced wholesale destruction. At that time villages were left to die. People and communities were left with no hope for the future of their children and grandchildren.

Since 1997, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) reported is the case in his constituency, unemployment in North Durham has been at a record low. It has dropped by 44 per cent. The Conservatives tend to forget such facts. The reason why unemployment has fallen is that under a Labour Government we have had economic stability since 1997, with low interest rates and low inflation, which has allowed business in the north-east—or whatever business was left after the Conservatives had decimated it—to flourish.

I recognise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David), who mentioned that there are pockets of high unemployment in his constituency, which doggedly defy those trends. Similar areas exist in North Durham, and they will take time to put right. That is down to the "couldn't care less" attitude that we saw in the 1980s, when those communities were left to the whims of the market.

One of the great success stories in North Durham has been the eradication of the scourge of youth unemployment, thanks to the new deal. That was paid for by a windfall tax, which it was said would decimate industry. It clearly did not.

I welcome the exemption from stamp duty for businesses in deprived areas. In areas such as Stanley in my constituency and South Stanley, that will be warmly welcomed. The abolition last year of stamp duty on housing led to more development. I know that it is hard for some Conservative Members to accept, but it is difficult to bring about development and business starts in those areas. Any help such as relief from stamp duty is valuable.

A further legacy of the industrial past of North Durham is a large elderly population scarred by industrial disease. The measures announced this week for the health service will be warmly welcomed. The Conservative strategy is to talk the health service down, reiterating the fact that it will not work. They want to break up the health service and replace it with a system under which people will have to pay. That is insulting to many of my constituents who work in the health service and are proud to do so.

The scandal in my constituency is not that, starting in September, we are getting a new hospital in Chester-le-Street, but the fact that the old one was still there in 2001—it was an old workhouse. When the nurses moved into temporary accommodation two months ago, they said that that was better than the building that they had left. The new hospital will ensure better health care for my constituents.

We have heard tonight from Conservative Members that they want investment in public services and health, but not one contribution to the debate set out how they would fund it. All they tell us is why it cannot be funded in the way that the Government have determined.

On Saturday, I did what I do every second Saturday: I went out on the doorsteps of North Durham, on this occasion asking people what they thought of the Budget. I can tell Opposition Members that the Budget is popular with the constituents of North Durham, whether in working-class areas of Pelton or some of the more middle class suburbs of Chester-le-Street. The Budget offers them the improvements in health care that they want. I can tell my hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench that the key point reiterated by my constituents is that if they are to pay more tax, they want delivery. We must ensure that that happens.

I also visited two schools on Friday. The head teachers at both the infant school and the junior school at Sacriston in my constituency welcomed the extra money that they were being given directly to improve facilities and to enable them to decide what they wanted for their schools. The hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) clearly did not understand that some of that money has already been put through and that extra money is being given directly to schools with no strings attached so that head teachers can decide the priorities. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads up on what is happening in his constituency.

This Budget is good news for my constituency. It is part of the rebuilding of Britain. It is about rebuilding communities that were torn apart during the 1980s. It will go a long way to ensuring that the regeneration of and employment in North Durham continue.

9.25 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): This debate has been consistently fascinating and sporadically enlightening. Before dealing with the many contributions made to it from Members on both sides of the House, as shadow Education Secretary I would like to deal with the topic of the Budget and education.

I should point out one salient fact about these four days of debate on the Budget. For the first time since this Government came to office in 1997, they have failed to put up an Education Minister to speak about the Budget, although I should say that I am always delighted to debate with and listen to the Paymaster General. Those of us who have fond memories of proceedings on the Finance Bill in the early days of the previous Parliament are always nostalgic for them. Nevertheless, the absence of a day's or even half a day's debate on education speaks volumes for the Government's current commitment to it. As ever with this Government, one should look at the actions and not the rhetoric. Either the Government cannot be bothered to discuss the Budget's effect on helping our schools and universities, or they feel a little ashamed of how education has fallen down their agenda.

It is important to be fair. Education was mentioned by the Chancellor in a couple of cursory lines in his Budget statement, so it is worth investigating in some detail what was announced. He announced, for example, a payment of £87 million to help schools deal with pupils' bad behaviour. I must point out that that is not new money. Some of it was first announced as part of the £150 million of the children's fund allocation in the report by the Department for Education and Skills last March. Some of it was first announced as part of the £420 million allocated to the Connexions service—announced first on 23 October 2000 and then again on 20 March 2001. In addition, the truancy measures announced as part of the Budget have already been announced twice: on 26 March 2001 and 28 November 2001.

Let us look at the wider announcements in the Budget. The centrepiece of the Chancellor's claim to be helping schools was simply that he was giving more money directly to head teachers so that they could spend it as they like. Again, that bears a degree of investigation. The press release put out by the Department—indeed, what the Chancellor told the House—suggested that a typical secondary school would see a rise in such funding from £98,500 to £114,000.

As one head teacher who e-mailed me about the announcement pointed out, half the money had already been announced in last year's Budget—a standard Government trick, as he said. He calculated that the extra income for his school was therefore £5,881. That in itself would of course be welcome, but, unfortunately, he has also calculated that the extra employer national insurance contributions that he will be making will cost his school £13,224—considerably more than the school is gaining from the Chancellor's apparent largesse.

[Mr. Damian Green]

Let us consider schools throughout the country. The best local government estimate is that the total cost to our schools of the national insurance increase for both employers and employees will be something like £165 million. That is rather more than the Government say they have given to schools. Faced with that embarrassment and the fact that people are looking behind the press releases to the detailed figures of the Budget, the Government did what they always do: they leaked an announcement of jam tomorrow. So, in two of this morning's newspapers, we saw what will come up in the comprehensive spending review.

Even these figures seem slightly hazy and depend on which newspaper one reads. According to the *Daily Express*, there will be a £20 million bonanza in the comprehensive spending review for schools and universities. According to the *Daily Mirror*, the figure will be £3 billion. I know that figures are not the Government's strong suit, but it is slightly ridiculous that they cannot get their leaks straight. They are not sure whether they are going to give £20 million or £3 billion in the comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): We are all pleased to hear that the hon. Gentleman can count to three. Does he not accept that the additional money that the Chancellor is giving to schools will go into their budgets this year and that the national insurance changes will affect them next year?

Mr. Green: And every year thereafter, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. Schools will be even worse off in the long term. I am happy to continue to talk about school spending if that is what the hon. Gentleman wants. In 1997, the Labour party promised that education would be its No. 1 priority. It said that it would

"increase the share of national income spent on education as we decrease it on the bills of economic and social failure".

However, spending on education as a proportion of gross domestic product in the 1997 to 2001 Parliament was 4.7 per cent. Under the last Conservative Government, between 1992 and 1997, the average figure was 5 per cent. So the Labour Government managed to reduce the proportion of GDP spent on education in their first term. If Labour Members find that difficult to believe, they do not have to take it from me. Professor Howard Glennerster of the London School of Economics said:

"Real-term spending per pupil . . . is only now"

in 2001

"beginning to creep back up to the level of five years ago. It was not until . . . 2000 that real per pupil spending rose above the 1995–96 level in England . . . By no stretch of the term 'priority' could it be said to have applied to state education spending in the first four years of the Labour Government. Even in 2003 planned . . . spending will only be back to the levels of 1994."

So much for priorities.

It is worse than that, however. Even when the Chancellor announces in successive Budgets and comprehensive spending reviews that the Department for Education and Skills will receive more money, it does not necessarily spend it. The Department's total underspend since the Government came to office totals more than £4 billion. In the past two years alone—2000 and 2001—it underspent by £1.4 billion. From careful reading of the Budget figures, we have discovered that in the past year the Department managed to underspend by £800 million. The Department is so incompetent that even when the Chancellor pretends that he is being generous to it, it cannot spend the money on our schools and universities. It would have been helpful had an Education Minister spoken in the debate so that we could have probed why that is happening.

Mr. Bryant: What about responding to the debate?

Mr. Green: I was coming to that. The hon. Gentleman should calm down.

The Prime Minister said in Prime Minister's questions that our education system is now among the top eight in the world precisely because of the investment, but that ranking is precisely not because of that investment, as we have seen. There has not been as much investment as the Department thought and when it does get it, it cannot spend it.

I was struck by a memorable remark from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon), who said that the Prime Minister used to have a principle. I can tell him that the Prime Minister still does have a principle: when in doubt, dissimulate. His complacency about education is breathtaking. I assume that the figure that puts us among the top eight in the world comes from the programme for international student assessment—the Pisa study—which recently reported on comparative education systems across western Europe.

I must explain to the Prime Minister and any other Minister who might want to quote that study that it is based on 15-year-olds in 2000. Education Ministers and, indeed, some of the more honest Members on the Labour Back Benches made it clear that the Government spent their first term dealing with the primary education sector and are only now moving on to the secondary education sector. Those who were 15 in 2000 did not attend primary school at all after 1997, so this Government can have done nothing that had a beneficial effect on the education of the cohort included in the Pisa study. If that shows an improvement in good standards in the basics of education, it is a tribute to the Conservative education reforms of the 1980s. I hope that the Government will recognise that what they have said is complacent and misleading, and that the real state of British education is one where truancy is rising, where discipline is falling, where teachers are leaving as never before and where the rise in standards that we have seen over the past 10 years has stalled. The Government cannot afford to be complacent about education, and the Budget has done nothing to help Britain's schools.

Nor has the Budget done anything to help Britain's hard-pressed universities. The Association of University Teachers said that the Chancellor

"missed the opportunity"—

that is in the Budget—

"on Wednesday."

It says:

"Serious recruitment and retention problems, rock-bottom morale and decaying buildings and teaching facilities join the cuts in research funding and under-recruitment of students as serious problems facing higher education."

That seems enough to be going on with after five years of Labour Government. That is an indictment from one of the sectors that most welcomed the Labour Government in 1997; the university sector thought that its problems would be solved by the Labour Government, and it was cruelly misled.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Clearly the hon. Gentleman is attempting to talk down higher education. If no extra money is going into HE, who is paying for the brand-new campus at Consett for Derwentside college, which will be of great benefit to my constituency and to that of my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury?

Mr. Green: Many of the people paying for it will be the students. As we learned this morning, they are now on average £10,000 in debt, despite the fact that before the 1997 election the Government promised that they had no intention to introduce tuition fees. That was the precursor of all the betrayals on tax that the Government introduced later, not least in the Budget. Things in education will not become better as long as the Government remain committed to their centralising agenda.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) was right when he said that far too many heads are frustrated by the micro-management of their schools by the Department for Education and Skills. As teachers, heads and governors know, they are not being allowed to get on with their respective jobs. They will continue to become disillusioned and leave. That poses the greatest threat to long-term standards of education in our schools.

The Government have always claimed that education and training should be one essential underpinning a successful economy. I think that we all agree with that. However, breathtakingly, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who opened the debate, seemed to suggest that the US model of a low-tax, low-regulation economy was another essential factor in a successful economy. The Opposition agree with that analysis, but the right hon. Lady does not seem to recognise that she was praising a Budget that moved decisively away from that model.

A number of Members talked about the general economic climate and specific sectors in the economy. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said that growth would be lower as a result of the Budget. I agree. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) made a similar point. All the economic numbers are put under threat by the Budget. It does nothing to help a savings ratio that is at its lowest for a decade. At a time when we are lagging behind many of our European partners it does nothing to encourage productivity. In particular, it does nothing effective for small business, as my hon. Friends the Members for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) and for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) made clear.

Not content with the prospect of making small business and especially the self-employed suffer, the Government do not recognise that these sectors are essential for future prosperity and future job creation. Yet the Government have chosen to increase taxation through national insurance contributions, which is especially harmful to those sectors.

My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) was right to say that attacking business in this way—an attack launched by many Labour Members, especially the hon. Member for Telford (David Wright)—will not create a climate that will result in a reduction in poverty.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) was right when he called the Chancellor of the Exchequer the tax-raiser general. We have heard various quotes of what Ministers said, including the Prime Minister, during television interviews in the run-up to the election. I think that, as ever with new Labour, the briefings are more accurate than the on-the-record quotes. The briefings to journalists from the Chancellor of the Exchequer seem to be especially relevant in this context. On the BBC 6 o'clock news on 22 May, Mark Mardell said:

"Those close to Gordon Brown"—

I think we know what that means—

"say it's completely wrong to interpret this reluctance as meaning there is a plan to put up national insurance. They say that's not his intention".

Even further up the BBC hierarchy, Andrew Marr said on the same programme:

"What he is saying is that the simple, straightforward Conservative allegation that he was going to lift the lid on national insurance and therefore produce an effective 50 per cent. rise in income tax is untrue."

No; it seems to be true. So the macro-economics of the Budget are damaging and not a little dishonest, and my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) was right to raise fears about future tax rises, including in council tax, occurring as a direct result of the tax rises in this Budget.

The other half of the Budget lies in its attention to the NHS, about which we have heard fascinating contributions from those on the Labour Benches. I must say that I have a sneaking fondness for the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), mostly because of his sheer shamelessness. He said that the NHS funding method was decided on the basis of the Wanless report. Decided after what debate and over what period? How arrogant of the Treasury to take this decision in private over a period of six hours. At least the hon. Gentleman could never be accused of naivety.

Sadly, the hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) simply told us that Wanless had spoken and that we should therefore accept what the oracle said and stop thinking for ourselves about health care. Since when did Labour Back Benchers have such blind faith in retired bankers? It is not beyond argument that a 1948 model of funding and delivery is the only possible one. My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) was right: we must be open-minded as a nation about how best to promote better health care.

I am glad to observe that once again, my party is the truly internationalist party in this House. As many of my hon. Friends have made clear in this debate, we are attracted to a United States economic model without too many intrusive taxes and regulations, and we are also interested in many western European methods of delivering public services—especially health, education and transport. We are prepared to consider why these other European systems provide better health care, especially for the poor and disadvantaged. They may well also provide less bureaucracy, as the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) pointed out. The contrast is that we want to combine the best of the US economic model with the best of the western European public services model, while perversely, the Government want the worst of the high-tax, high-regulation aspects of

[Mr. Green]

the western European economic model, combined with the top-down centralist model of the old eastern European delivery of public services.

It is a standard cliché for Ministers—the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) repeated it—to say that they will take no lessons from us. They have now reached the stage when they will take no lessons from anyone on anything. Apparently, every other country is out of step on health care: left-wing and right-wing Governments from Scandinavia to Australia are all wrong. On the future of British business, every business organisation is wrong. The CBI has consistently been abused by Labour Back Benchers, and I have to tell them that its members will have been listening. Whether it is the Institute of Directors or the Federation of Small Businesses, we are told that none of them has any knowledge about business, and that only those on the Labour Back Benches know best how to run a business. They will not learn even from other parts of the UK. They have seen the levels of health spending in Scotland and Wales, which are higher than those in England but provide worse health care outcomes. In the case of Scotland, those outcomes are getting worse by the year.

Mr. Peter Duncan: Does my hon. Friend accept that Scotland indeed provides the model justifying our position, which is that money in itself will not deliver better outcomes? Last year in Scotland, fewer patients were treated by fewer nurses in fewer beds after waiting longer.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend and his constituents will know that very well.

With every day that passes since the Budget announcement, it is clearer that the Government's case is unravelling. This is not a Budget for enterprise, but an assault on the hard-working businesses that provide jobs and prosperity as well as the revenue for our public services. It is not a Budget for fairness; instead, it ties ever more people into a complex and confusing web of taxes and benefits while keeping a resolutely closed mind on reforming our great public services. This Budget is an historic failure. It deserves to be opposed and we will oppose it.

9.44 pm

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): This has been a long, interesting debate, with more than 30 Members on both sides of the House contributing. Before I reply, I want to say to the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) that we will take no lectures from the Conservatives on under-investment in education, bearing in mind the neglect that we inherited from them in 1997. At that time, nearly half of all 11-year-olds were failing to learn the basics in maths and English. Primary school class sizes had risen every year from 1988 to 1997, and thousands of our children were being taught in crumbling classrooms.

The story so far, thanks to the extra investment in our education system by this Government, is that maths and English tests show an improvement of nearly 20 per cent. Ofsted reports rising standards, class sizes are down for five to seven-year-olds, 800 failing schools have been turned round since 1997, and more than 12,500 new teachers have been appointed since January 1998. Spending on education is rising, thanks to a commitment from this Government.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the Minister give way?

Dawn Primarolo: I will not give way at this time. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to get into the substance of my speech, I will give way to him later if time permits.

Five years ago, the Government's first Budget set out our objectives and reforms, and the disciplines to achieve economic stability, high employment and sustainable prosperity. Britain has enjoyed the lowest inflation and interest rates for 40 years, and, for the first time in half a century, unemployment in Britain is lower than in America, Japan and Europe. In the year just ended, Britain had the highest growth of any of our major competitors. As many of my hon. Friends mentioned today, employment has increased by 1.3 million since 1997.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Caerphilly (Mr. David), for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard), and for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) pointed out, every reform undertaken by this Government has been opposed by the Conservatives, be it the introduction of the national minimum wage, the windfall levy, the corporation tax reforms or even the objective of reaching full employment.

At the same time as we were achieving economic stability, net debt has been reduced. In the year to last April, the Government repaid £37 billion of debt. In 1996–97, debt represented 44 per cent. of Britain's national income. Three years ago, we brought that down to 36 per cent., and last year to 31 per cent. In the United States, it is 41 per cent. of national income, in the euro area as a whole, it is 53 per cent., and in Japan, 59 per cent.

Debt interest payments were running at £29 billion a year when we came to power, and more money was being spent on debt interest than was being invested in all our schools. Yet the Conservatives have the cheek to tell us that we are not doing enough for education. Debt interest payments fell to £26 billion in 2000 and fell again in 2001 to £22 billion. We expect the figure to fall again this year to £21 billion, which is 2 per cent. of our national income. Debt interest payments consume a lower proportion of our national income than at any time since the first world war.

This Government are committed to building a fairer, more inclusive society in which everyone can contribute to and benefit from rising prosperity. That is more than the previous Conservative Administration ever managed to do in their 18 years. It means delivering excellent public services, supporting families and helping parents to balance work with their child care responsibilities. It also means ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential in the workplace and in business, providing security for pensioners and ensuring that opportunity for all sits at the heart of our welfare reform agenda.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) pointed out, supported by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), investment in measures to assist those with learning difficulties—

my hon. Friend called them the "forgotten army" in our communities—such as the new deal for disabled people and the supported placement scheme is a project that we must continue to press forward.

The Budget is built on the foundations of economic stability created over the past five years, which made Britain last year the fastest growing G7 economy. It takes action, doing what needs to be done to build a strong, fairer and more enterprising Britain.

Last week, the Chancellor said that the Budget is

"to make our NHS the best insurance policy in the world . . . Fairness and enterprise together."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 592.]

It demonstrates the need to raise revenues for essential public services, which is supported by about 76 per cent. of people in this country. Even 54 per cent. of Conservative voters support that principle. However, raising that investment in public services will not deflect the Government from the path that we laid out in previous years—encouraging enterprise, modernising the tax system and creating opportunities for business.

Through the changes to the national insurance system, we seek to achieve a balance that is as fair and equitable as possible. Our approach recognises the interconnected interests of business, the individual and the community, which is vital to making the proper investment in our health service. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford vividly described the importance of investment in partnership, recognising as the CBI does that absence due to sickness costs business a phenomenal amount—some £23 billion a year. Tackling that issue is crucial if we are to make progress.

We have pressed on with modernising business tax to provide a fairer and better balanced system with fewer distortions and a structure that supports our productivity and enterprise agenda. We have introduced a new research and development tax credit to help innovation and to narrow the productivity gap with our major competitors. We have again cut corporation tax for small enterprises.

Mr. Prisk: Will the Minister give way?

Dawn Primarolo: May I make progress? I shall come to the hon. Gentleman's points in a moment.

We have made it clear that we shall continue our practice of consultation, even on issues where some decisions in principle have been taken in advance of Budget announcements. On major changes such as stamp duty reform, the treatment of overseas companies operating here through branches, face value vouchers and abolishing North sea royalty payments, we have a particular interest in ensuring that we consult with the industry.

Sir Robert Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Dawn Primarolo: I shall refer to the North sea in a moment.

We have also announced our intention to consult on the next stage of corporate tax reform following on from the changes introduced in the Budget on the sale of substantial shareholdings in respect of corporation tax and establishing a new coherent approach to taxing international property rights.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) referred to the research and development tax credit and, in particular, asked whether the definition is too narrow. The definition set out in the Department of Trade and Industry guidelines is based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development definition of research and development. The same definition underpins the UK accounting definition of research and development and the tax definition used in most other countries with research and development tax incentives. The Government are working with the CBI to clarify the definition, including relevant case studies, to ensure certainty for business.

North sea taxation was raised by a number of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members. Changes to it will ensure that companies pay a fair share of tax on their profits from exploiting a national resource. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies says that that is a textbook case of tax on economic rent. In 2001, the UK continental shelf companies made a pre-tax rate of return of 34.3 per cent. compared with 11.2 per cent. for other non-fiscal companies.

Hon. Members are concerned to ensure that ours is not the highest taxing regime in the world. The UK regime, even with the changes that have been made today, is far fairer and far better than regimes of other countries, such as Norway at 88 per cent., the US Gulf of Mexico at 66 per cent., Canada at 70 per cent., Australia at 75 per cent., Angola at 80 per cent. and Brazil at 65 per cent. That shows that the UK has a low tax regime.

Sir Robert Smith: The hon. Lady does not seem to understand that what matters is the total costs across the operation. The North sea is an extremely expensive place to operate in physically, and those costs are the reason why the tax regime has been lower in the past to encourage investment. The Chancellor has recognised that in the past, but has now changed his mind. No classic textbook on taxing business says that the tax regime should be changed at midnight so that companies have no chance to plan for it, no chance to take it into account and no chance to incorporate it in their business plans.

Dawn Primarolo: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the announcements on allowances and future investment and the reform of royalties are part of a fair and balanced package for the North sea.

Many issues have been raised in the debate, but I want to deal specifically with the points that several hon. Members made about small businesses. They continued to confuse the number of statutory instruments and the number of regulations on businesses. They quote figures that are incorrect. More than 95 per cent. of statutory instruments have no impact on business. Many have only a local or temporary effect.

Opposition Members' obsession with regulation and statutory instruments leads them to confuse the debate. The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) made a number of points about small businesses, the self-employed and unincorporated companies. He also dealt with national insurance, in particular class 2 and class 4 contributions. Class 2 for those earning below £4,025 a year is zero, as is class 4. For all other levels in

[Dawn Primarolo]

class 2, it is £2 a week. Only for those in class 4 whose earnings are between the lower and the upper profits limit does the charge rise to 7 per cent.

The comments about burdens on business, especially on the self-employed, from national insurance contributions failed to recognise the additional benefits that those in the self-employed sector get from the national insurance fund.

Mr. Prisk: As the hon. Lady will realise from having attended the debate, my point was that the Budget specifically excluded the self-employed from tax cuts, yet it happily included them in the tax rises under national insurance. I was challenging that inequality.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman should look again at the Budget and at the work that the Government have already done to see the benefits for unincorporated business, including the 40 per cent. first-year allowances, the 100 per cent. capital allowances, the over-indexation of the 10p starting rate, the cut in the basic rate of tax and the changes to the quarterly payments for PAYE.

The hon. Gentleman should also consider what small businesses themselves are saying. Chris Thompson, the chief executive of Express Engineering Group, who employs 350 people in the north-east, said:

"It's one of the best attempts I've seen to promote an enterprise culture. The reduction in capital gains tax on selling stakes certainly makes it worth starting a business."

He went on to say that the benefits that his company will receive from the training and R and D tax credits vastly outweigh any other concerns.

The Budget has been about enterprise, fairness and investing in the national health service. Economic stability is the foundation for achieving a fairer and more inclusive society. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) said, the health of the nation goes hand in hand with the wealth of the nation. This is a Budget to make our NHS the best insurance policy in the world, with fairness and enterprise together, and I commend it to the House.

Debate adjourned.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That—

(1) the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet at Westminster on Wednesday 8th May at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the adjournment of the Committee, and

(2) in respect of that sitting Standing Order No. 99 (Scottish Grand Committee (substantive motions for the adjournment)) shall have effect with the substitution in paragraph (2)(b) of the word 'seven' for the word 'ten'—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Ordered,

Wireless Telegraphy

That the Wireless Telegraphy (Television Licence Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 641), dated 6th March 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th March, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

Aggregates Levy

That the Aggregates Levy (Registration and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 4027), dated 19th December 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 20th December, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Aggregates Levy (General) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 761), dated 21st March 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st March, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Elections (Sierra Leone)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

10 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I appreciate the opportunity to initiate the debate, but before I speak about the elections in Sierra Leone I must mention the recent allegations that aid workers sexually abused children in refugee camps in that country. I hope that the Government are taking that issue up with aid agencies and the Government of Sierra Leone.

The subject for the debate is especially relevant as campaigning is well under way and the election will be held in three weeks, on 14 May. It is critical for the peace process in Sierra Leone that the elections are successful. It is also important for Africa, where democracy is still such a frail plant, that they are peaceful and that the outcome is accepted—whether President Kabbah and the Sierra Leone People's party are returned to power or a new President and a new Government are in Parliament.

Without going into all the details, it will be salutary for the House to remember that until January a civil war had been going on in Sierra Leone for 11 years. During that period, several attempts were made to re-establish peace and the democratic process, but unfortunately—to put it mildly—they all failed. We must hope that Sierra Leone is on the verge of a miraculous recovery after those years of untrammelled violence, during which unspeakable atrocities were committed. Indeed, we can only marvel at the recovery that has been made, and should regard with wonder the way in which—during the past few months especially—the political leadership across the party spectrum and the people at large have tried, with much success, to put the violence and bloodshed of the past decade behind them and have focused on reviving democracy, breathing new life into the meaning of peace.

That is a huge change for the better, but it did not happen on its own. The involvement of the United Nations through the United Nations mission in Sierra Leone—UNAMSIL—has been critical in brokering and maintaining peace; while the British armed interventions at vital points, especially between May and September 2000, were generally regarded in Sierra Leone as essential for the success of UNAMSIL. Indeed, many people would say that the activities of British troops in Sierra Leone between May and September 2000 saved the Lomé peace agreement of July 1999 from being merely fine words and enabled the political leadership and the people of Sierra Leone to focus positively on restoring democracy. So far, they have responded magnificently.

British and UNAMSIL military efforts have been crucial, and well publicised, in bringing about the current situation in Sierra Leone, where the politicians and the people are vigorously participating in the presidential and parliamentary elections. What is not so readily recognised, nor so well publicised, is the work of independent organisations, such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute, the International Foundation for Election Systems, the British Council, the Institute for Peace and Development and the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights in Sierra Leone, and official bodies such as the British high commission, the Department for International Development and the UN Development Programme. Between them, a huge effort has been made and is still being made—even during the campaign—to strengthen democracy, the democratic process and the political parties in Sierra Leone.

The WFD has been in the vanguard of that work. Liz Marsh, its programme director for Africa, has family links with Sierra Leone and has been tireless in promoting work with the political parties in order to restore multi-party democracy. In Sierra Leone itself, the WFD programme manager, Catherine Worthing, continues to work flat out to ensure that training is provided for polling agents in at least nine centres in all the provinces, including Freetown. Tony Expedzor, from the Ghanaian national electoral commission, is providing hands-on training and doing a great job. In addition to that training, five weeks ago—after much preparation and work with the leadership of most of the 23 registered parties, the British high commission, the national electoral commission, non- governmental organisations involved in the electoral process, the Speaker and Clerk of Parliament, and resident multilateral and bilateral development assistance agencies involved in good governance—a round-table conference was held in Freetown to focus on strengthening the democratic process in the run-up to the elections of 14 May and beyond.

Dr. Mike Warner, a research fellow at the Overseas Development Institute and director of Stakeholder Negotiation Services International, led on the organisation and provision of strategic guidance for the round table. He was ably assisted by Kwabena Mensah, a democratisation consultant from Ghana. I participated with Kwabena in a presentation on the practicalities of parties—government and opposition—working in a democracy. During that day, I also acted as a facilitator to the group that considered the priorities and purpose of national democracies. I spoke briefly at the final session, at which the participants—19 representatives from 12 of the 23 registered parties, including all those with parliamentary representatives—drew up a memorandum of understanding. Among many other points, the participants agreed

"that our vision as political parties is a democratic system where there will be mutual respect and trust, leading to electoral processes the outcome of which will be accepted."

We must all hope, for the sake of the people of Sierra Leone, that the agreement will hold once the outcome is known, on 14 May, of the democratic processes taking place in Sierra Leone. During my five-day visit, I had meetings with the high commissioner and staff of the British high commission, officials from the Department for International Development, and Walter Nicol, chairman of the National Electoral Commission, and his four regional directors. I also spoke to 56 trainee polling agents; members of the public; Joe Hall, director of the National Democracy Institute; Honorie Muyoyeta, lead trainer of the NDI election support programme; and two aspiring women candidates, Salamatu V. Conteh, a teacher who hopes to represent the United National People's party in Parliament, and Amelia Gebanawe, who hopes to be elected as a paramount chief.

Finally, as an MP "addict" I held a surgery, to which I invited round-table participants who wanted to express their feelings about what was happening. Five senior figures from the parties involved came to see me, including Dr. John Karefa-Smart, the then leader of the UNPP, who is now its presidential candidate, and

[Mr. Win Griffiths]

John Benjamin, interim chairman of the National Unity party. He is not participating in the elections—that has nothing to do with anything that I said to him—because he failed to become the presidential candidate for the Grand Alliance party and has refused the vice-presidential candidacy. The other senior figures were Pallo Bangura, secretary general of the Revolutionary United Front party—the political wing of the rebel RUF—and its presidential candidate; Cornelius Deveaux, leader of the Young People's party; and Osman Yansaneh, assistant secretary general of the All People's Congress.

One point that emerged from those meetings was the general concern that the NEC was favouring the Government, and in particular that election day could prove chaotic. Many registered voters in urban areas were not sure at which polling station they would be voting, as the station in question would not necessarily be the one at which they registered their right to vote. No polling cards were sent to voters in Sierra Leone. To reduce the queues on polling day, about 500 voters have been allocated to each polling station—a good idea, but many people do not know exactly where they are supposed to vote. As a result, there may be great dissatisfaction and dissent, and the possibility of serious unrest is obvious.

The following day, I spoke to Walter Nicol, the chairman of the NEC, and raised that issue with him. I suggested that, at the beginning of the campaign, the NEC post outside each polling station a list of the voters eligible to vote there, and he promised to consider that idea. When I phoned him this morning, he said that the NEC had decided that, although it could not do as I suggested everywhere, it would do so in the capital, Freetown, and other major towns, where voters could have real difficulty finding their voting stations.

Given the bloody and brutal decade of military conflict, I was encouraged by the positive efforts made by the political parties to ensure that the elections of 14 May will represent a fresh start for sustainable, peaceful democratic politics in Sierra Leone. However, that process is not without real difficulties and, in truth, challenges, given the catalogue of failures since 1991. The criticisms and fears of the opposition parties could be subdued if election observers were in place. There are now only a few small teams of observers across the country, with additional observers arriving during the election campaign.

Anything that can be reported in the Sierra Leone media to show that there is a keen interest in and observation of the elections, especially in the United Kingdom, will help to create confidence in the electoral process and strengthen the acceptance of its outcome. When that high hurdle has been successfully negotiated, it will be crucial to ensure that the issues raised in the memorandum of understanding are followed up.

I want briefly to consider two key issues. First, there should be an overhaul of the Sierra Leone Parliament's administration and working processes. Secondly, preparations to establish democracy at district level should get under way pretty quickly, and I understand that a draft Bill has now been proposed on that subject. That work will need to be done by all-party committees in Parliament, calling on outside expert advice. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the NDI and similar organisations are well placed to provide such advice and guidance. Their work so far has been excellent and has made a vital contribution to the progress made in creating confidence in the real possibility of a peaceful transition to democratic politics after a decade of military conflict.

I hope that our Government will be fully involved in those processes. In fact, to some extent they already are, but it will be encouraging to hear that officially from the Minister speaking from the Dispatch Box tonight. I want the Government to act before the elections to ensure that there are sufficient observers to give the opposition parties in particular confidence in the electoral process and, after the election, to sustain the new democratic start for Sierra Leone by maintaining the momentum for peace and economic recovery through financial, technical and expert support.

I close with the words of early-day motion 1098, which I tabled and which has so far attracted 218 signatures:

"this House . . . looks forward to a new era in Sierra Leone politics where the ballot box and peaceful debate in Parliament and outside will replace permanently the horrors of internal military conflict".

I certainly hope that that is the future for Sierra Leone.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) for making the elections in Sierra Leone the subject of this debate, for drawing attention to the recent positive developments there and especially for naming all the groups that, in his view, have contributed so much to those positive developments. That Sierra Leone is holding parliamentary and presidential elections on 14 May is a remarkable achievement. It clearly illustrates the real progress that Sierra Leone, with the help of the United Kingdom, the United Nations and the wider international community, is making towards a lasting peace.

Let me speak first about the peace process. A year ago, more than 50 per cent. of Sierra Leone was under the control of the brutal RUF rebels. Since then more than 50,000 combatants have disarmed and the UN peacekeeping force, UNAMSIL, has deployed throughout the country. The Government of Sierra Leone have restored their authority over the whole country and are now gradually extending basic Government services into areas that have not been under Government control for the best part of a decade. All parts of the country are now accessible.

On 18 January, President Kabbah declared that disarmament was complete and the war over, and on 1 March, he lifted the state of emergency. Thanks to the training provided by, among others, our own armed forces, Sierra Leone can now have more confidence in its rehabilitated armed forces, which are now patrolling the borders effectively. Like my hon. Friend, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the critical contribution made by our armed forces since their deployment to Freetown in May 2000, and by the UN, to the restoration of peace.

Our strategy in Sierra Leone is working, but the peace is fragile, and much remains to be done to consolidate it. In the short term, there is an urgent requirement to establish reintegration programmes across the country to help, through training and employment, former combatants to resettle in their home communities. We are

extending a reintegration programme successfully piloted in north-western Sierra Leone to other areas, and we hope that other donors will follow our lead.

The illegal mining of diamonds by the RUF fuelled the conflict. The Government of Sierra Leone need to set out and implement a comprehensive strategy to manage and secure the diamond fields, so that the diamonds can be exploited to the benefit of all Sierra Leoneans and are put beyond the reach of rebel groups. Consultants funded by us have finished a study setting out the options for the Government. We are also funding a technical adviser who will work in the President's office.

As my hon. Friend rightly says, in the long term Sierra Leone faces the massive task of rebuilding its shattered infrastructure and society. The priority for the new Government after the elections will be to improve standards of governance and to root out the endemic corruption that was one of the root causes of the conflict. Our commitment to Sierra Leone is long term, but we cannot do everything alone. I urge all donors to seize the opportunity for lasting peace in Sierra Leone and to mobilise the funding and technical assistance required for economic, social and political development.

Having described the background, I now focus on the main subject of tonight's debate: the elections, which should mark a further significant step towards peace and the restoration of normal, peaceful politics. My hon. Friend is right to raise this important issue. Preparations for the elections have taken place in difficult and unusual circumstances. Voter registration commenced barely one month after the ending of disarmament, and a new electoral system—the district block system—has been introduced. Wherever possible, arrangements have been made for refugees and the internally displaced, who are returning to their home communities, to vote.

While I am on the subject of refugees, let me say a little about the issue that my hon. Friend mentioned at the start of his speech—the serious allegations made in the joint report by Save the Children Fund and the UN about the sexual abuse of refugees and the internally displaced by aid workers and peacekeepers. We welcome the UN's investigation into these allegations and urge the UN to ensure that internationally accepted standards concerning the treatment of refugees are met, and that appropriate controls are put in place to prevent the recurrence of such unacceptable abuse.

Like most of the institutions in Sierra Leone, the National Electoral Commission has been degraded by years of civil war and it lacks capacity, but it is the NEC, not the international community nor the UN, that has taken on the responsibility for running the elections. I stress that the elections are being run by Sierra Leoneans for all Sierra Leoneans.

We have long recognised that elections would be an important element of any peace. Through the electoral consultancy International Foundation for Electoral Systems, we have provided more than £3 million of technical and material assistance to the NEC since 2000. The US Government have also provided funding to IFES, and the European Commission has funded the printing and supply of ballot papers.

Security is of course a vital issue in the elections. UNAMSIL is playing a key role by providing a secure environment for the elections, as well as logistical assistance to the national electoral commission, including the security and transportation of election materials. UNAMSIL will also provide advice and support to the Sierra Leone police, who will be responsible for security at polling stations. I commend the UN for that constructive contribution to the elections.

Voter registration took place over three weeks in February and March, and it was extended by one week as a result of organisational and logistical problems. Some 2.3 million people registered to vote. That compares favourably with only 1.6 million registered voters in 1996. The registration process was acknowledged to be fairer and wider than in 1996, and there were no violent incidents. IFES is working with the national electoral commission to ensure that the problems encountered during the registration process do not recur during polling.

Campaigning has now started. Ten parties will contest the elections. There are nine candidates for the presidential elections and 1,349 candidates for the parliamentary elections. The Revolutionary United Front has transformed itself into a political party—the RUFP—and it is the fourth largest party in terms of its number of candidates. We urge the RUFP to continue to turn its back on violence and embrace normal politics.

Participatory politics suffered during the conflict and the parties, especially those in opposition, lack resources, capacity, experience and organisational skills. We have focused on the need to develop the capacity of parties as a priority, not only before the elections, but over the long term. We have provided some £150,000 to fund the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's work with the parties.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend's positive feedback about the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's work in Sierra Leone. We have come to expect high standards of that organisation, but this is an important and large programme that is laying the foundations for a longer-term programme in Sierra Leone. I was particularly pleased to learn that its events are well attended and appreciated by the Opposition parties. I commend the Westminster Foundation for Democracy for its valuable work in Sierra Leone.

I thank my hon. Friend for taking the trouble to visit Sierra Leone to participate in the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's round table on promoting democracy. I am aware from our contacts in Freetown that the round table, which was attended by 12 parties, was a success and that Opposition leaders valued my hon. Friend's contributions in both formal and informal meetings. If my hon. Friend will allow me, I shall write to him about the detailed point that he raised in relation to his informal surgery concerning Opposition parties' fears about polling stations.

I agree with my hon. Friend that the presence of international observers in addition to local monitors will further help to give the parties confidence in the process and to ensure that the elections are credible. The European Union is fielding an observer mission of 18 long-term and 56 short-term observers. I can confirm that we are contributing one long-term observer and four short-term observers, including the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones). The majority of long-term observers are already in Sierra Leone to observe the electoral preparations and campaigning. I understand that the Commonwealth, the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union and Nigeria are also planning to send observer missions.

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

Free access to the media is another important factor in the election campaign. In a country where communication is very difficult, radio is the only medium with national coverage. We have provided more than £20,000 of funding to the Thomson Foundation, which is working with the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service on the reporting of election campaigns. We urge the broadcast and print media in Sierra Leone to play their full part in the elections and ensure that all parties have equitable access to the media. I commend UNAMSIL and several commercial radio stations for giving the political parties free air time on their radio stations.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, we also need to look beyond the elections. Holding credible elections is only one stage in a long process of political development in Sierra Leone. The Government of Sierra Leone, with the support of the United Kingdom and others, must promote improved governance and accountability. I assure my hon. Friend that the United Kingdom is fully involved—probably more involved than any other country, as he must know from his visit. We intend to remain so.

The Government of Sierra Leone need to build the capacity of Parliament, ensure that it has adequate resources and develops a structure of committees so that it can scrutinise more effectively the activities of Government and call the new Government to account. We hope that, after the elections, the new Members of Parliament will raise the profile and reputation of the Parliament through constructive debate.

For the moment, we are looking forward to peaceful and fair elections. I am encouraged that the Opposition parties that attended the Westminster Foundation signed a memorandum of understanding calling for a

"democratic system where there will be mutual respect and trust, leading to political processes, the outcome of which will be accepted".

I call upon all those participating in the elections, whether candidates or voters, to ensure that the elections are conducted in an atmosphere of peace.

We hope that all Sierra Leoneans will benefit from the peace and that, for the first time in a decade, they can exercise their democratic right to vote in peace. In his speech at the George Bush Senior Presidential Library in Texas on 8 April, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke about his visit to Sierra Leone on 9 February. He said:

"Never forget: the people are the true victims of conflict. I'll always remember driving through the villages near Freetown . . . seeing the people rejoicing—many of them amputees through the brutality from which they had been liberated—and their joy at being free to debate, argue and vote as they wished."

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 23 April 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREENHAM AND COOKHAM COMMONS BILL

Lords amendments agreed to.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Standard Spending Assessments

1. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): What steps he is taking to bring SSAs in English unitary authorities closer to the national average. [49393]

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We are currently reviewing the system for distributing grant to local government. We have said that the new formulae will take into account the circumstances that authorities face. Clearly, circumstances in unitary authorities vary enormously, as they do elsewhere. Therefore, I do not think that it is helpful to set broad goals, such as moving a particular group towards an average. That would lead us to a system where everybody gets the same irrespective of differing needs and local circumstances, which would not be fair.

Hugh Bayley: When the City of York was created as a unitary authority in 1996, it inherited from the Conservatives one of the lowest SSAs in the country. I know that the Government acknowledge the need for change in the local government funding formula, and that they have brought forward proposals in that regard. Will my right hon. Friend say whether the Government intend to bring forward legislation in time to affect the local government finance settlements next year?

Mr. Raynsford: I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that we intend to introduce changes in time for next year's local government settlement, although that will not require legislation. The proposals will be subject to a period of consultation with local government and other interested parties during the summer, and we intend to make the necessary arrangements so that the new system can be in force from April 2003.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): In his review, will the Minister look at the London borough of Havering, which receives substantially less than other boroughs with similar populations? For example, Redbridge next door gets £50 million more than Havering. Does he agree also that it is better for local money to be spent on local services than on the bureaucratic and unnecessary regional assemblies around England with which the Government appear obsessed?

Mr. Raynsford: The system is based on a proper and serious assessment of the needs of each area, taking account of different circumstances and requirements. Simplistic and crude comparisons of the grants available to different areas are usually very wide of the mark. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are looking carefully at all the factors relevant to local government needs, in London and in other parts of the country. We intend to produce a system that is clearer, simpler and easier to understand than the current system, and one that is also fairer.

As to regional assemblies, the hon. Gentleman will have to await our proposals. However, it is our intention not to create bureaucracy but to create structures that add value and improve regional economic performance.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): My right hon. Friend said that it was important to take into account the circumstances of different authorities. Swindon borough council receives the lowest education SSA of all unitary authorities. Schools elsewhere in the country receive £1,000 more per pupil than is the case in Swindon, where standards are higher. Does my right hon. Friend accept that that is unacceptable and unfair, and that the situation cannot continue?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend raises a perfectly fair point about the weight to be given to the per-pupil allowance in the educational element of the grant distribution formula. However, other factors need to be taken into account, such as special local circumstances. Authorities in rural areas face greater costs because of sparsity, for example, and there are particular deprivation factors in inner-city areas, and where there are high concentrations of people for whom English is not the first language. Any system must take account of the whole range of factors, and that is why we propose to carry out detailed consultation before we finalise our proposals.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): Despite the Government's continual boasting about increases in SSAs and levels of grant money to all local authorities, including the unitary authorities, real-terms council tax rises under Labour have averaged 5 per cent a year, compared with 2 per cent. under the previous Conservative Administration. Is not that yet another example of a Labour Government stealth tax?

Mr. Raynsford: No, it is not. The details show that the largest increases in council tax this year have been imposed by Conservative authorities. If he wishes to criticise council tax increases, the hon. Gentleman could

do no better than to talk to his colleagues in those Tory shire counties which, in the year after an election, have chosen to have a very large increase in their precept. That is an example of the politics being played by the Conservative party, and the House will have no truck with that approach.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Boroughs such as mine, Westminster and the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea did well in this year's settlement, but is my right hon. Friend aware that the figures issued last week on households below average income show that London as a whole has more families at risk of poverty than any other region in England? Will he assure me, therefore, that the current review into SSAs will take into account both London's exceptional costs and the extremely high levels of deprivation across the capital?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. As she will know from my earlier comments, we are considering carefully all the relevant factors in all areas of the country. Inevitably, there will be some difficulty during that process, because every area and every group of authorities sees the review as an opportunity to increase its share of the total. Everyone cannot be a gainer in that process, however, and it is our duty to be thoughtful and careful and to come to the best and most prudent conclusions that will genuinely respond to needs and create a fair framework for the grant distribution settlement. That is the basis on which we are acting, and I hope that my hon. Friend will bear with me and will understand the difficulties that face us as we try to come up with an appropriate solution.

West Coast Main Line

2. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): What recent representations he has received on the progress of the upgrade of the west coast main line. [49394]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I have received a number of representations about a range of issues relating to modernisation of the west coast main line.

Mr. Luff: On St. George's day—and a very happy St. George's day to you, Mr. Speaker—I am delighted to be able to ask a question about a line that links London with the heart of England. Does the Minister share my concern about the implications of the regular programme of weekend closures planned for the line later in the year? Will he intervene to ensure that better management avoids the serious short and long-term consequences of that wholly unnecessary programme of closures?

Mr. Spellar: As a fellow heart of England Member of Parliament, I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have a very acceptable and efficient alternative rail system from the west midlands to London via the Chiltern line. I am sure that he will acknowledge its extremely good record.

I depart from the hon. Gentleman, however, when he says that the closures are unnecessary. There was much discussion about them in the industry. As he knows, the initial proposals were for a four-week closure programme that included the working week. Many representations were made as to the impact of that on business and commerce in the regions. However, Railtrack needs to secure the track in order to make vital improvements on the west coast main line and there has been much discussion with the Strategic Rail Authority, local train operators, Virgin and Railtrack to try to pull together the various elements. Nobody could say that the closure is desirable but it is necessary and there was an agreement in which everyone gave a little. Obviously, we are looking forward to the improvements that will result from this period. We have also made sure that it avoids a number of significant events—not least the Commonwealth games in Manchester.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that when the west coast main line is fully upgraded—hopefully with the trains running at 140 mph—there will still be a major capacity problem? Bearing that in mind, does he support the SRA plan for a brand new high-speed link from London to the north of England?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend is a little in advance as regards the state of that process. That option is being examined and we shall obviously look at the outcome. Similarly, we shall consider the proposal for additional freight capacity made by Central Railway. The SRA is in intense negotiations and will be making its recommendation later this year.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): On St. George's day, may I ask whether the Minister has had the opportunity to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a joint assessment of the impact on the Scottish economy of the continued procrastination about the west coast main line upgrade? Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to deny the rumours and speculation that the upgrade will not extend north of the border?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman is a little uncharitable given that the state of the railway industry that the Conservative Government bequeathed to us, the appalling structure and record of Railtrack and the problems that it had on the west coast main line were the absolutely crucial factors in its inability to continue as a going concern. A degree of humility from Opposition Members would be in order.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the SRA, Railtrack and the train operators are considering how they can work together to ensure the most favourable outcome from the west coast main line scheme, which had been appallingly priced and mismanaged by Railtrack. We are starting to pull that scheme together, but I do not underestimate the difficulties that we were bequeathed by the Conservative Government, whom he supported.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will my right hon. Friend reconsider the weekend closures and the closure of Stockport station? I am not sure whether he recalls that between 1958 and 1960, when the west coast main line was electrified, every bridge between Manchester and London had to be raised to get the electrical cables through. That was done with minimum disruption on a Sunday. Why do engineers now seem

incapable of achieving the desired main line upgrade without major closures at weekends and without closing some stations for long periods?

Mr. Spellar: Well, Sunday is half the weekend. The implications of the time scale are straightforward—the more the work is spread out, the longer it takes and the later we get the improvements. As I said earlier, there was a proposal to do the work in shorter time by shutting down much longer chunks of the network throughout the week. That was thought undesirable and, indeed, damaging to business and business travel. As a result, we are considering a series of weekend works, but even more weekends would be affected if we were to adopt my hon. Friend's suggestion, which would, of course, affect even more people who wish to travel to and from London at the weekend.

A balance must be struck. No one believes that such closures are desirable—I merely point out that the various parties have reached the best negotiated outcome.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): The chief executive of the north-west tourist authority says that the weekend closures will seriously affect tourism in that region. They will also seriously inconvenience my constituents who do not have cars and who wish to travel to London and the rest of the country. Is it not beyond the wit of Railtrack and the Government to upgrade the west coast main line without shutting it at weekends in one of busiest periods?

Mr. Spellar: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's other constituents who wish to travel to and from London on business would be very concerned if the system were shut down during the week. A balance must be struck. All the options create difficulties; it is question of which is more undesirable. The House would generally agree that weekend closures are preferable to shutting the line during the week and severely disrupting business and commerce. I am sure that the business community in the north-west will note the rather light-hearted way in which the hon. Gentleman is treating such comments.

Regional Air Services

3. **Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): If he will make a statement on the future of regional air services. [49395]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): The Government recognise the importance of regional air services and have undertaken a programme of studies on them. The Government will shortly undertake a consultation exercise on the findings of those studies through a series of regional consultation documents. Those documents will examine how regional air services could develop under a range of scenarios.

Mr. Stewart: The Minister will be aware of the worrying trend in the United Kingdom of regional air services being cut in favour of more lucrative international destinations. In my constituency, for example, we lost our link with Heathrow in 1997. Does my hon. Friend share my view that we have to beef up our protection for vulnerable geographic routes, such as those to and from Inverness and Plymouth? Does he agree that we must demand stronger regulations in Europe for public service obligations; interpret the current regulations as liberally as the French do; and, finally, grapple with the difficult and thorny issue of the lack of runway capacity in the south-east?

Mr. Jamieson: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) on so assiduously following up this important issue on behalf of his constituents through questions, correspondence, meetings with constituents and Adjournment debates. He has left us in no doubt about the importance for Inverness of the London air links. I noticed that he cheekily introduced the issue of Plymouth in relation to Inverness; I am not quite sure why.

The Government have shown that where there is a demonstrable need for regional air services, we will take the necessary action to provide them—as we have in the highlands and islands, where there are public service obligations on certain flights. However, I remind my hon. Friend that public service obligations and the ring-fencing of slots are governed by strict European legislation, and we have to test each application to determine whether it meets those criteria.

My hon. Friend mentioned the south-east and east of England regional consultation document. I am sure that all hon. Members will be interested to see it once it is published.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Will the Minister acknowledge that any further expansion of Heathrow that involves the construction of a third runway would be completely unacceptable to the vast majority of local residents, and will he take this opportunity to rule it out?

Mr. Jamieson: It is too early to speculate on that matter, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to wait until the regional air services consultation documents are published. I assure him that many hon. Members, not only those in the south-east and east regions, will be interested in the outcome of studies in their areas.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The Minister will be aware that in France, major airports in the Paris area have vast numbers of slots that are protected for public service obligations, allowing regional air services to connect people with goods and services. Given that it is possible to protect regional air services, will the Minister give an undertaking that the Government will put that at the top of their agenda in order to defend the interests of the regions?

Mr. Jamieson: I assure my hon. Friend that the importance of regional air services is very much on our agenda, as will be underlined by the consultation documents when they are published.

I can also tell my hon. Friend that my Department is considering the European legislation to see how it can be strengthened and to see if other policy options could be used to provide protection for regional air services. It has not generally been Government policy to protect and ring-fence the slots, because where they are protected—for example, in the highlands and islands—funding issues must be addressed as well.

Angus Robertson (Moray): The Minister will be aware that a campaign for a public service obligation order for the Inverness to Gatwick route has been running for years, not months. He will also be aware that there have been debates in the House and Ministers have repeatedly been questioned about when the Government will announce a decision, yes or no, on a PSO for the Gatwick to Inverness route. The longer they take, the more it will be perceived as a rebuff to the Scottish Executive, who are in favour. The delay is inexplicable to the people of the highlands and islands, given the contrast with the situation in France, where there are at least 34 such PSOs, even on routes where there are competing airlines. When will the Government announce their decision?

Mr. Jamieson: I note the hon. Gentleman's interest in public service obligation orders and look forward to seeing ideas from his party about how they might be funded in certain circumstances, because that issue must be addressed at the same time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber has made clear to me the importance of the Inverness service. An application for a public service order was received from the Scottish Executive last year. We are in correspondence with them about the matter, and an announcement will be made shortly.

Local Transport

4. **Andy King** (Rugby and Kenilworth): What recent additional resources have been allocated to local authorities for investment in local transport. [49396]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): Last December we announced an allocation of more than £1.5 billion for local authority transport schemes. By 2005, we will have invested over £8 billion in a five-year package of local transport improvements. That funding represents a long-overdue increase in levels of investment.

Andy King: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that response, and I can give him some figures from Warwickshire, which has benefited enormously from that settlement.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Has he got a job yet?

Andy King: I have not, actually.

Spending on integrated transport has gone up from £1.7 million to £4.52 million and on public transport improvements from £212,000 to £1,005,000. The facts speak for themselves. Now here comes the question. The people of Rugby and Kenilworth have said for a long time that they want to use public transport, but, through the efforts of the Conservative party, it was not there to use. There is now more public transport, and we need to continue the investment. Does my right hon. Friend share my pleasure in the refurbishment, undertaken under the Government, of Rugby station, which will officially be reopened on 27 May?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State can now answer the question.

Mr. Byers: I am sure that we all look forward to celebrating the opening of Rugby station on 27 May. My hon. Friend made an important point, and Conservative Members' reaction was all too typical. They do not want the facts to get in the way of their prejudices. The Conservative party starved local authorities of funding for their transport projects. Consequently, many parts of the country have a local transport system that desperately needs significant investment. We are putting in that money now: £1.5 billion before Christmas and more than £8 billion by 2005. That investment will make a genuine difference in Rugby and Kenilworth and throughout the country.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Secretary of State is considering the allocation of resources for local transport systems. He knows that in London, investment in the tube has decreased in the past four years and that long-term investment strategy has still not been determined. Delays have doubled in that period, and London Underground has missed its seven targets.

An article in the *Evening Standard* today describes London commuting as the worst in Europe. How can any voter in the next four years trust the Government to provide a decent transport system in London or anywhere else in the country?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman makes the case for the modernisation plans for the London underground, which has been starved of investment for too long. He must acknowledge that under 20 years of Conservative rule as much as under any other Government, money was not invested in the London underground system. We are consulting about a proposal to provide investment—some £16 billion a year over 15 years—in it. That will remedy many of the problems to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I hope that he will support our proposals for investment and modernisation.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): What influence will regional government have over local and regional transport plans? What will be the division of powers between local and regional government and national Government? Will the forthcoming White Paper spell that out? When can we expect it to be published?

Mr. Byers: As always, my hon. Friend presents a strong argument for involving the regions, in this case in transport. He will have to await the White Paper, which will be published shortly after the local elections on 2 May. When he reads its proposals, he will realise that, for the first time, we have a Government with an active regional policy that provides choice. People can vote for an elected regional assembly if they wish, but, most important, the White Paper will value the regions of England. I am delighted that so many hon. Members are wearing red roses on St. George's day. Perhaps they have been out campaigning for Labour in the local elections. On St. George's day, it is right to celebrate the regions of England, and the White Paper will do that.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): The community transport schemes funded by the Government have been

welcomed in my constituency and elsewhere. However, they have suffered from the problem of a hand-to-mouth existence because their funding has never been guaranteed beyond the next year or, in some cases, two years. Will the Secretary of State explain how such community transport schemes will be funded in the long term when the current grants run out? Will councils have to cut other items of public transport to keep community transport going?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman is right to stress the importance and the valuable role of community transport in his constituency and in many others. The figures will show that we have doubled the funds being made available to that initiative. The hon. Gentleman makes the strong point—both in relation to certainty and to the achievement of value for money—that if we can plan not only on an annual basis but perhaps over a three-year spending programme, it will allow people to plan ahead with confidence, which they perhaps cannot always do at the moment. We will certainly want to look carefully at how we can extend the benefits of the Government's three-year spending programme to those agencies, local authorities and bodies involved in community transport which want the certainty that we can now provide as a result of that three-year spending programme.

Rail Network (Nottingham)

5. **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What assessment he has made of the development of the local rail network in Greater Nottingham. [49397]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): We have established the Strategic Rail Authority with a fundamental purpose to secure the development of the railway network. The authority has published its first strategic plan, which lists the developments being taken forward—a number of which will benefit Greater Nottingham.

Vernon Coaker: May I tell my hon. Friend that Nottingham station is full, and that we shall not be able to develop the local rail network until that problem is overcome and, in particular, until the Trent junction signal box is improved to an adequate standard? Will my hon. Friend try to give some impetus to that plan? It has been around for a number of years and it needs—for want of a better word—a bit of oomph behind it to try to get it moving. We have old pit lines and a local rail network—we have everything in place—but the signalling needs to be improved so that we can use Nottingham station and have a properly functioning, expanded local rail network, which will help to address the commuter problems in Greater Nottingham.

Mr. Jamieson: On the important subject of the railway station, I know that the Nottingham councils have funded a feasibility study, in partnership with Railtrack and the train operating companies, into improving passenger capacity and integration, particularly with the Nottingham express transit service. I hope that it will be a candidate for railway passenger partnership funding. My hon. Friend will know that the complexities of the rail system in the area around the Trent junction are considerable, and I am afraid that there is no single, simple solution to that problem. However, the SRA will be trying to get some oomph behind the problem by working with Railtrack on the feasibility study to achieve incremental improvements in performance and to increase capacity to benefit rail users in the area. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be around later in the year when my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport is due to open some of the new improvements to the Robin Hood line.

Local Government Finance

6. **Ms Joan Walley** (Stoke-on-Trent, North): What steps his Department is taking to analyse the council tax and spending patterns of local authorities. [49398]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): Over the past five years, the Government have increased the grant to local authorities by 20 per cent. in real terms. This compares to a cut of 7 per cent. in the last four years of the Conservative Government. As part of our changes to local government finance, we will be considering the relationship between the levels of council tax, the Government grant and the amount actually spent on the provision of services.

Ms Walley: It is extremely important that we have properly funded public services, particularly after all the inequalities of the last 12 years. It is important that my right hon. Friend looks at the review of the standard spending assessment, and, in particular, at authorities such as Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent—which I represent—to see how we can put right the problem of our per capita spending being 5.4 per cent. below the national average. What people really want is proper standards of rubbish collection, green spaces to be properly attended to, and back alleyways—of which there are many in Stoke-on-Trent—to be made good and kept clean. That is what we need the money for. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that his review gives councils such as Stoke-on-Trent the opportunity to have their say and the certainty for future spending?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, as she often does, on behalf of her constituency and of Stoke-on-Trent more generally. I am aware of the difficulties and pressures faced by that area because of certain closures that have taken place in recent years and because of the historically low levels of wages provided to those in employment there. It is right that, when we come to review the distribution of Government grant, we should take into account many of the issues that bring pressures to bear on local authorities such as Stoke-on-Trent. It is also important that, when we consider the steps that we want to take for an overall community, we also look at other sources of funding that we might be able to target more specifically in a locality, to focus on the areas of greatest need. That is certainly what we intend to do as we carry forward our review of local government finance distribution.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): When the Secretary of State looks at council tax levels, will he bear it in mind that one thing unites all the shire authorities, whether they are controlled by the Conservatives,

the Liberal Democrats or, indeed, as in the case of Durham, Labour? What is common to shire authorities and other authorities, such as York, is that they have to respond to the chronic underfunding of social services. Is the Secretary of State comfortable with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's proposals to fine local authorities if they cannot meet obligations for which they have not been funded?

Mr. Byers: When the right hon. Gentleman has the opportunity to look in detail at the figures that were revealed in the Budget last week, he will see that there is to be an increase in personal social services spending of more than £1.1 billion next year. That is made up of £766 million that had already been identified, which is an increase well above the rate of inflation, and the additional sum of £360 million, which the Chancellor announced last week. There is thus a real-terms increase of 6 per cent. for personal social services. In that context, local authorities—county and unitary—should be able to meet the demands that are being made on them by using the generous increase in funding that is being made available.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): While my right hon. Friend is looking at patterns of spending, will he pay particular attention to Conservative-controlled Calderdale council? In spite of an excellent financial settlement, it has seen fit to increase home care charges by 33 per cent, to withdraw funding from Scope, an excellent outreach service for people with disabilities, and to introduce one of the highest council tax charges in Yorkshire.

Mr. Byers: I shall certainly do that. However, Calderdale is not a Conservative administration in isolation; its actions reveal a trend in Tory local authorities up and down the country. The figures speak for themselves. The average council tax in Labour councils is £738; in Liberal Democrat-controlled councils it is £824; and in Tory-controlled councils it is £833. The position is this: Tory councils cost more and deliver less.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): But following on from the very point that average council tax rises have been greatest in Conservative-controlled councils, as the Minister for Local Government generously explained to the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), will the Secretary of State confirm that the lowest rise in the past four years has been in Liberal Democrat-controlled councils?

More important, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that regardless of which party is in control of a local council, the greatest cause of any increase in council tax is the issuing of diktats by an increasingly centralising Labour Government? To avoid making matters worse, will the Secretary of State tell the House precisely what plans he has to help local authorities mitigate the increase of £300 million that will be imposed on them as a result of the Chancellor's decision on national insurance, which almost wipes out the increased support to social services?

Mr. Byers: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman looks carefully at the figures. He will see that the additional costs of national insurance contributions for personal social services will be between £40 million and £45 million. Those are the true figures. He can dispute them, but that is the case.

The fact is that we have made a generous settlement for local government. We added to it last week by providing £360 million specifically for personal social services. The other aspect of local government funding will be dealt with in the spending review, the outcome of which will be announced in July this year. The hon. Gentleman should wait for that. He proclaims the low charges that are imposed by Liberal Democrat county councils, but he will be aware that the highest average council tax per dwelling in England is in Liberal Democrat-controlled Richmond upon Thames, with a figure of £1,208. I am sure that when the electors in Richmond upon Thames go to the polls a week on Thursday, they will be acutely aware that they are paying the highest price in the whole country for being Liberal Democrat-controlled.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): Tax relief for amateur sports clubs was announced in the Budget, but council tax is of course the responsibility of local authorities, so will the Secretary of State consider advising local authorities to give 80 per cent. mandatory rate relief to such clubs, which are very important to the community?

Mr. Byers: I know that amateur sports clubs have made a positive response to the announcement made by the Chancellor in the Budget last week, and I am sure that local authorities will want to respond in a way that is equally as positive as the Chancellor's action. Lobbying by people such as my hon. Friend means, I hope, that the important role played by sports clubs in the community will be recognised by local authorities, and they will be as generous as possible.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Yet again the Secretary of State is being economical with the facts that he gives to the House. It is all very well him standing there talking about a £360 million increase in funding for local authority social care, but that will be wiped out by the Chancellor's increase in national insurance bills for local authorities. In his assessment of council tax, has the Secretary of State made any assessment of the impact of the Chancellor's stealth tax on pension funds?

Mr. Byers: We have made sure that the funding for local government is generous and above the rate of inflation, and we added to that in last week's Budget. Additional costs that may be borne by local authorities, whether through national insurance contributions or changes to pension funds, are more than made up by the additional funding given by the Government.

If the hon. Lady and the Conservative party oppose national insurance contributions, they must say where the money will come from. There are three options: there will be cuts in health service spending; other taxes will be raised which are being kept secret; or people will be charged or will have to take out private insurance. Those are the options, and I hope the hon. Lady will tell the House which of them the Conservatives favour.

Mrs. May: Yet again the Secretary of State failed to answer the question that he was asked, but it is obvious

that he has made no assessment of the impact on council tax of the Chancellor's stealth tax on pensions. I can tell him that it is costing council tax payers the equivalent of a 1.5 per cent. increase in council tax every year.

Every year under Labour, Ministers have said that they have generously funded local authorities, and every year council tax has gone up by three times the rate of inflation. That is bad news that the Secretary of State cannot bury, because people see it every time they pay their council tax bill. Under this Government, the typical single pensioner has seen council tax increases wipe out one third of the rise in the state pension. Is not the sad truth that Labour's double whammy of stealth taxes and soaring council tax is hitting hardest the most vulnerable in our society?

Mr. Byers: I made it clear in my reply that we had taken into account the increased costs arising from pension changes, and I am sorry that the hon. Lady chose not to hear that. It is interesting that she talks, as the record will show, of the increase in council tax affecting a third of the state pension increase, yet she chooses to ignore the other funds that the Government are making available to pensioners, such as the £200 a year, which is not taxed, and the free TV licence.

When pensioners look at the benefits that they are getting, in the round, from this Government, they will know that they can trust Labour, but they cannot trust the Conservatives. When they come to vote a week on Thursday, they will know who they can trust. They distrust the Conservatives because they know that, after 18 years of Conservative rule, pensioners had got nothing and were no longer able to live in dignity and security, as they now can because of the measures that this Government have introduced.

Local Transport

7. **Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): What action he is taking to improve public transport in urban areas. [49399]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): Most journeys by public transport in urban areas are taken by bus. The Government provide support of more than £1 billion a year to the bus network. We intend to review this support—in particular, the £300 million fuel duty rebate—to ensure that it helps achieve our transport objectives and improves bus services.

Paul Goggins: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Can I tell him, however, that although bus companies are very happy to provide services along the busy major urban routes, they are failing miserably in extending public transport to many of the estates where people live? Although I welcome important Government initiatives such as the urban bus challenge, will the Secretary of State tell the House what pressure he is bringing to bear on the private operators to ensure that they play their full part in the delivery of public transport across all our towns and cities?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to raise the importance of travel by bus. More than 10 million bus journeys are taken every day, on average, and it is therefore right that the bus network should not be regarded as a sort of Cinderella in the public transport world. It should be given the support and the attention that it deserves. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed concern to me and Ministers in my Department about worsening bus services in their areas. That is unacceptable. In total, about £300 million in fuel duty rebate is being made available to bus operators. We have to see a real return on that level of public support from taxpayers. We are not seeing that return at the moment, which is why we will review our support to see what further steps need to be taken.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): May I point out to the Secretary of State that, however much he might fiddle the figures, the real problem in the south-east of England, particularly in West Sussex, is the lessening number of bus drivers available? Many of them are driven out by high property prices and are moving to the midlands and the north. That means that many bus companies must put up their wages, which means increased costs. Consequently, the subsidies given to local authorities do not stretch. In my county, many routes have been cut simply because more has had to be paid for existing bus services. What is the Secretary of State doing to make sure that bus drivers are available to drive the buses that are needed in places such as the south-east where there are extra costs?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out the success of this Government. Since 1997, 1.5 million more people are in work. That may be one of the reasons why he is wearing the red rose of Labour this afternoon—he recognises the success of this Labour Government. He is right to point out, however, that we need a strategy for dealing with this success. That is why we want to review the funding that is going in—for example, the £300 million that we are giving in fuel duty rebate—to make sure that we improve standards in his constituency and in constituencies elsewhere in the country.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): My bus services in Cambridge have improved vastly recently. There is still a need for more frequent bus services in some parts of the city, but there has been a vast improvement in the last five years.

May I urge the Secretary of State, when he implements the Cambridge to Huntingdon multi-modal study, to ensure that public transport comes first and that the Government back the plans for the guided bus, which will take people from Huntingdon to Cambridge and ensure that they no longer need to use their cars for this purpose?

Mr. Byers: I am pleased to hear that the bus service in Cambridge is improving. I am acutely aware of the importance that local people attach to the Huntingdon to Cambridge guided bus route. We are looking carefully at the proposals that have come from the multi-modal study report, and we will want to make decisions shortly. Of course, the great strength of that kind of inclusive approach is that all forms of transport are considered.

The proposal that has come forward from that study is exciting, it shows real innovation, and we will want to give it detailed and appropriate consideration.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): The Secretary of State is right to say that we need to look at all forms of transport. Does he agree that in large conurbations such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Bradford there is a fine balance to be struck between road and rail, and that passengers are attracted to public transport by a combination of perception and price? In these dark days for the strategic plan, I am sure that the House is sympathetic to the Government's reasons for instructing the Association of Train Operating Companies to find some good soundbites in respect of railways.

Following the publication in *The Sun* today of the memo from ATOC, may I ask the Secretary of State one simple question? Given the many unhappy statements that he has been forced to make to the House in recent weeks, and the particular esteem in which he is held by the public, how did he think he would ever get away with burying rises in fares?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman should know by now not to believe everything he reads in the newspapers. If he were able to produce such a memo, I would be delighted to see it, but I do not think that one exists. That is the fact of the matter.

More interesting is the fact that, although we are discussing bus services on which 10 million journeys a day are made, the hon. Gentleman has nothing to say about that, or about the railway system. This Government and this Secretary of State are getting on with the job of beginning to turn this country's transport system around. That is what we are committed to do, it is what we shall continue to do, and in due course the travelling public will get the benefits of that approach.

Disabled Access

8. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): What good practice his Department has recognised in respect of councils promoting better access and mobility. [49400]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): Earlier this month, we announced that Telford and Wrekin council, Nottinghamshire county council and the London borough of Lewisham had been awarded beacon status for their good practice in ensuring that they provide better access to services for local residents through imaginative local transport schemes.

Ms Munn: I thank my hon. Friend for her answer, but may I raise with her the concerns of my constituent Mrs. Carson, who has a disability and relies on a motorised wheelchair to get about? What does my hon. Friend have to say to Sheffield city council about the fact that one of its departments—social services—has spent thousands of pounds adapting Mrs. Carson's council house, while another department has refused to fund the construction of a ramp at the end of the walkway where Mrs. Carson lives, thus making her virtually a prisoner in her own home?

Ms Keeble: The case shows how important it is to make sure through beacon council schemes and the like that local authorities extend best practice and prevent people from becoming prisoners in their own home. My hon. Friend might be aware that under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 local authorities have responsibilities to ensure that disabled people can exercise their rights of access to goods, facilities, services and premises. The case she describes, which arises in a Liberal Democrat council, is a complex one, and in the interests of ensuring that the services provided to her constituent are improved, I ask her to send me the full details. I will make sure that officials advise the council.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Is the Minister aware of the importance of access to jobs for those who are unemployed? The unemployment rate on the Isle of Wight is 5.8 per cent., compared to an average rate in the south-east of England of 1.7 per cent. A recent report states:

"insularity prevents the Island's unemployed searching for jobs effectively off the Island. The cost and time involved cause labour mobility to be far lower than on the mainland."

Will the Minister consider redesignating the rural bus challenge, which was most welcome, the rural transport challenge, so that Isle of Wight council can apply to the Government for money to spend on supporting ferry journeys?

Ms Keeble: The Government are acutely aware of the need to make sure that people have access to jobs. Our approach differs somewhat from the one adopted by the previous Administration, which was simply to tell people to get on their bike. We have provided support to enable unemployed people to get buses to work through schemes such as the urban bus challenge, and our support for rural buses makes provision for 4 million additional people to get to work. The hon. Gentleman never fails to raise constituency issues, and I am sure he knows that we have examined extremely carefully the special needs of the Isle of Wight. However, I suspect that most people can find jobs in the local job market, and we provide support for bus services there.

David Wright (Telford): May I congratulate Telford and Wrekin council on securing beacon status for access and mobility? Is my hon. Friend aware that the council, working with its partners, has increased the use of local buses on the red line route in the town by 40 per cent. in the past two years?

Ms Keeble: Yes, my hon. Friend's local authority's beacon status is well deserved both through the dial-a-ride scheme that he mentioned and a new service called the Wrekin Ryder. By increasing the rural bus subsidy grant, the Government have provided for an extra 4 million bus passenger journeys, which is a huge commitment to improving transport services for rural communities.

Online Voting

9. **Mr. Richard Allan** (Sheffield, Hallam): What assessment he has made of progress with the online voting pilots for the forthcoming local elections. [49402]

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): All online pilots have been subject to a departmental quality review that showed they were all on track. We are planning a further independent quality and security review of those authorities before election day. We have also been working closely with authorities piloting all postal voting to ensure that their arrangements do not enhance the opportunity for fraud or undermine the secrecy and security of the poll. We will remain in contact with all pilot authorities over the election period so that the returning officers responsible and we ourselves can be confident of the robustness and security of the pilot voting arrangements that will be available.

Mr. Allan: Like the Minister, I want the e-voting pilots to succeed in May. I congratulate Ken Bellamy, head of information, communications and technology at Sheffield city council, on what he has done to develop the Sheffield pilots. Will the Minister ensure that clear guidance is issued to cover a situation which still concerns me? What happens when a voter turns up on 2 May at the polling station only to be told that someone has already cast their vote electronically, but they deny having done so themselves? That problem could damage confidence in e-voting if it is not handled carefully. I hope that the Minister will agree to publish guidance so that Members of Parliament, councillors and the public know what would happen in those circumstances.

Mr. Raynsford: On the specific issue raised by the hon. Gentleman, I shall ensure that officials from my Department are in touch with Sheffield council to discuss the circumstances of that case and that appropriate guidance is issued to all authorities undertaking electronic polls. It is very important that we use the pilots as an opportunity to test thoroughly the availability of new technology to facilitate voting. All of us are concerned about falling participation in elections; anything that we can do to help people to vote who might not otherwise do so is a good thing. We are keen to explore that, and ensure that we make the most of the opportunities presented by the pilots.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will understand that certain basic principles govern voting in this country: people can be assured that no one can tell for whom they voted; they can be certain that when they put their ballot paper in a ballot box they have voted; and when counting takes place, candidates or their agents can scrutinise the process. Can my right hon. Friend therefore give a guarantee that when people vote electronically it will not be possible to trace them or the person for whom they voted? Can people have a guarantee that when they have voted electronically their vote will be received and counted, and how will the process be scrutinised by candidates and their agents?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend raises a number of important issues that we considered carefully, along with the Electoral Commission, before authorising the pilots this May. Arrangements are in place to deal with the precise concerns that he raised, and will ensure the security of the ballot, the anonymity of the voter and the opportunity if necessary to challenge any allegations of fraud. We are keen that the polls should be conducted in the most rigorous and careful way, but we are also conscious of the fact that many people who show an interest in using electronic technology to exercise their vote perhaps would otherwise not vote. It is right to pilot such opportunities to test whether in fact we can extend opportunities and encourage more people to exercise their vote, while at the same time guaranteeing the integrity and secrecy of the ballot.

West Coast Main Line

10. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): What policy the successor to Railtrack will have on the levels of investment for modernising the west coast main line. [49403]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): That will be a matter for Railtrack's successor.

Mr. Jack: In earlier exchanges on the west coast main line, the Minister asked for a degree of humbleness on the part of Opposition Members asking questions. May I suggest to the Minister in all humility that many of the problems reflected in those earlier exchanges focus on the problems brought about by his changes to Railtrack and the arrival of Network Rail? When can we expect a definitive statement that will spell out precisely what is to happen on the west coast main line in terms of train capacity, safety and rail closure, and what is included in phase 1 and phase 2 of the development?

Mr. Spellar: The right hon. Gentleman is right to be humble about the railways, as the Opposition have much to be humble about. If he had been listening to the full exchanges, he would have heard me say that discussions were taking place with all the parties about how the system can evolve to achieve progress on the west coast main line. In view of the mess that the Conservatives left, the right hon. Gentleman should understand that that will take a considerable time, not least because we have steadily been finding more and more deficiencies in the previous practice of Railtrack. He should not only be humble; he should be blooming well ashamed of it.

BILL PRESENTED

ANNUITIES (COMPETITION)

Mr. Frank Field presented a Bill to require pension providers to provide information from the Financial Services Authority on annuity rates to all holders of personal pensions policies which allow the purchase of an annuity from any provider: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 123].

Alcohol Services

3.31 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require local authorities and health authorities to provide alcohol services in their areas to address the needs of people with alcohol problems, to produce joint five-year strategic projections and annual service evaluations and plans; and to establish joint commissioning arrangements in their areas for the purchase of alcohol services.

There are two background features to the Bill that I should mention briefly. The first is the extent of problem drinking and its social and economic costs. Too many people are drinking well over the recommended limits; indeed, a recent survey indicated that just over a quarter of adults aged 16 to 74 are hazardous drinkers, the highest proportion being those aged 16 to 24 years.

As well as the deaths and illnesses directly attributable to alcohol abuse, there are the indirect effects on the health of the nation—for example, one in seven people killed on the roads and one in 20 people injured are involved in drink-drive accidents. In addition, there are the alcohol-related crimes. The British crime survey in 2000 found that incidents in and around pubs and clubs accounted for nearly one in five of all violent crimes.

I shall say no more about the problems of alcohol abuse. There is an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall tomorrow and I know that a number of hon. Members want to explore them on that occasion.

The second background feature to the Bill is that alcohol care services throughout the country are under severe pressure. Services are shrinking in number; most services have static or declining levels of funding; and the present sources of funding are not secure. Moreover, alcohol care services are patchy; there is a postcode lottery in availability, range and quality. One current problem is the haemorrhage of skilled staff to drugs agencies as a result of the greater priority and Government funding given to them for the expansion in drugs services. There are therefore high levels of unmet need, especially for early intervention and preventive services. That is showing up in the higher level of alcohol-related admissions to accident and emergency units and to acute and chronic in-patient services.

Four years ago the Government announced that they would publish an alcohol strategy, and two years ago they said that they would implement it by 2004. Unfortunately, other pressing priorities have meant that the strategy has yet to be announced. The upshot is that there is uncertainty about the future of alcohol services. Local authorities are not prioritising alcohol issues in their community strategies, local public service agreements and crime reduction strategies. Without a lead from the centre, primary care trusts are not always clear how to proceed.

The Bill seeks to address those problems in alcohol care services. The understanding behind it is that the Government will use their own favoured system of solving such problems, which they have used successfully in other areas. Specifically, the Bill calls for the inspection and regulation bodies—the Commission for Health Improvement and the National Care Standards Commission—to investigate each part of the country, report on deficiencies in alcohol care services and make recommendations. They would examine whether there was adequate coverage and availability of high-quality alcohol care services in every locality.

The best way for the Government to make that work is to issue a national service framework for alcohol care services, which would set standards and models of care, provide a proper implementation structure and ensure that mainstream NHS and local authority money is directed to those services. That would provide the benchmarks against which the regulatory agencies would carry out their inspections. In addition, the Bill builds on the existing roles of local authorities.

I hope that if the House gives leave to bring in the Bill, it will agree on consideration that its approach has advantages, as it fits with Government policy in devolving responsibility for purchasing to primary care trusts and requires no new administrative machinery.

In summary, the Bill provides the implementation machinery for the Government's alcohol strategy. There is an urgent need to put the authority of the regulatory bodies behind a serious initiative to create a nationally adequate and reasonably secure system of alcohol care provision. Without an adequate system of early-intervention alcohol services, other Government policy goals in law and order, employment, productivity, social exclusion and education will not be achieved. An adequate system of alcohol services will save money across the public services as a whole, as well as addressing the social needs of many of our citizens.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ross Cranston, Mr. Kelvin Hopkins, Mrs. Marion Roe, Bob Russell, Mr. Russell Brown, Jon Cruddas, Mr. David Amess, Mr. David Drew, Mrs. Betty Williams, Mr. Siôn Simon, Rev. Martin Smyth and Fiona Mactaggart.

ALCOHOL SERVICES

Ross Cranston accordingly presented a Bill to require local authorities and health authorities to provide alcohol services in their areas to address the needs of people with alcohol problems, to produce joint five-year strategic projections and annual service evaluations and plans; and to establish joint commissioning arrangements in their areas for the purchase of alcohol services: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 124].

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [22 April].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

(1) That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance.

(2) Subject to paragraph (3) below, this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for any relief, other than a relief that—

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.

(3) Paragraph (2) above does not exclude the making of amendments with respect to value added tax providing for relief on the acquisition from another member State of any goods in relation to which, if they were imported from a place outside the member States, relief would be given by an order under section 37 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994.—(*Mr. Gordon Brown.*)

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

3.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption.]* It gets better—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are in a frisky mood today. Before I start, I have to draw the attention of the House to the fact that Budget resolution No. 6, as it now appears on the Order Paper, has been slightly amended. In the course of finalising the drafting of the biodiesel provisions—*[Interruption.]* I should be grateful if there were no interventions on this one. It became apparent during that process that it would be clearer if excise duty on blends of biodiesel and diesel could be dealt with as a separate item and not under existing powers to make orders relating to fuel substitute. The changes in the proposed resolution enable that to be done. *[Interruption.]* I hope that that is clear. If there are technical questions, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is here, thank God.

Last week, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a Budget for enterprise and hard-working families, and above all, a Budget to put the national health service on a sustainable footing for the long-term. It deals with funding not for a single year, as used to happen when the Conservative party made Budgets. It is a Budget not even for three years, but for five years, so that the national health service can plan ahead with confidence and stability for the long term. After years when the economy veered between boom and bust—*[Interruption.]* I knew that that would get

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

Opposition Members going. After those years, this Budget is built on the sure foundations of the economic stability that we have created.

Conservative Members often claim that there was a golden legacy, but the legacy was far from golden. Inflation had peaked at 10 per cent; interest rates had peaked at 15 per cent; borrowing for just one year stood at £50 billion; the national debt had doubled; and 3 million people were out of work. It is this Government who ended that mismanagement of our economy.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): On the legacy and health service reform, only a year or so ago, the Secretary of State said that it was vital that the NHS remain the monopoly supplier of medical services so long as a Labour Government were in office. It is only recently that he has changed his tune, and although I welcome that change, the difficulty is that we have had five years of very little reform.

Mr. Milburn: That is complet[illegible] untrue. In fact, Conservative Members argued with [illegible]e for four or five years that we needed better ways of ending the lottery of care in the national health service. That is why we created the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, a reform which they opposed. They argued that we needed tighter inspection systems, so we introduced the Commission For Health Improvement, which they opposed. They argued for greater devolution, so we invented primary care groups and primary care trusts, which we can now take further. I would argue that all those aspects of reform are delivering services for patients.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): If the Secretary of State has devolved power to primary care groups, why does my local group have to deal with 380 different targets set by central Government? How does that help patient services?

Mr. Milburn: In terms of standards, it is important that we get the balance right. The hon. Gentleman would be the first to complain if cancer patients in his area did not receive the same standard of service as those in other areas. The need to get the balance right is true of every health care system in the world, but what has characterised the national health service for 50 years is that the balance has been wrong. There has been too much centralisation and not enough decentralisation, and we can now put that right.

On taking office, our first job was to put the economy and public finances on a sure footing. Today, we have the lowest inflation in Europe, an employment rate higher than any of our major competitors, the lowest unemployment for almost 30 years, and interest rates that have not been lower for almost 40 years. Our opponents warned that the minimum wage would cost 1 million jobs, but in fact, there are 1.5 million more jobs in the economy than when we took office.

None of that has come about by chance. It has happened because of the choices that we have made: new fiscal rules, Bank of England independence, and new programmes to create jobs and make work pay. All those initiatives were introduced by this Labour Government, and all were opposed by the Conservatives. Every time we were making the right choices for Britain, they were making the wrong choices. Tonight, when they vote against this Budget, they will get it wrong again. They will vote against the biggest sustained growth in resources that the national health service has ever seen. Over five years, investment will grow in real terms by an average of 7.4 per cent. a year.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): May I return the Secretary of State to the subject of the Commission For Health Improvement? Its recent report on acute hospitals in East Kent is damning of management beyond belief. It condemns them for failing to take lessons on board, and for failing to make essential communications with medical and nursing staff, whom it commends and describes as overworked. Does he intend to rubber-stamp proposals to waste a fortune reorganising hospitals in east Kent, or will he reconsider them and listen instead to many local commissions, all the local branches of the Royal College of Nursing and four out of six local councils, which recommend that the proposals be thrown out?

Mr. Milburn: I shall of course consider the commission's report. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, we are looking very carefully at the situation in his area, and it is true that problems exist there. Although they are partly the result of changes in the make-up of local services—he has been raising that issue with my hon. Friends for some time—they are also partly the product of a shortage of resources. The question for the hon. Gentleman this evening is whether he is prepared to back this Budget and the extra investment in it. He cannot make such complaints and then vote against the extra resources.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Secretary of State read out a list of credits for which he claimed ownership for the Government. Will he take ownership of the fact that, under new Labour's stewardship, as a nation we have dropped from ninth to 19th in the world competitiveness league; for the fact that our exports have been in deficit every month for the last four years; and for the fact that productivity growth, which used to be higher, has now slowed? When he hears those things or fails to mention them, does he hear a warning bell in his head that perhaps things are not going to get better after all?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Lady's claim would have more credibility if in her constituency and those of her right hon. and hon. Friends employment was not up; if unemployment was not down; if there were not more people in work with better protection, a minimum wage and a working families tax credit; and if the economy was not doing better than our major competitors in Europe and across the developed world. The country is moving forwards, not backwards, and the hon. Lady should have the honesty to acknowledge that.

For the benefit of the House, it is worth putting the new resources for the national health service in perspective.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Milburn: It is not about complementary medicine, is it?

Mr. Tredinnick: The right hon. Gentleman is ever generous in giving way. It does happen to be about that.

I just wanted to ask him whether he intended to include in his package anything that would bring in some of the 60,000 complementary therapists to increase the supply of practitioners in the health service? If he did so, he would have an automatic 15 per cent. increase in people who could treat patients. I beseech him earnestly to consider that issue.

Mr. Milburn: We continue to examine complementary therapies and complementary medicine, but as I have said to the hon. Gentleman before, I cannot take such decisions: they must be taken by the clinicians. *[Interruption.]* I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is demonstrating part of the therapy that he advocates. He cannot have his cake and eat it. He cannot say that we should do more and then, when we do, argue that it is centralisation. Nor can he say that we should do more and then argue, and vote, as he will tonight, against the extra investment in the national health service. If he wants an extension of mainstream medicine and other therapies, he must accept that the NHS needs extra resources. I urge him to vote with us in the Lobby tonight.

It is worth comparing this five-year Budget with the five years between 1992 and 1997. Now the NHS will grow by 7.4 per cent. in real terms, whereas then NHS budgets rose by 2.7 per cent. a year in real terms. Social services funding, which rose in that same period by less than 0.5 per cent. a year, will now rise by 6 per cent. a year in real terms.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that the laudable targets in the NHS plan will fail if social care is inadequately funded? Although the extra £300 million that was announced in the Chancellor's Budget last week is most welcome, there has been a long period of chronic underfunding that has led to a gap of at least £1 billion in local authority social services budgets. In that context, how does it help to penalise local authorities for things for which they are not responsible, such as the crisis in residential care in some areas?

Mr. Milburn: I do not accept what my hon. Friend says. In any terms, these increases in funding for social services are very generous. It is worth recalling that social services budgets rose by less than 1 per cent. in real terms before this Government came to office, whereas they are now rising by 3 per cent. in real terms, and we are about to double that to 6 per cent. in real terms. It is absolutely right that social services have the opportunity to use those resources wisely and well. If I know social services, they will use the new incentives to improve and expand the range of services for elderly people.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I accept what the right hon. Gentleman says about poor funding in real terms up to 1997. Is he aware of the figure for real-terms growth in social services, which he and his predecessor controlled between 1997 and 1999? He will not find it in the Wanless report, because those two years are missing. Does he accept that it was less than 0 per cent. in real terms, and that we are now paying the price, as his hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) has just acknowledged?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is like a broken record. He has only one tune and it is always the same—"More, more, more." However much we give, he always wants more money. He has to accept that when we came to office the public finances were out of control, inflation was back in the system and interest rates were rising. All those had to be sorted out.

We could not make the investment in our public services until we had achieved stability in the public finances and the economy. Frankly, if the hon. Gentleman and his party had been in office, we would have experienced precisely the veering between boom and bust that occurred when the Conservatives were in power, because they would not have had the discipline to do what was necessary to sort out the public finances.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): May I explore the detail of the point made from the Back Benches by the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor)? If the changes proposed by the Secretary of State are introduced this year, and given current bed blocking in the NHS, what is the Department's estimate of the cost to local government?

Mr. Milburn: I am not sure that I have a figure for that off the top of my head.

Dr. Fox: You should have.

Mr. Milburn: Well, what I do know is that since we put extra resources into social services on top of the 3 per cent.—the extra £300 million that we distributed in November last year—delayed discharge from hospital has been falling. In September last year, about 6,400 elderly people were needlessly in hospital when they were ready for discharge but there was not adequate provision in the community. Today, the figure is about 4,700, but we must get it down further. To do that, we need not just more investment but reform of the system.

Frankly, as I go round the country—the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) must find this, too—I see that there is a lottery as to whether health and social services can work together in partnership. Basically, that relies on good relationships locally. I do not believe that elderly people, people with a mental health problem or people with a disability should have to rely on happenchance as regards whether a local authority and an NHS trust want to work together. There should be a positive incentive to ensure that they work together.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): My right hon. Friend is making an important point about the relationship between local social services departments and the health service, and the changes will provide a better service for the elderly and the chronically sick and disabled. Will he consider the representations made by SIGOMA—the special interest group of municipal authorities—and, as we need that co-operation between the health authorities and the social services, meet SIGOMA representatives to discuss the progress that can be made in that relationship?

Mr. Milburn: Either the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), or I would be extremely happy to meet representatives, and we shall of course discuss the detail of the proposals, but it is worth bearing in mind the fact that the hon. Member for Woodspring, who is the first to suggest that we should look abroad to other parts of Europe for the solution to

[Mr. Milburn]

all the problems in the NHS, might have reminded the House from the Dispatch Box that the proposal that we are discussing for England is precisely that which has worked in Sweden, Denmark and other countries. It has brought delayed discharge from hospital—the misery of so-called bed blocking—down to much more acceptable levels. The hon. Gentleman is always urging us to look abroad, except in respect of policies that we are implementing at home.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I fully support the reform of the system and the Secretary of State's commitment to delegate the responsibility, but I am sure that he accepts that there is concern about whether there will be sufficient resources to fulfil that responsibility, particularly in counties such as Dorset, which are attractive retirement areas and where there is extreme pressure on the care sector. Can he give me any reassurance about those retired communities?

Mr. Milburn: Clearly we need to ensure that the resources are targeted to the right places and my hon. Friend will be aware that we are reviewing the distribution of resources not only for the NHS, but for social services. Most hon. Members accept that neither the SSA system for distributing local government finance, nor the system for distributing NHS resources, is quite right. I hope that, as we review the system, we will be able to take into account exactly such problems as my hon. Friend has described.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the MORI poll in today's *Financial Times*? It shows that the tax and health package proposed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor makes this year's Budget the most popular for 25 years. People do not think that the Budget will necessarily be good for them, but they recognise that it is good for the country's health service and economy. They do not want to return to an era of failure and cuts, which is what a Conservative Government would bring.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—as is the MORI poll, I suspect. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has done the right thing by the country, although it was not necessarily the easy thing. He has raised the resources to secure the investment needed to put the NHS on a sustainable long-term footing. Even now, I ask Opposition Members contemplating voting against the Budget this evening to think again. It will not be credible for them to stand up in the Chamber—still less in their constituencies—and argue for more resources for their local services if they are not prepared to back investment across the whole health service.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose—*

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle) *rose—*

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster) *rose—*

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak) *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I have given way a lot, and I will give way to the hon. Gentlemen later. For now, I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones).

Lynne Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend. Of course, everyone is pleased about the extra money being made available for the NHS, but there are ongoing concerns about resources for social services. Budgets in that sector are overstretched, and there are not enough places in care homes and nursing homes. Is not my right hon. Friend worried that a policy of fining local authorities over cases of bed blocking may mean that vulnerable people in the community miss out on services? The perverse result could be a rise in emergency admissions. Will my right hon. Friend take that into account as he develops the policies?

Mr. Milburn: First, of course safeguards must be built in. We can no longer allow people's discharge from hospital to be delayed unnecessarily—and neither can we accept a big growth in emergency readmission rates to hospitals. My hon. Friend will have seen in the Command Paper that we issued last Thursday that we intend to ensure that the proper incentives for the NHS and for social services are in place to prevent that.

Secondly, I can assure my hon. Friend that we have examined the question of funding very carefully. The Government have accepted that social services investment must be increased to the extent that is proposed because the Department argued that that is how much is needed to do what needs to be done with regard to services for children and care services for the elderly. The first task is to stabilise the care home market, and expand care home places. In some parts of the country, local authorities will have to decide how to use the extra investment. Increasing fees for residential care homes, for example, will be a matter for local authorities. However, we must also expand the range of provision, and not assume that every old person must end up in a residential care home. Many will want to, but many others will want to retain independence for as long as possible. It is therefore important to make certain that the resources exist to ensure that care is available in care homes, and in people's own homes as well.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): I welcome the extra money being given to health—so much so that I am now thinking very seriously about voting Labour at the next election.

Is my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State aware of the Arbuthnot report, which proposed that additional money should go to Scotland, and to Glasgow in particular? The city has the worst health record in the UK. The Arbuthnot report was not implemented in previous years because that would have meant taking money from other parts of Scotland. Does my right hon. Friend agree that now that new money is being made available more can go to Glasgow without anyone else suffering, and that it is now possible for Glasgow to get the health care that it needs? [HON. MEMBERS: "Good question."] Thank you.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend has not heard the answer yet.

I am aware of the Arbuthnot report, but it is a matter for the Scottish Parliament, not for me. In England, however, we have an opportunity to address the dreadful health inequalities that are a scar on the face of our country, both by ensuring that we get the right investment to the right parts of the country and by waging an unrelenting war on the diseases that kill the most people

in this country—cancer and coronary heart disease. We have made a start; now we have the opportunity to do much, much more. We have made a good start and we need to build on it.

Essentially, the Opposition's grounds for voting against more investment in the NHS are two. First, they argue that putting resources into the NHS does not yield results; in fact, it does. Secondly, they argue that resources are not being matched by reforms; in fact, they are.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I have given way about a dozen times, so I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

I want to test each of the Opposition's propositions. First, they say that resources do not produce results. Yes, there are problems in the NHS at present; they are long-standing problems, brought about by failure both to invest and to reform. No one but a fool—and, of course, Members on the Liberal Benches—could believe that a few years of extra investment would put right decades of underinvestment. The difference between the Labour Government and Conservative Governments is that we are both investing and reforming. Waiting lists rose by 400,000 in the years until 1997, but they have fallen by 100,000 during the years since.

Waiting times are falling, too. The number of people waiting more than 12 months for a hospital operation has fallen by one third in only one year. The number of people experiencing long waits for an out-patient appointment is the lowest on record. The total number waiting for an out-patient appointment is lower than when we came into office. For those with the most serious clinical conditions—cancer and coronary heart disease—waiting times are even lower.

Last year, there were 11 per cent. more heart operations and 13 per cent. more cataract operations. Since 1997, the NHS has been treating over 700,000 more in-patients and over 1 million more out-patients.

In primary care, the prescribing of cholesterol-lowering drugs is up by one third. Tens of thousands of patients are receiving the latest drugs to combat cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease and arthritis. In the past year alone, death rates from cancer fell by 2 per cent., and from heart disease by 5 per cent.

Where do Opposition Members think those improvements came from? They did not come about through the invisible hand of the free market. They did not happen by chance, but because of the choice that the Government made to put extra resources into the NHS. Of course, it is true that the NHS is still feeling the effects of decades of underinvestment. It is true that patients wait too long for treatment and that we still have staff shortages. At present, however, the NHS is the fastest-growing health care system in any major country in Europe.

To those who suggest experience abroad as a lesson for our country, I point out that while health spending as a share of national income is falling in France and Germany it is rising in Britain. Decades of neglect are being put right. Resources are beginning to produce results, and because of the Budget we can finish what we started.

The Opposition say, secondly—

Mr. Wiggin *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is in a different place, but he does not fool me—unless he is the first successful experiment in human cloning.

Dr. Fox: The clones are all behind the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Milburn: I hope not, for all our sakes. I give way to the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin).

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful to the Secretary of State—I shall change my seat more often, although not in the same way as my predecessor.

The Secretary of State will be aware of the extraordinary situation in Herefordshire—not only because I have written to him about it but because I have raised it on other occasions in this place. Today, as he revels in his largesse, provides him with an excellent opportunity to tell not only the House but the people of Herefordshire that he has listened to what they said and that he is aware that the new hospital to be opened in the autumn will be 120 beds short of the number in the previous hospital. As he knows, the primary care trust said that it requires £6.5 million a year.

Mr. Milburn: More money?

Mr. Wiggin: Indeed—£6.5 million a year. While the Secretary of State is asking us to vote for his Budget, perhaps he will take this opportunity to confirm that the primary care trust in Herefordshire will get that £6.5 million a year and that we can have our extra 120 beds.

Mr. Milburn: It is no use raising those issues with me; the hon. Gentleman should raise them with the shadow Chancellor, who tonight will urge his Back-Bench supporters to vote against extra investment in the NHS, not just in Herefordshire, Kent, Avon or Essex, but throughout the country.

The hon. Gentleman now sees the horns of the dilemma on which the Conservatives find themselves: they say that the health service needs more investment, but they are not prepared to commit more investment. They say that they oppose the sources of the extra investment, but they are not prepared to identify new sources of investment. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) nods. I suggest that the hon. Member for Leominster dodges around again and goes to the Front Bench to whisper in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's ear and get him to change his mind.

The Opposition say that there is no reform, but the Budget is every bit as much about reform as it is about investment. The NHS plan, which we published in July 2000, is our 10-year programme for change—national standards, more devolution, greater flexibility among staff and more choice for patients. Last Thursday, I set out in the House and in the Command Paper that we published the next steps that we will now take on those NHS plan reforms.

[Mr. Milburn]

The opponents of the NHS say that reforms can never be made. They say that the NHS cannot offer patients choice because it is not a market. They say that it cannot be sufficiently accountable to members of the public because it is funded from general taxation. They say that it has to be centralised, so stifling local innovation, because it is a public service.

We say that, with the right programme of investment and reform, the NHS need not be a market, but it can offer patient choice; that it should remain tax funded, yet it can be more accountable; and that it can retain its ethos of public service, yet devolve and diversify its services. So alongside the investment will come a strengthened system of inspection and audit to improve accountability to patients and taxpayers. Where more resources are going in, people have the right to know what they are getting out.

Greater accountability will be accompanied by more devolution. Hospitals will be paid by results, through a new system of financial incentives that will give more rewards to those who can treat more patients, more quickly and to higher standards. Social services will also be paid by results—an issue that hon. Members have raised with me—so we will put in place new incentives to end the misery of bed blocking.

For the first time, patients will be able to make informed choices about when and where to be treated. We will start this summer by offering choice to patients who need heart surgery. As capacity expands, choice will grow for more patients. By 2005, patients, with their GPs, will have choice over the location of their treatment, as well as the timing of their treatment.

The hon. Member for Woodspring cannot bring himself to say that those are radical reforms because to do so he would have to acknowledge that the NHS is capable of being reformed. That is not what Conservative Members have in mind. They do not want to reform the NHS; they have decided to reject the NHS—not that they are yet ready to say in public what they say in private.

Only this weekend on the BBC, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe told John Humphrys:

"We haven't got a plan yet. And if we did have a plan, John, you'd laugh me out of this studio."

The Conservative party has spent months on study tours and city breaks, but as I reminded the hon. Member for Woodspring on Thursday, the purpose of travel is not to travel but to arrive. So when he gets to the Dispatch Box, he has got to do more than show us his postcards—he has to outline his prescription.

The truth is the hon. Gentleman has made up his mind already, as we know from what he told the Conservative Medical Society in Harrogate a few weeks ago. Of course, he felt that it was safe to speak then because it was, as he said,

"a secure environment to float ideas without having to read about them . . . in the *Daily Mirror*."

I have here a copy of *The Mirror* of 11 April 2002—it is not very flattering, as it describes the hon. Gentleman as "Dr. Death"—in which his speech is extensively quoted. He outlines his four-step strategy to break the NHS. Step one:

"persuade the public that the NHS is not working";

step two: convince them that it has "never worked before"; step three: tell them that it "will never work"; and step four: get more people to "self-pay" for their own care.

That is the strategy that the Conservatives have been implementing. That is why they say that NHS staff treat patients worse than dogs. That is why they dismiss every step in the right direction. That is why they distort every issue. And that is why we will expose their strategy for what it is. It is denigration for a purpose—a cynical attempt to destroy the bond of trust between the British people and the British health service.

Chris Grayling: Can I take the right hon. Gentleman back three years to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's previous Budget announcement of £40 billion of extra spending on public services, including a substantial chunk for the national health service? If the NHS is the vehicle to deliver better health care, why have we seen no signs at ground level in our constituencies of improvements as a result of that extra spending?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman obviously lives in a parallel universe.

Chris Grayling: I see problems every day of the week.

Mr. Milburn: Of course there are problems in the national health service; we acknowledge that. I do not pretend that everything is perfect, but the hon. Gentleman should not pretend that everything is hopeless, because it is not. The NHS is growing and expanding. Numbers of nurses, doctors and beds are up; waiting lists and waiting times are coming down. Yes, of course there is a long way to go, but the only way to ensure that we continue to make progress is to get in the investment alongside the reforms.

As I said to the hon. Gentleman before, if he is concerned about the national health service, what will he do tonight to support it now that he has an opportunity to do so? No one should pretend that if we want world-class health care in our country it can come without being paid for.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): May I welcome the investment on behalf of pensioners in my constituency? Under the Government's plan, my pensioners will not pay a penny, whereas under the Conservatives' plan they would have to pay—if they could find an insurance policy that would insure them.

Before 1997, two community hospitals in my constituency were threatened with cuts by the Conservative Government. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that this Government will give the investment to primary care trusts that will allow those community hospitals to deliver services for elderly patients at the nearest point to where they live?

Mr. Milburn: That is precisely what we propose. When we came into office, GPs controlled about 15 per cent. of overall NHS budgets. Today, through the primary care trusts, they help to control about 50 per cent., and over the course of the next two years they will control 75 per cent. Indeed, if we can go further than that, we should do so. The money should be out there on the front

line, controlled not by politicians or by civil servants, but by front-line doctors, nurses and local patients and members of the public.

On my hon. Friend's first point, he is absolutely right. The choice about funding health care is not whether we pay more for improved health care, but how we pay it. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe and the hon. Member for Woodspring both acknowledged that we need to put more money into our health care system; there is consensus on that. The issue is how best to do so. The choice is not between one system funded through general taxation, which might result in higher national insurance contributions, and another system that comes for free. Every health care system in the world has to be paid for.

Conservative Members are in danger of arguing that the grass is inevitably greener on the other side. Yet when they look at social insurance systems in France and Germany, they will see that although more investment has been going in, it has been going in for decades. The costs of importing the German system would be the equivalent of approximately £1,000 per worker a year; the French system would cost around £1,500 per worker a year. That is the problem with social insurance.

I shall outline the problems with private health insurance; the hon. Member for Woodspring has form on that. I do not know whether he will advocate it, but he knows that it means increased bureaucracy, decreased efficiency and heightened inequity. The British Medical Association review stated more than a year ago that

"on the grounds of both equity and efficiency retaining a centrally tax funded system which remains essentially free at the point of use is preferable to introducing other systems."

There are good reasons for saying that the case for a tax-funded NHS is stronger than ever. In a world where health care can do more but also cost more than ever, providing care according to need rather than according to ability to pay is the best insurance policy in the world.

Conservative Members like to pretend that we have a closed mind on learning lessons from other countries. That is simply untrue. Of course there are lessons to be learned from abroad. However, the first lesson is not to abandon our system of tax-based funding, and to make the right supply-side reforms. Our proposals on patient choice are therefore modelled on the success of that approach in the tax-funded health care systems of Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

Payment by results and output-based funding are founded on experiences not only in Scandinavia, but in Australia, Austria, France and Germany. Our plans to reduce delayed discharge, which the hon. Member for Woodspring seems to have taken against, are modelled on those in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Models similar to foundation hospitals exist throughout Europe, whether in Sweden or Spain. Diagnostic and treatment centres are increasingly common not only in this country but in the United States.

The difference between the Government's approach to lessons from abroad and that of the Conservative party is that we have sought to learn lessons to strengthen the NHS, whereas Conservative Members look for excuses to undermine it. Why else do they refuse to learn the big lesson from countries such as France, Germany, Denmark or Sweden? It is that better health care requires more resources alongside effective reforms. Those countries do not have a superior system but a superior level of funding for health care. In the Budget, we apply the lessons that we have learned.

By contrast, the Conservative position frankly lacks principle and credibility. Conservative Members say that health care needs more resources, but refuse to say how much. They say that they will not back our sources of extra investment, but refuse to explain where they will get the resources. They say that the NHS must be reformed but refuse to outline their programme of reform.

There is only one conclusion. Today's Conservative party does not want the NHS to expand, but to decline. Conservative Members do not want a one-nation service, but two-tier health care. When they claim that they want the NHS to be reformed, they mean that they want it to be abandoned.

Labour Members say that that is not the right way forward for health care in our country. Tonight we will vote for investment plus reform. We will vote for increases in funding, but improvements in performance; we will vote to put more in, but demand to get more out. Tonight, we will vote for the NHS. We will do that with our heads as well as our hearts.

4.18 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I agree with one comment in the Secretary of State's speech. There is much in the current debate on health care on which both sides agree. He is correct that we agree on the need to spend more on health care in the United Kingdom—however the money is raised—and that it should be available to all, irrespective of ability to pay. I go further. I agree with the Secretary of State's comment that

"what we need to see over time is actually more diversity and more plurality in the health care system."

I hope that he was serious when he said on Sunday that private management might well run national health service hospitals by the next general election.

There is undoubtedly a growing appetite for a genuine debate about health care in this country, and I welcome that. The Conservative party will make proposals on organisation and funding, and I should be surprised if they were not vigorously debated in the House and beyond. Many other systems are worth examining and most of them lead to better cure and survival rates and shorter waiting times than the NHS. The Secretary of State is right; in many ways, the grass is greener on the other side, and that is what we would like to see on this side as well.

The Chancellor would have us believe that there is a simple choice between the NHS and a US-style insurance model. That is a completely bogus argument. A whole range of systems of funding and structure shares this country's values of availability to all, irrespective of ability to pay, and delivers to poor and vulnerable people better quality health care than those groups receive in Britain. Just to set the record straight with the Secretary of State, I spent part of my time as a medical student studying in the United States, and I do not find the United States an attractive alternative model for health care in the United Kingdom. I believe, however, that the experiences of a number of other countries could lead to improvement here.

Those arguments are for another time, however. Today, we are discussing the Government's plans for our NHS in the Budget and the reform package. It is the beginning of

[Dr. Liam Fox]

their sixth year in office. We ask whether they offer real hope of improvement or whether, in the Chancellor's terms, the scale of reform matches the scale of his tax and spending plans.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): The hon. Gentleman says that he has an open mind on the future financing of health care, but is there not mounting evidence that he has, in fact, made up his mind? I refer to a message sent to me by the NHS Confederation about a conference that the Conservative party held. It states:

"Last week . . . we joined a group of think tanks . . . at a Conservative Party seminar designed to help them with their policy formation. Many believed that the NHS needed to be dismantled and replaced by a variety of competing providers and insurers."

Has not the hon. Gentleman made up his mind?

Dr. Fox: I understand that the term "think tank" is entirely alien to new Labour. The whole point, when at an early point in opposition, is to bring together groups such as the NHS Confederation and the King's Fund—which I am sure the hon. Gentleman would not regard as having closed minds or being outrageously right wing—so that we can have a proper debate about these matters, in a way that the Chancellor is clearly trying to preclude in his own party. They came because we wanted to take soundings from a wide range of those involved in health care provision.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East) *rose—*

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Dr. Fox: I will give way again in a moment.

The Government would like us to believe that this is not the beginning of their sixth year in office but year zero for their health policy, and that if we only give them just a little more time, all will be well. They have already been in office for five years, however, and their record is hardly one to shout about.

Let me remind the Secretary of State what the real NHS looks like. We have seen the loss of 50,000 care home beds, a bed-blocking crisis, and record numbers of cancelled operations, hospital infection rates, and readmission rates among the elderly, many of whom are sent out of hospital early to make the statistics look better. We have also seen the clinical distortions arising from the Government's flawed waiting list policy.

Of course, there have been good things, too. The establishment of the Commission for Health Improvement, in particular, is a positive development. We shall wait to see whether the new primary care trusts achieve the benefits promised. When the Labour Government came to office, and when they were re-elected, they were promising more than just some improvement. Let us remember that they had 24 hours to save the NHS. That has now turned into the Prime Minister's aim to have it basically fixed by 2010. They promised us world-class public services by the next election, so it is only reasonable for us to expect them to have met some of the targets that they have missed so far.

Mr. Howarth: I want to take the hon. Gentleman back a few minutes in his speech. Most people would accept that, at this stage in the political cycle, it is not unreasonable that the Opposition should look around and consider what policies are appropriate for them to adopt. I would certainly accept that. In the unlikely event of the Conservatives winning the next election, it would take them 12 to 18 months—perhaps even longer—to implement any new proposals. People find it perplexing at this stage in the political cycle that, in the absence of any meaningful proposals of their own, the Conservatives are not prepared to accept the Budget proposals of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, and the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for reform and increased funding. The hon. Gentleman is incoherent rather than enlightening—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. Fox: The choice for the Opposition on these occasions is simple. We are weighing up whether we think that the costs and benefits of the Government's proposals are sensible. The costs are certainly high in terms of both reducing personal income and increasing costs to employers, which will result in a loss of competitiveness in our economy. We have to balance that against whether we think that the Government's plans for reform will deliver. It is our judgment that they will not deliver what the Government promise and so our position is entirely justified.

We are looking not only at what the Government promise, but at what stage they should have reached according to their timetable of reform. They promised that they would achieve a set of benchmarks on the way to the 10-year NHS plan and it is reasonable for us to see whether those have been met. They promised us that more NHS patients would be treated in the private sector. They boasted in December last year of a done-and-dusted deal with the BUPA hospital at Redhill in Surrey. We now find out that nothing has been signed. So much for a done-and-dusted deal.

Before they were elected, the Government promised us an end to the indignity of mixed-sex wards, but patients still have to endure that humiliation five years into their Administration. They promised free nursing care, but it turned out not to be free because it was capped at £110 a week. They promised that by April 2002, 35 per cent. of trusts would have electronic patient record systems, but that is the case for only 3 per cent. They promised more capacity and less bureaucracy, but there are 12,000 fewer beds than when Labour came to office in 1997 and they have managed to increase the number of administrators to 1.15 for every bed in the NHS.

The Government told us that they had met the promise for patients waiting more than 15 months, with only two patients across the country now waiting for that long. When the Secretary of State announced that achievement, we were inundated with telephone calls, e-mails and faxes from people up and down the country wanting to know who the other person was.

Mr. Salmond: All that being so, can we return to thinking the unthinkable? What was the truth behind the leak in *The Mirror*? The hon. Gentleman is a fair-minded man and he must accept that his comments on the NHS read pretty badly. Was he lured into saying something he did not want to say? Was he tricked in some fashion? What was the truth behind that story?

Dr. Fox: The same newspaper said:

"Today is a very good day to bury Alan Milburn"

when one of the Government's figures was published that did not suit it. Not only were my comments made at a fringe meeting, but it was open to everyone, including the press. Only *The Mirror* would believe that that was part of a closed conspiracy. As several people, including the Labour party's press officer, were present, I am surprised that it took *The Mirror* an entire month to get a world exclusive.

Before, during and just after the Budget statement, it became increasingly clear that Ministers have a new lexicon. They have learned the language of reform, but what lies beneath that language? Are the soundbites made to please the private sector and the right-of-centre press, or do they have substance? There is a huge suspicion that the Chancellor has agreed to part with the cash before the plans to spend it have been finalised. Of course, that story has probably been planted by the Treasury so any failure will be blamed on the Secretary of State and will not interfere with the Chancellor's main agenda.

On Sunday, I wrote to the Secretary of State setting out a number of questions that illustrate the problems that arise because of the lack of detail in the Government's proposals. It will ultimately be the detail that matters in terms of whether the Government deliver on their programme. I asked: if money is to follow the patient, what new information technology systems will be required? Will money automatically follow any patient who wants to be treated outside their geographical area and, if so, what say will the PCTs have as they are now nominally independent? If hospitals are to be paid by results, what will happen to those that achieve no stars under the Government's rating if patients refuse to go there? What effect will that have on their funding and will they, or parts of them, be forced to close? That is an extraordinarily important question.

If patients choose to be treated in a private hospital or overseas instead of by the NHS, which has been mooted by the Government, will the entire NHS benchmark funding go with them, or will strings be attached? Will private companies competing to treat patients at nationally fixed rates be required to meet the same terms and conditions of employment for their staff as the NHS? Will the new auditors have powers to audit or inspect hospitals abroad that are treating NHS patients and receiving British taxpayers' money?

The subject of the auditor gives rise to other important questions. It will take time to introduce that office through primary legislation, time to get it up and running and time for it to report. By our reckoning, the very earliest that such a body will be able to report to Parliament is 2005. The body set up by the Chancellor to guarantee to monitor how our taxes are to be spent will not be able to report to Parliament until after the money has been spent. Once again, we are being entirely hoodwinked by spin and a false calendar—*[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) says, only after the next election will the body be introduced that will tell the voters how their extra taxes have been spent. What makes the difference to the provision of care is not how one audits and monitors but how one spends the money, and it is on that point that we intend to hold the Government to account.

Much has been said in this debate about opinion polls. It has been suggested that there will be much in which the Government can take comfort in the short term. This is the most popular Budget since 1977, according to the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies). Oh, he has already left the Chamber—hard lines for him, but no sadness to the House. I shall just remind the Government what happened in the aftermath of that Budget. We saw Chancellors arriving at Heathrow airport, having been humiliated by the International Monetary Fund; we had the winter of discontent, and the Government were thrown out of office. If that is the precedent that the hon. Gentleman wants to follow, I am sure that we can live with that.

The clear message from pre-Budget and post-Budget polls is that there is public scepticism about the direct link between spending and outcome. There is no doubt that it is possible to spend more, much more, without success. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have spending levels per head which are much higher than those in England and, indeed, above the European average, but waiting lists in Wales and Northern Ireland are much longer than those in England, with rates of 23.7 and 33.2 per 1,000 respectively, compared with only 21.2 per 1,000 in England. Waiting times in Scotland are going up.

No one believes that with the increased cost of medical science, improvement can come without any increase in spending. Historically, health care has been underfunded in the UK compared with many of our European neighbours. The Secretary of State is entirely right about that, but it is worth pointing out that UK spending fell below the European average not in 1979 but in 1963. For all but 18 months of my life we have been falling behind our European neighbours, and when the Labour party tries to say that that is entirely as a result of Conservative Government, I have to point out that Labour was in office for 16 of those years. We clearly need a higher level of debate about attracting funding as well as about how we organise it.

We need to ask ourselves two questions. First, how do we best spend any available money to produce the best quality health care? Secondly, how much can we afford to spend? Unfortunately, the Government have those questions the wrong way round, and they have decided how much to spend before they have decided how to spend it. It was that mistaken order of priority that saw spending double in the 1990s, under both parties, and increase by £18 billion after 1998. Yet we still see increasing numbers of elderly patients trapped in hospital beds, A and E patients treated on trolleys or even on the floor and a recruitment and retention crisis among health professionals.

Nowhere in the NHS is that manpower crisis seen more clearly and nowhere is the challenge greater than in my previous area of general practice. One of the Government's central promises was that they would recruit 2,000 more GPs by 2004. They are already falling well behind that target, but I wonder how many hon. Members, even on the Government side of the House, understand quite how far. In 1996–97, the increase in whole-time equivalent GPs in England was 111. By 1998–99, that figure had fallen to 71 throughout the whole country, and in both 1999–2000 and 2000–01, the increase in England was 18.

[Dr. Fox]

The Government will no doubt argue that the number of trainee GPs has increased, which is correct. The number of fully trained GPs going into general practice, however, has gone down. The problem is even worse than it looks at first glance—16.5 per cent. of all GPs on 1 November 1992 qualified in overseas medical schools and roughly two thirds who were practising then will have retired by 2007. Not only will that have a disproportionate effect geographically, because of their distribution, but many of those doctors will work close to the retirement age of 65. When they are taken out of the statistics, the alarming revelation is that most UK-qualified doctors are retiring at the age of 58. Not only will the increase in the number of GPs come nowhere close to the Government's fantasy target of 2,000, but it is entirely possible that it will remain entirely static over the period in which the Government said that there would be a huge increase. There is nothing in this Budget to help the morale of the country's hard-pressed GPs.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: If I may, I shall quote from a letter that appeared on the letter page of *The Times* yesterday. A GP wrote:

"I am also self-employed within the NHS. As a result (in common with other GPs) some of my staff costs are reimbursed. In 1990 the Government paid 70 per cent. of these costs, now this figure is creeping below 50 per cent. To add insult to injury, not only am I being penalised personally to fund my employer but I will have to pay more on behalf of my staff as well."

If the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) can tell me how taxing NHS staff more will help recruitment and retention, I would love to hear the answer.

Linda Gilroy: As the hon. Gentleman is highlighting the shortage of doctors, will he apologise to his constituents, my constituents and those of all hon. Members, given that it takes seven years to train one?

Dr. Fox: The logic of the hon. Lady's question is rather dubious, as the Government constantly trumpet the increased number of GP trainees. By her definition, all of them must have started their medical education under the last Conservative Government. If there is an increase in the number of trainees, that is nothing to do with the Government. The problem with the Government is that those trainees do not want a career in general practice because morale is constantly undermined by interference from politicians in clinical freedom. GPs have less ability to do what they think is right, and they are now being taxed more into the bargain, notwithstanding the fact that they are more likely to be sued. All those elements contribute to general practice being much less attractive as a career, and responsibility for most of them lies at the door of the Secretary of State. I suggest that the hon. Lady saves her questions for the wind-up this evening.

The Secretary of State told us this afternoon about the Government's closed mind. We have had many indications of what he described as their closed mind. That is perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the Government's policy. To make matters worse, the Chancellor's closed mind was forced on the Department of Health. The Wanless report, which was held up as a great independently minded tome, was simply used as a smokescreen to raise our taxes. Its conclusions could have been written in advance, and its contribution to the health debate was minimal at best.

That closed mind, which the Secretary of State mentioned, prevents the Government from dealing with four of the biggest problems in the national health service. For all the talk, it remains hugely centralised. Devolution, which was written and directed in Whitehall, is a sham. The primary care trusts will have their budgets decided by the Secretary of State. He will set the budgets, decide the performance targets and withhold funding as he sees fit. Labour's concept of earned autonomy is an oxymoron; it means that people can do what they like, but only if it is what Labour likes. The system also remains hugely politicised. Far too many appointments are made according to political allegiance rather than health expertise. Since the introduction of the so-called independent Appointments Commission, the number of appointments given to those who expressed an allegiance to the Labour party has gone up. The system is becoming even more politicised than it was when it was being criticised by Dame Rennie Fritchie only a couple of years ago.

The system also remains hugely wasteful. In case hon. Members think that I am bigoted in terms of what newspapers I read, the *Sunday Mirror*—the Chancellor's fanzine—pointed out this week the loss of

"£9 billion down the drain every year in the NHS . . . £2 billion because of bedblocking or late-cancelled operations . . . £1 billion because of infections caught in hospitals; £400 million on clinical negligence; £300–£600 million on wasteful prescribing and over-priced drugs; £100 million on avoidable management costs."

Given the Treasury's intense interest in the content of the Mirror group of newspapers, I presume that the Chancellor is hugely concerned by those figures.

Perhaps most worrying is the Government's failure to deal with lack of choice in the NHS. All too often in the NHS, patients are seen to service the system, rather than the system being seen to exist to service the patients. What the Government mean by choice is extremely unclear. The Secretary of State told the House:

"Within three years, all patients, with their GPs, will be able to book hospital appointments at a time and a place that is convenient to them."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 716.]

Yet by this weekend, on "On the Record", that unambiguous promise had been diluted into:

"if the Primary Care Trust and if your local GP and you yourself as a patient decide . . . There are a lot of ifs about this—decide that what you want to do is to be treated in that hospital, then providing it's got the capacity that's fine."

Little wonder the public are so hugely sceptical, when what Ministers say one day is translated into something entirely different another day. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State says that it is obvious that capacity is essential. We all acknowledge that—so why did he make a promise that he knew he could not fulfil, given the failure of reform up to that point?

Since the Budget, desperate Ministers have described the NHS as the world's best insurance policy, so let us examine the case for that assertion. The first reason why the NHS is not the world's best insurance policy is that consumers cannot tell whether they are getting value for money. In Germany, whose system the Secretary of State

so deprecates, consumers can compare the prices of sickness funds and if they do not like what they see in one, they can choose another. We in this country have no idea how much of our tax goes to the NHS because of the Chancellor's rejection of hypothecation. Secondly, people on middle incomes cannot tell whether they are paying enough to assist the poor because we know too little about access and outcomes. Thirdly, the payment we make to the Treasury does not guarantee us any power of choice. Fourthly, the NHS is a state-run monopoly with no real competition.

Let us imagine telephoning the world's best insurance company for car insurance. We might be told, "We can't say how much it will cost you—we'll take an unspecified sum directly from your pay packet each month. Although we will promise you fully comprehensive, high-quality, universal coverage, we won't detail what rights you have to expect that, and if you make a claim, we might not get around to the repair for 15 months, especially if your car's an older model, and even then you'll have no choice of repairer." How long would such a company stay in business?

Clive Efford (Eltham): The hon. Gentleman is fixated on people on low incomes, but when we talk about a universal insurance policy, we have chronic illnesses in mind as well. Can he tell me about one insurance policy that covers chronic illnesses?

Dr. Fox: The German social insurance policy ensures that people get access to chronic disease management far better than they get in the United Kingdom. The Chancellor says that we cannot even consider other systems because of the effect that they would have on the poor and vulnerable. I say to him, go to France, Holland or Germany and see what happens to the poor and vulnerable of those countries—they get far better quality care than people in many parts of the United Kingdom.

Clive Efford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: No. The hon. Gentleman had his chance and he blew it.

We will, no doubt, engage in much further debate on how we finance health care, but the way in which money is spent must take priority.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: No. I will not give way again.

There are real doubts about the NHS's ability properly to absorb spending increases of such magnitude within such a time scale. The Conservatives will continue to examine the ways in which other countries organise and fund their health care, to see what lessons we can learn for the sake of the people of the United Kingdom. As the King's Fund puts it:

"It is time to stop making heroic promises, and buckle down to the unglamorous detail of building a good-enough health system for the 21st century."

The Labour Government will ultimately live or die as a result of their success or failure in producing a world-class NHS by the next election—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. It is no good hon. Members baying at a Member addressing the House; the hon. Gentleman will indicate if he is prepared to give way. He has said that for the moment he is not.

Dr. Fox: It is entirely characteristic of the party with no arguments but lots of volume to adopt such an approach in the House. It knows, as do the voters of this country, that the Government will ultimately live or die as a result of the success or failure of producing not good, not better, but world-class health services by the next election. We will monitor their performance; we will support them when we think that they are right, and produce alternatives when we think that they are wrong. The push for deeper reform must continue. The life and death of the Government is one thing, but failure to reform is a matter of life and death for our fellow citizens and is of a completely different order of magnitude.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 15-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

4.45 pm

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): The arguments of the shadow spokesman on health were baseless. Under Conservative rule, the national health service in my constituency was completely privatised; people found it difficult to get any service at all because of Conservative policy. I am sure that people know that the Conservatives will pursue such policies again.

My hon. Friends and I were pleased that the Budget moved us to the next stage of our agenda to improve public services. During our first term in office, it was essential to stabilise the economy and provide a sound economic footing for the reforms and improvements in health and education that we promised. We undoubtedly achieved that, despite the shock to economies around the world caused by the 11 September attacks. Last year, the British economy was the fastest growing of those of the Group of Seven rich nations. The Chancellor consequently judged that we were in a position to put significantly more money into our public services to compensate for years of underinvestment, which was worst during the 18 years of Conservative rule.

It is not just the Labour party that believes that investment in services has been inadequate for a number of years. An economic survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development published in November said that, thanks to fiscal consolidation in recent Budgets, there is room to address what it describes as

"a poor quality of public infrastructure"

derived in part from a "long period of underfunding".

The health service is set to be the main but by no means the only beneficiary of that extra funding, with a cash injection of £40 billion by the year 2007–08—a rise of over 40 per cent. in real terms—to be funded largely by an increase in national insurance. The Chancellor considered that the fairest means of funding improvements. Some people, including the Conservatives, have criticised that as a stealthy way of raising income tax, but a rise in income tax would have hit pensioners the hardest, which we did not want to do if at all possible.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Khabra: No, I do not have much time.

Undoubtedly the amounts pledged on health spending are huge, and the Chancellor has made some optimistic assumptions about the levels of growth necessary to fund the increases. However, optimism is not the same as recklessness; the Treasury team has been remarkably accurate in its forecasts. In its conclusions on the Budget, Deloitte and Touche argues that the Chancellor's optimism on growth will probably be vindicated.

Increased Government spending on health has already contributed to improvements in my constituency, and I have noticed that people have benefited from that. Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow health authority in my area secured an extra £225,000 from the Government to help people stop smoking, and smoking cessation clinics are now open in all three boroughs covered by the health authority. Extra funding has also helped the health authority to spend £625 million on hospital, community and health services in 2002–03, compared with £472 million in 1998–99. That is the result of more money being given to the health service.

The Wanless report offered an insight into the scale of the task ahead, with enormous improvements necessary in buildings, equipment and information technology. The British Medical Association, reflecting on the scale of the increase in funding, said that there was "real hope" for improvement. However, as the chief executive of the Patients Association pointed out, extra money is all well and good, but it needs to be invested properly. The Chancellor made that clear to the House on the day that he presented his Budget.

I welcome the announcement of an annual statement by a commission for health care audit and inspection, which will soon be appointed to inspect and comment on how the extra cash is being spent. I am pleased that the commission is to be independent of both the NHS and the Government and that it will report annually to Parliament rather than to Ministers. I hope that Conservative Members will be pleased to see that happen as soon as possible.

The problem of wasting the extra money will not be an easy one to overcome, but it is essential that we avoid the possibility that, as *The Economist* put it, the NHS will

"gag on the huge quantities of money being stuffed down its throat"

as we seek to make improvements.

The Conservatives have attacked—

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Khabra: May I finish?

The Conservatives have attacked the increases in taxation generally and the method of funding the NHS specifically, yet they have failed to respond convincingly when asked how they would fund investment and how the NHS would be different under a Conservative Government. They have failed miserably to answer those questions, even today in the House. Their retort so far has been that they are still developing their agenda for the NHS. The public have no idea when they will have completed that.

Dr. Fox: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. The point was best made for the Opposition some time ago, when it was said:

"Time for reflection is necessary because the political landscape will alter over the next five years. There is no point in our debating whether our policies were right for"

the last election

"because we will not be asked to fight"

the last election "for a second time." Those were the words of John Smith. It was wise advice to the Opposition and we will stick to it.

Mr. Khabra: That may be the hon. Gentleman's view; it is not mine. It is all very well for the Opposition to adopt such a view, but a Government in office must present a Budget each year and make decisions and commitments. The Government cannot simply wait and see. The Opposition have the luxury of engaging in debate without having to put real proposals before the House and say what they would do if ever they had the opportunity.

The other charge made against the Government—that Labour is returning to tax and spend simply for taxing and spending's sake—is ridiculous. I do not believe that we are in danger of crippling the public with tax rises. As we have seen over the past five or six years, the noises from the Opposition Benches have had no effect at all on the economic position of the country. There is more money in people's pockets.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me?

Mr. Khabra: No.

It is true that taxes have risen under Labour, but they have not risen nearly as dramatically as some people imply. For example—

Mr. Barker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Khabra: Let me continue.

For example, figures released by the OECD last year show that the tax burden of income tax plus employee contributions as a percentage of gross income was lower than in our main European competitor countries, which is a record. The burden was also slightly lower than in the United States. Indirect taxes undoubtedly increase the tax burden further, but I think that many people will be surprised about having lower percentages in comparison with those of other nations. As Martin Wolf, writing in the *Financial Times*, pointed out, the headline-grabbing tax increases in this year's Budget still amount to less than 1 per cent. of GDP over the next four years.

With regard to other provisions in the Budget, I feel that the Chancellor has introduced some useful changes. For example, in respect of small businesses, which are many and diverse in my constituency, I welcome the measures to ease the impact of VAT as well as the penny cut in corporation tax rates for small businesses. I am sure that many small businesses in my community will benefit and will be able to contribute more to the development of the economy as a result.

I also hope that my constituency might benefit from the new community tax credit, which is intended to support enterprise and investment in disadvantaged areas such as mine. Southall in particular is feeling the strain of a high

number of asylum seekers and other immigrants—I make this point for the attention of Front Benchers—in increased pressure not only on housing, but on education and environmental services. That pressure is worrying my constituents in the Southall area, which has been completely neglected in terms of new money. I hope that the Government will make extra investment in such places a priority and that the Treasury will take them into consideration. Areas such as mine are prone to ethnic tensions, and there is already a deterioration in people's living standards.

One aspect of the Budget with which I was a little disappointed was the failure to close the tax loophole that allows foreign business men who are resident in Britain to avoid paying tax on much of their income. That is the point that Ministers should take on board after this debate. We were right to be critical of the loophole when we were in opposition, and I should like all those who can afford to pay their way in taxes to contribute. We should not be one of the few nations that lets the problem happen.

Despite that concern, I broadly welcome the Budget proposals and the shift in emphasis from stabilising this country's finances to investing in our future. Economic stability is essential, but it should not be an end in itself. It should have a purpose, and I believe that investment in our public services is a very worthy purpose, as the Chancellor emphasised in his Budget. If we want a health service that meets the expectations of the public, we have to invest, and he has committed himself to doing that. I am pleased that he has been brave enough to make the case for that investment in a Budget that is truly for the health of our country, and I am delighted that the majority of the public have supported the rise in national insurance contributions. They fully realise that money has to be made available, and the Chancellor considers national insurance the best way of raising it.

I congratulate the Chancellor of the Exchequer on his popular Budget for investment in public services, and I shall vote for it tonight.

5 pm

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): The House's formal debate on the Budget has almost come to an end, but I suspect that the debate outside—on the health service above all, but also on the Government's entire approach to public services since taking office, including the decisive change in the funding of those services—is in many senses only just beginning. We welcome that change, which we called for, but so far as the equivalent of a penny extra on national insurance is concerned, I am tempted to say that that was the longest wait to spend a penny in history.

The Budget is decisive for another reason: it has finally forced into the open the floundering position of the Conservative party and its attitude towards the national health service. We now know that it is a party with no arguments—a criticism that the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) levelled at the Government a moment ago. Of course, the Conservatives know only what they do not like, and they do not like the national health service. They cannot offer an alternative, yet they oppose the funding that would tackle the problems that patients face, while asking us to wait until who knows when for them to offer a solution.

Chris Grayling: Does the hon. Gentleman share my desire for a health care system that works and that has no waiting lists, as in virtually every other European country? After a decade in which Conservative and Labour Governments have poured money into the national health service with few measurable results, is it not appropriate to consider whether lessons can be learned from methods used elsewhere?

Matthew Taylor: The hon. Gentleman should take a moment to consider the number of doctors and nurses available to the public in every other European country, and spending on their health systems. Various systems all have in common much greater investment and many more staff, which result in much better outcomes. At the front line, it does not matter whether doctors are paid for through a private health scheme, a social insurance scheme or national taxation, provided that they are available to patients. Under private insurance schemes, doctors are too often unavailable because patients do not have such insurance and cannot afford to pay. Under social insurance schemes, patients can be asked to pay more than they would pay under a national health system, or to make a direct cash contribution to treatment by their GP. In other words, such a scheme is less fair, more expensive and does not of itself deliver better care—unless one pays the staff to do the job.

Mrs. Browning: During the Budget debate and in the media, the Liberal Democrat spokesman on trade and industry has opposed the 1 per cent. employers' national insurance increase. Will the Liberal Democrats vote for that tax tonight?

Matthew Taylor: If the hon. Lady casts a glance at the Order Paper, she will discover that there is no such vote tonight, so the answer is that we shall not vote on it and nor will she. I shall deal with the issue that she raises in a few moments, which prompts me to move on a little.

Mr. Barker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Matthew Taylor: I shall give way later, but I want to make progress. I did hope that, in giving way to Conservative Members, we might hear about their alternative proposal, but of course, they do not know what it is. They know only that they oppose the NHS, and no one will grant them credibility while that is so. Worse still, they are asking for no extra resources for the NHS—for the patients who need treatment today and tomorrow—because they believe that an alternative will come to them in a flash of intuition just before the next general election.

Mr. Barker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Matthew Taylor: I told the hon. Gentleman that I want to make some progress.

The first test that we set for the Budget was the test of whether the Government would at last start to tackle underinvestment and underspending—a word that I want to reintroduce to the House. Matthew Parris sadly no longer writes his column in *The Times*, but he rightly said that the word "spending" has disappeared, and I want to use that proper word. We know that the Government have not been delivering on long-term capital investment. It does not suit the Conservative party to say that, so it does not expose the Labour Government's failure, which leaves them free to get away with cuts in investment.

[Matthew Taylor]

The real figures show that public sector net investment from 1992 to 1997 was on average 1.5 per cent. of national income. Under five years of Labour, it has fallen to less than half that. That is why there is not enough investment in public services. In every year since 1997, public sector net investment has been lower than it was in 1995. Only in 2006–07 will it reach the same proportion of gross domestic product as in 1992–93. That is why public services are crumbling.

The Conservatives argue that there has been investment in public services, but that chucking money at the problem has not succeeded. The truth is that no money has been chucked at it, and this Government's record is even worse than that of the Conservative Government.

I want to deal also with spending and the direct day-to-day costs of investment in staff—the teachers, doctors and nurses who have to deliver the service. It is true that tax has risen as a proportion of GDP since 1997, but in 2000–01 total spending as a proportion of national income was lower than in any year of Tory Government between 1979 and 1997. That is true even if we strip out debt and social security. The Government argue that we are paying less on debt and unemployment, but that is not the answer. Labour chose to follow Conservative cuts in the early years, and the later spending increases did nothing to balance that out. At first they were mythical, and even when they eventually arrived they were so late that they were hardly in time for the general election campaign.

Linda Gilroy: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the Peninsula medical school, which is about to open its doors to its first students from Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall this September, would have been built had the Tories remained in power? Will he acknowledge the fact that such significant ventures are under way in the south-west peninsula?

Matthew Taylor: The hon. Lady argues that the position would have been worse under the Conservatives, and I am sure that it would have been. I doubt that the Conservatives would have reversed the cuts, as Labour started to do at the end of the last Parliament.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Two wrongs do not make a right.

Matthew Taylor: As my hon. Friend says, two wrongs do not make a right.

The biggest problem identified in the Wanless report is the growing gap between the number of doctors who will be in place and the number that we need. That gap will grow even after the late investment that Labour has made in training more doctors. That investment should have been made when Labour first came to office. I suspect that the hon. Lady agrees with me, and would have liked the Government to have taken those decisions five years ago. Many Labour Back Benchers wanted them to do that.

Linda Gilroy: Will the hon. Gentleman give way again?

Matthew Taylor: I want to move on, and the hon. Lady may find that I will answer her point. Many Labour Members privately agree with us that the Government's greatest error was to fail to make that investment early on.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Matthew Taylor: I shall move on, and then I shall take some more interventions.

Average spending on pensioners was 4.4 per cent. of GDP between 1992 and 1997, but that has fallen under Labour to 4.3 per cent. for the period to 2003–04. Labour's pension credit, which it says is designed to relieve pensioner poverty, has an outstanding problem. The Chancellor, who likes to complicate the tax system, has delivered a change for pensioners that, sadly, will—like so much else that Labour has done—leave without many people whom the Government acknowledge are needy. On the Government's own figures, one in three of those entitled to the pension credit will not find their way through the complicated forms. Indeed, pensioners do not want to be seen to claim benefits to get the money that they need. The fact is that the Government have introduced a system that will means-test millions, but leave some 1.5 million people who are entitled to that pensioner support without it.

Average health spending between 1992 and 1997, when we, like many Labour Back Benchers, campaigned for change and the investment that the health service so obviously and badly needed, was 5.4 per cent. of GDP. In 1997, it was cut, and only after 1999–2000 did it begin to exceed the Conservative averages. Again, the cuts took years to retrieve—years in which patients suffered, doctors were not trained, the number of beds fell and hospitals closed. Exactly the same can be said of education. Average spending between 1992 and 1997 was 5 per cent. of GDP. Under Labour, all the way forward to 2003–04, it still averages only 4.8 per cent.

The fact is that Labour failed to invest. Now we come to the excuse, which we heard from the Secretary of State, "Oh, we had to balance the economy. We inherited an economy with huge deficits and problems." That is true. Taxes rose and spending did not, because Labour spent most of that money on clearing the deficit—the £20 billion every year that the Conservatives spent but did not pay for through taxes. In that process, the Conservatives were, of course, wrecking the economy in the long run. Labour may have put that right, but because it allowed itself no tax rises for health or education, it left health and education cuts in place.

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Mr. Levitt *rose—*

Matthew Taylor: I shall finish my point and then give way to both hon. Members.

In fact, the situation is worse, because Labour released funds and the Chancellor found money. What did he find it for? Tax cuts. We are told that Labour could not spend extra money because it was not there, but a penny came off income tax. Although the measure was hugely unpopular, the Chancellor made that choice; it is the very penny that Labour has in effect put on the national insurance system.

What else did we see in the run-up to the general election, only just over a year ago? The Chancellor announced some £3.6 billion of tax cuts for this year and £4.2 billion for next year, describing them as

"tax cuts we can afford".—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 308.]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry described them as prudent.

The money was there, but Labour believed those on the Conservative Benches who said, "You can't win an election if you promise tax rises. You can't win an election except by bribing the electorate with their own money." Labour was wrong. It should have told the truth: first, invest the money, which was there, then turn the NHS around and present to the electorate the case that Labour now makes—the money must be found.

Mr. Levitt *rose—*

Matthew Taylor: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I want to ask him some questions. Does he honestly believe that, just a year ago, the Chancellor had no idea that taxes would have to rise now? Between 1997 and 2001, how was the Chancellor able to change his position from being able to pledge no national insurance rises to being unable to do so if he did not know that he had to increase taxes? How could he ask Wanless to report on NHS funding if he did not know that there was a problem with it?

If the Chancellor knew all those things, why did he cut taxes just before the general election and refuse to admit during that election that he would increase them? Indeed, only months later, he has announced that taxes must increase. We do not disagree, but Labour should have been honest enough to say that it would happen. Perhaps the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) was honest enough to say so in his constituency.

Mr. Levitt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to answer. Of course my right hon. Friend the Chancellor looks to plan for the future—that is why the changes in national insurance contributions come into force next year, and not this year, as the hon. Gentleman seems to suggest. It is a matter of planned investment over a number of years.

I want to return the compliment and ask the hon. Gentleman a question. Does he honestly believe that it would have been possible and sustainable to have a capital programme in the NHS of the size that is proposed in the Budget at a time when inflation was three times the current level, and interest rates were twice what they are now? That is what the Government inherited. Moreover, in their early years they had competing priorities, such as paying for 2 million unemployed.

If the Government had tried to embark on an investment programme of this scale in 1997 they would have been doomed to fail because of the economy's underlying weakness.

Matthew Taylor: I would agree with the hon. Gentleman had the Government at the time tried to spend borrowed money, but the Chancellor has now admitted that the strategy was wrong because the money could have been found through taxation. The Liberal Democrat party was right to argue for an increase in taxes. The share of national income spent on services has had to be increased, and that could have happened five years ago.

In addition, I advise the hon. Gentleman to look again at the Wanless report. It shows that, even allowing for the private finance initiative contribution, the Government over the years have been investing less in capital terms than their predecessors. They have not exceeded Conservative spending in even one year.

I understand the confusion among Labour Back Benchers. They are being told two different things at once. They are told that, only a year ago, the Government had no idea that they would have to raise taxes and make the largest-ever spending increase in the NHS. However, the Sunday papers contain reports quoting friends close to the Chancellor to the effect that the Government have not changed strategy, and that this move was planned two, three or even 10 years ago. That latter figure means that, even in opposition, the Government knew that they would have to introduce these measures. It was all a matter of stealthily taking the public along with them. I can understand why Labour Back Benchers might find it hard to interpret the different briefings that they get from different members of their Front-Bench team.

Mr. Barker: A little time ago, the hon. Gentleman mentioned the myth that it was the Chancellor's prudent management of the economy that reduced the national debt. That is a canard. The reality is that the reduction in the national debt was due overwhelmingly to the bubble in internet share prices that pushed telecommunications, media and technology share prices to ridiculously high and unsustainable levels. As a result, there was a frenzied auction, at which the companies involved bid an unprecedented £22 billion. Even the Treasury thought that the amount that landed like a golden egg in the Chancellor's hands was ridiculous. That money accounts for the record fall in national debt, not some wonderful powers of economic management.

Matthew Taylor: I do not agree. Just a little distance behind and along from the hon. Gentleman is sitting someone who probably agrees with that analysis even less: the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). The major reason why the Government were able to eliminate national debt was that they chose to follow his Budget plans.

Incidentally, I believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would agree that, if he had remained in office, he would not have followed the spending plans that he had set out, as his Government's annual spending review would probably have meant that spending would have gone up. However, the Labour Government decided to follow his plans and make real-terms cuts in spending. The cuts in social services spending, for example, are among the factors that led to the rise of the problem of bed blocking for elderly people who would be better off in nursing homes or residential homes.

The Labour Government got rid of the deficits incurred by their predecessors and balanced spending. However, in their early years, they did nothing but cut the public services that they had been elected to save.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) intervened, because I want to turn my attention to the Conservative party. We cannot let

[Matthew Taylor]

Conservative Members off the hook and say that they have no ideas about the NHS, for we know that, behind the scenes, they do have some ideas on the matter. Unfortunately, he is not present, but the shadow Chancellor has changed his use of language in the past few days. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) used to talk about the Stalinist NHS. He used to ask, "How can we expect it to work? It is a Stalinist creation". That is an odd view of history because the NHS developed from the ideas of a Liberal, but we shall put that to one side.

The shadow Chancellor used to say that the NHS was a Stalinist creation but now he says, in new softly modulated tones and with an expression of complete reasonableness, "We support extra investment; we are not going to vote for it, but we support it. We want an NHS that works. We do not actually believe in it, but we want it to work." The word "Stalinist" no longer passes his lips.

I hoped that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would remain in the Chamber because I wanted to ask him whether he still believes that the NHS is a Stalinist creation. In fact, it is clear that a focus group has told the Conservatives to stop saying what they think. They have stopped saying what they think about an even more fundamental issue. They have stopped their health spokesman saying anything about what he thinks. He is allowed to say it only to delegates at the Conservative conference, behind closed doors, but we know what it is. He believes that they need to run down the NHS, persuade people that it cannot work and then introduce self-pay. Self-pay means that people will not get treatment unless they can afford to pay for it. They will have to pay for it when they are sick rather than through taxes funding the health service. People who have the means will pay for themselves, instead of everybody contributing to a national health service. The Conservatives do not want to reform the NHS but to dismantle it.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman is no more a shadow Chancellor than Lord David Sutch was a peer.

Does the hon. Gentleman realise that many of my constituents have no choice but self-pay? The reality confronting them is that they must either wait a year for their operation or pay for it themselves in a private hospital. Does he think that that system is fair? If he thinks that it is not fair, why does not he share the desire of my party to consider every possible way of creating a better health care system in this country, rather than accepting the single option presented to us by the Chancellor?

Matthew Taylor: I agree that self-pay is unfair. That is why I oppose a system that would force people down the private insurance, pay-as-you-go route that the hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench colleagues seem to prefer. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) is in a difficult position. We know that the Conservative party is prepared to look at any option apart from the system that we actually have—the national health service—and they are prepared to delay any investment until they have made a decision, even though such delay would cost today's patients the treatment that they need. Under Conservative policy, people will have to carry on paying for treatment—if they can afford it; if they cannot afford it, they will have to carry on waiting. That is a wholly disreputable policy.

The reason that the Conservatives do not explain their policy publicly is simple: the public do not agree with it. In fact, the public hate it. They think that it is the worst possible idea and they are right. All the Conservative options would cost the public more and treat them less and, worst of all, later, because there would be delay in making the investment that is so obviously needed.

All the alternatives have one thing in common: they are more expensive and less fair. The Conservatives say that they have an open mind but they have closed their mind to saving the national health service.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): In the interest of proportionality, it is time for a Liberal Democrat intervention.

Has my hon. Friend noticed that, in the opinion poll published in *The Guardian* today, such is the popularity of the Conservative party's opposition to the NHS that it has dropped five points?

Matthew Taylor: We shall have to see whether that continues. I noticed that most Conservative supporters favour the increase in spending so it seems unlikely that the party can make much progress on that issue.

Conservatives raise one issue in particular as a weapon in their argument that the money should not be spent: they say that there is no way of spending it effectively. I want to suggest some ways in which it could be spent not only effectively but earlier than the Government's plans would allow.

First, it is well known that thousands of NHS beds are blocked by elderly patients who are kept in hospital not because they need hospital treatment but because there is no funding either for the residential or nursing care that they need, or for support in their own homes. That is a real issue now and the money could be spent now. Throughout the country, social services departments, including my own in Cornwall, could make the investment to find places for those people if they had the money to do so. That needs to be done now, not in a year or two, because the doctors and nurses who support the people in those beds could be treating patients who need hospital care.

One of the biggest worries about Labour's plans—I do not know whether the Government did not think of this, or whether they simply had no answer—is that the very local government organisations that are expected to spend the extra money to find places for those people will be hit by a national insurance increase for their staff, so much of the extra funding for social services next year will be taken out by the back door no sooner than it has come in through the front door.

The Government need urgently to consider how they can release to local authorities the scale of funds necessary to allow such placements to be made. The funds need to cover not only the extra beds, but the increase in fees necessary to stop many residential and nursing homes closing because the current fees simply are not enough for them to keep their doors open. That is urgent: my constituency has lost four nursing homes in the past year or so because the fees that they can be paid are too low, even though Cornwall county council has substantially

increased them recently, at the expense of placing fewer patients. More needs to be done urgently. Conservative Members have argued for that, but they will not now agree to the means to pay for it.

Secondly, recruiting and retaining nurses is an issue. In many parts of the country, nurses have the training and skills to do the job, but they cannot afford to work in the NHS on the low pay that many—not all—nurses receive. There is now a reasonable pay scale, which starts to give nurses real rewards as they go up it, but pay is an immediate issue at the low end, especially for other professional staff in the NHS. That is why we budgeted for immediate pay rises for low-paid professional staff in the NHS, especially in areas of high housing cost. If hon. Members visit any hospital in the south-east, they will be told that there are trained nurses, but that they cannot be recruited on the salaries being paid.

The third immediate priority—again, Conservative Members need to pay attention to this—is massively to increase the number of people being trained. It takes five years to train a doctor, so things cannot wait one, two or three years, or however long it is until the next general election before the Conservatives decide what to do. We must start training doctors and nurses now, or no matter what system the Conservatives come up with, they will not be able to find the staff needed to look after those in the beds.

The Budget has at last delivered the increase for health on the scale that we called for and, very nearly, using the means that we called for, but we do not agree that the Government have chosen the best way to raise the money. We argued for the use of income tax. Instead of using employers' national insurance, the Government could have raised about the same amount of money with a new top rate of tax on earnings of more than £100,000 a year. That would have been fairer in its distribution and, unlike the Government's proposal, would not have hit jobs and manufacturing industry. That said, we want the increase in the NHS to take place, we will not stand in its way, and we charge the Government with spending that money well—none of which can be said of the Conservative party.

5.29 pm

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): First, may I apologise to the House and to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I should be attending a Standing Committee sitting that is scheduled to continue until 10 minutes to 10, so I may not be able to return to the Chamber to hear the winding-up speeches or the rest of the debate; I apologise to those on the Front Benches and to yourself.

Tackling poverty—whether child, family or pensioner poverty—has been a major Government target, and to the Government's eternal credit, we have also set out to tackle overseas poverty. Of course, much progress has been made. On child poverty, however we want to measure it, either 1 million or 0.5 million children have been lifted out of poverty following years and years of inexorable growth in the number of children living in deprivation.

We recognised that the best way to lift people out of poverty is to ensure that they get a job—the Yosser Hughes way; "Gizza job." One million extra people in work represents 1 million extra people out of poverty. It is not a matter only of putting them in work, but of protecting them once they are there. The minimum wage, trade union rights and protected working conditions through the social chapter will ensure that their social needs are looked after as well as their economic needs. The Budget will build on that. This year, deprived areas such as Pemberton in my constituency will get additional help to ensure that the enterprise that lies within such communities can be released. However, even with the extra jobs, many deprived areas—not only Pemberton, but other parts of my constituency—will continue to suffer deprivation. Despite the protection of the minimum wage, far too many people are still on low wages, and skill levels remain low, leading to low attainment and low ambition, perpetuating the cycle of deprivation.

That cycle is further reinforced by the lack of collective wealth in such communities. People are not able to go and spend in local shops, thereby creating more wealth and jobs and improving the whole area. We need to pump more money into such areas to break the cycle. That is why the Chancellor's help through his support for enterprise, children and families is not only welcome, but essential.

However, that alone is not enough. The wages of poorer people comprise not only the wages that they get in their pockets through work or benefits, but what we used to call, and may still be called, the social wage. They cannot afford to send their children to private schools, to take out private medical insurance or to hire home helps to look after their parents or children when they are ill, as can people with much greater incomes. They depend on high quality public services even more than the average, because they have no alternative. They need good schools to lift their children out of declining educational standards, which were so evident in the Conservative years, and which we have addressed through the learning and skills promoted by the literacy and numeracy hours. They need better hospitals to give them better treatment, because they are poor not only in financial, but in health terms. They need the primary care facilities provided by GPs to ensure that the chronic diseases that are rife among people in deprived areas are treated. They need the protection provided by local authority social services. They need their environment to be protected so that they have access to clean air, clean water and the generally higher standard of life that exists in a better countryside. The vast majority of those services are provided locally.

David Taylor: Would my hon. Friend add to his list such people's need for higher standards of policing and tackling of criminality? Poorer people in working class areas are much more subject to the actions of criminals, which damage their lives far more than those of other sections of the community.

Mr. Turner: The list could almost be added to ad infinitum, but my hon. Friend makes a valid point.

Many of the services that I mentioned are provided not only by local authorities, but by police authorities and health trusts—primary care trusts and local hospital trusts.

If we are to eradicate poverty, the agencies that I mentioned need to be funded not only properly but fairly. That does not happen currently. The standard spending assessment and health funding formulae are manifestly unfair. I have heard the description, "postcode lottery of underfunding". The author of that term, the Conservative party, is guilty of a foul calumny because "lottery" suggests chance; it implies dealing a card, spinning a bottle or tossing a coin. That is nonsense.

[Mr. Turner]

The SSA was designed to discriminate. It was not envisaged that all local authority leaders would troop down to Queen Elizabeth hall every November to watch money being drawn out of a hat and to exclaim, "Oh look, Westminster's won yet again. What a surprise." The SSA was never meant to be a lottery; it was designed to ensure a shift of resources from deprived, Labour-voting areas and councils to Tory-voting councils. It achieved precisely that.

I do not doubt that pockets of deprivation exist in Wandsworth and Westminster, but they sit alongside areas of great wealth. Indeed, there are fewer than 150 houses in band H in the whole Wigan borough, which has 212,000 properties. There are streets in Wandsworth and Westminster with more band H houses than the whole of Wigan. Those authorities have the wealth to deal with deprivation, but what do they do with the largesse that they receive from the SSA that the Conservative party designed? Do they tackle their pockets of poverty with it? No. They use it to ensure low council tax rises year after year.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman obviously does not understand the pressures on many local authorities in the south-east, where housing costs have made it difficult to get teachers for schools and nurses for hospitals. Does he not realise that pushing up the council tax in those areas makes it more difficult for young teachers, nurses and doctors to stay there? Simply diverting resources to other parts of the country would mean that swathes of Britain could not man their public services effectively.

Mr. Turner: I do not understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Does he not accept that people in Wigan have the same problems in paying their council tax as people in Westminster? It is even more difficult in Wigan because our band D council tax is so much higher than that in Westminster and Wandsworth. Those boroughs also receive significantly larger amounts of money through the area cost adjustment, which is designed to deal with the hon. Gentleman's points.

The borough of Wigan includes the constituencies of Leigh, Makerfield and part of Worsley. I am therefore speaking not only about my constituency but those of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Our local education authority is acknowledged to be good; it has received three stars under best value and gets better results than its demographics would suggest. Despite that, 24.3 per cent. of people in the Wigan borough have no formal educational qualifications compared with 18.4 per cent. nationally. Yet the SSA for education places Wigan 134th out of 150 local education authorities.

Our social services received a superb social services inspectorate report, which describes joint working, joint budget, lead commissioning and service integration. It proves that Wigan is good at dealing with those matters. The report states:

"Wigan has the second lowest number of over 75 year old people waiting to be discharged from hospital, the second lowest percentage of older people delayed in acute beds and excellent performance in reducing 4-hour trolley waits . . . Wigan has an above average spend on nursing placements for 75 year olds, but it also has the second lowest expenditure for each person aged 75 or over on home support."

In other words, it is an efficient authority.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I did not catch all the hon. Gentleman's point, but he was talking about SSA. If he believes that it was designed specifically to help Tory areas and to damage Labour areas, why has it taken the Government so long to change it?

Mr. Turner: If we had come into office with an absolutely wonderful legacy from the Conservative Government, that would clearly have been a high priority. Unfortunately, we had an awful lot of problems to deal with, and we are now going to deal with this one. I shall come to that shortly.

Good things are happening not only in local government but in health. The clinical governance review has congratulated my local health authority on the way in which it has set up its primary care trust. The standard of health in my constituency is, however, exceedingly poor. We have tremendous problems with morbidity and mortality rates, which are well above the national average, but that is not reflected in the funding formula for health.

Unemployment is another area in which the formula does not accurately reflect the needs of a community. It takes a simplistic count of the unemployed, without taking into account those who are incapacitated, yet those are the very people who place huge demands on local authorities, social services and the health service. On a claimant count, Wigan has 4.2 per cent. unemployment and is 73rd most deprived out of 354 authorities. On income deprivation, it is ranked 30th out of the 354, and on employment deprivation, it is ranked ninth, reflecting the large proportion of people in the borough who are too ill to work.

None of these factors is accurately reflected by the formula, either for the local authority settlement or for health funding. No one doubts the need to raise individual incomes. A stable and growing economy is essential, and the measures in the Budget will assist that. Many people, however, do not—and never will—have the capacity to have a good quality, high-paying job. The individual enterprise that we want to achieve, particularly in deprived areas, has to be backed up by the collective provision of public services. That will be achievable only by funding regimes that rigorously reflect the real needs of communities, which are identifiable and measurable.

In response to the point made by the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), the Departments responsible for health and local government are undertaking fundamental reviews of the funding formulae. I welcome the Secretary of State for Health's agreement to meet members of SIGOMA—the special interest group of municipal authorities—to discuss that issue. The additional money for health will provide the opportunity to speed up the equalisation process.

Solving the problem of poverty of the individual is essential, but if we do not take this opportunity to tackle the inequalities in public services such as health, education and social services, it will be a lost chance. We shall doom the individual to failure if we do not ensure that the means to tackle individual poverty and public service inequalities advance at the same rate.

5.42 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): I refer the House to the interests that I have declared in the Members' register.

I see from this morning's newspapers that this is probably the most popular political U-turn that we have seen in modern history, or, certainly, for a very long time. It is certainly a very dramatic one. Prudence was being scorned last year, but her defenestration is now quite complete. This is a reckless return to a policy of tax and spend—spending on one service in particular—of a kind that was completely ruled out by the new Labour project only two or three years ago.

In the short term, the Budget has had a popular reception, but this is not the first time that I have said in a Budget debate that Budgets that have a popular reception in the short term do not have a good history either of delivering results or of remaining popular for very long. The Budget of 1977 has already been cited as an example of that. In 1987, I seem to remember sitting surrounded by people waving their Order Papers at Nigel Lawson's most popular Budget. The responses to both those Budgets presaged complete disaster, and I fear that something similar might happen if this country does not have some good economic fortune in the next few years.

I have some concern for the Chancellor; I feel a slight responsibility for the well-being of my successor. He and I have presided over 10 years of growth with low inflation. We have not had a negative quarter for 10 years, although the present Chancellor has had some damned close run-ins and has nearly got there. However, he has presided over the second and least distinguished half of that period. In the public interest, I should like us to maintain the combination of growth and low inflation. It is the essential pre-requisite for funding the improvement in our infrastructure and public services which the country deserves.

The economic judgments behind the Budget are deeply flawed. The prospects for the NHS, to which I will devote the second part of my speech, are undoubtedly not as rosy as they have been made to appear. The Government are making one of the mistakes that they have frequently made since coming to office: they are raising public expectations of what will be delivered to incredible heights. If the public feel as disappointed and cheated as they did at the last election, the Government could be in for a big surprise at the next election.

The politics dominate this Budget. All Budgets are political, but I cannot remember one in which the political presentation has so dominated the content. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer were obviously both in a panic about the fact that they were having to break their election promises and raise personal taxation, which is what they have done. I agree with the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) that the increase in the employees' national insurance contribution is the Liberal penny, which was so derided and ruled out at the last election. It is not enough to pay for the promised expenditure but it clearly breaches the public commitments that the Government gave in spirit and almost to the word.

I cannot remember such a cynical Budget since the mid-1950s or such a cynical move before and after election to office. I will not repeat the largely excellent speech of the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell, but the Government cut taxation on the eve of the election and then raised personal taxation on incomes as soon as they could in the next Budget. That ranks with the type of political cynicism that we have not seen for more than a generation.

Clive Efford: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: Not now, but I will when I deal with the NHS.

In order to make the personal taxation increase popular, the Government produced spending plans for one Department. It happened to be the very Department over which they were in a political panic—the one with responsibility for the NHS. The public rightly perceived that the health service had slightly deteriorated in the five years in which Labour had been in office. To sell the Budget and break the news about the penny taxation on income, it was necessary for the Government to bury the NHS under pound notes. No one had contemplated that that would happen to that extent over the next five years, but such expenditure is popular. However, the penny is not enough to pay for this, nor for a quarter of the other things that the Liberals constantly cite.

The penny on employees' national insurance is not the principal taxation increase in the Budget. The problem is the choice of taxation when the Government looked elsewhere to raise revenue. I was one of those Chancellors who always thought that taxes sometimes have to go up or down. I prefer low tax economies, but we make a ludicrous fuss trying to forecast what will happen to tax in future years. However, the Government chose a bad tax; they decided to put a penny on the employers' contribution to national insurance, rightly described as a tax on jobs.

The Government have been raising tax on business ever since they came into office. They have not just started doing that. They usually deny those increases and this time they have obscured the fact that they are raising tax on business. The effect on our competitiveness is too severe to contemplate if things get difficult for us and the Government carry on with their plans. We are losing one of our major advantages. I raised taxes when I was Chancellor—I had to in order to leave Labour the legacy that it inherited, which I would defend again now were I living in the past to the same extent as Labour Members. However, I avoided taxing business and lowered the employers' national insurance contribution to strengthen the recovery in the economy and to get back to the full employment that 10 years' growth has nearly achieved.

The other problem that the Government face, and which they obscure, is the fact that they have lost tax receipts. The pre-election estimates were completely useless. One of the things that the Chancellor mentioned en passant in his Budget speech was that the forecasts for tax revenues that he made last year were £10 billion out. His receipts were £10 billion less than he had forecast in the last Budget because of the slowdown in the economy, and that is why he had to raise taxation. Even then, the Chancellor could not raise taxation to the extent that was necessary. Last year, I predicted that tax revenues would fall short, and I predict now that more tax increases will have to be made unless the Chancellor goes in for real prudence before the next election because he has probably not raised enough for the spending that he is now talking about.

[Mr. Clarke]

The Chancellor has gone back to old Labour practices to get round that problem. He has increased the estimates of growth, which carries shades of every failed Chancellor for the last 10 or 15 years. The Chancellor claims that he will be helped out because, he has discovered, we will have a faster rate of growth than we have hitherto enjoyed. I have to be amused because that is a complete reversal of the prudent Chancellor who took over from me and dourly reproved me for my excess of optimism in saying that trend growth was 2.5 per cent. in 1997. He reproved me for recklessness and reduced that figure to 2.25 per cent. By 1999, he had quietly slipped back to 2.5 per cent., but everything in the Budget in front of us is based on 2.75 per cent.

The Chancellor looks back at the 1990s, a time of boom internationally, and then he peers forward into the 21st century and says that it is going to be better and conditions allow us to assume that trend growth is 2.75 per cent. I do not believe that. I will not go on about the protectionism in the world, the uncertainty of oil prices and the uncertain nature of US recovery and so on, but for the Chancellor to say that he has suddenly discovered in this Budget that the outlook is that trend growth will be faster is plain folly, and I trust that nobody in the Chamber at least is taken in.

I propose to discuss health so I will not spend long discussing other large costs in the Budget. The Chancellor has slipped tax credits into the Budget, but he has not made a great performance about them. They are a huge extension to the benefits system, but he does not count them as such. He likes tax credits because he does not have to count them as public expenditure, but they have an enormous cost. I know that tax credits are very redistributive and family-oriented, but we now have a bizarre system in which means-tested credits are being extended to 90 per cent. of all families in this country, including those with earnings of £50,000 a year. They are filling in their forms to get their means-tested tax credits.

I am told that the Chancellor's public spending colleagues are very angry with him for his obsession with tax credits. I certainly would be if I were the Home Secretary or the Secretary of State for Health. That system is costing about £4 billion, and he is persevering with it in this Budget. It is an enthusiasm understood only by the Chancellor, but it is a very great burden on small businesses that have to administer PAYE systems and on the Inland Revenue, which has to pay out. The *Financial Times* described the situation as ludicrous, and I will not, at this stage, expand on that judgment except to say that I greatly agree with it.

To distract us from all those aspects of the Budget, we are meant to be talking about the fact that we are now looking at five years of huge expenditure on the NHS, so the Leader of the House has decided that health must dominate the last day's debate on the Budget. One service has mysteriously been plucked out of what was meant to be an orderly public spending round, and we are given not three years' figures for it but five years' figures.

There is to be an immense increase in real terms spending on health. Why is that? It is a very expensive way of stopping people complaining about having to pay another 1 per cent. in national insurance employees' contributions, and looking five years ahead is a way of taking us through the next election. The Government can continue trying to mount the daft argument that we have heard all afternoon, which is that if the Tories do not say that they agree to the spending, it means that we will cut the health service and everybody will have to pay for their treatment. My view is that the public are not as daft as that. The Labour party has been trying to run that argument for as long as I can remember, and it is not an adequate way of explaining the vast increase in expenditure.

I used to deliver Budgets that covered both tax and public spending, all public spending, at the same time. That was a very good thing and I regret the move away from it. Every year we used to make adjustments according to what had happened to the economy and to the services. That practice was cancelled by the new Chancellor, and it led to two years of savage cuts. Yet what he did had never been done by any Conservative Chancellor because, as the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell rightly pointed out, Labour went for a squeeze on public spending beyond all imagining in its first two years in office. It moved to a three-year cycle, which some people like; I have not yet converted.

This Chancellor and this Treasury claim that they are responsible, yet to plan for five years for one Department on this scale is frankly irresponsible. I predict that whoever is in office in five years will regret being stuck with these immense figures for one Department. We have no idea what will happen to the economy between now and then. Mr. Wanless, soon to be Lord Wanless, seems to have a means of calculating that health spending will be 9.4 per cent. of GDP. I have never read such tosh. No one knows what GDP will be five years out, and no one knows how to compare health spending as a percentage of GDP with figures in Europe. That is not possible five years out, even for the finest academic economist.

Every other area of public expenditure, including local government, the police, the Prison Service and transport, is in hock to this enormous commitment to increase spending on health. I am not surprised that the Chancellor has had open warfare with the Home Secretary, and I am not surprised that the Prime Minister ensured that the Chancellor made some obligatory reference in his Budget speech to bits of money for the Home Office and education. Those Secretaries of State must be seething with rage, but it is nothing compared with what their successors will be like after the next reshuffle or two, when they find that they have to live with that health expenditure commitment.

The Budget is not deserving of its popularity, and that is the background against which we must regard what is meant to be a huge political breakthrough on health. The Government have been increasing health spending for three years and have very little to show for it. Most of the money has gone on pay, and public sector pay is running ahead of other forms of pay. Much of the money has gone on drugs—the drugs bill is out of control and is increasing by 10 per cent. a year, which is simply unsustainable. Almost £500 million goes on litigation and damages, and we have no idea how to stop money going in that direction.

Everything depends, as my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said, on how the money is spent, but the Government have done a U-turn there as well, although I have not left myself time to deal with it adequately. The new NHS plan is the internal market

rewritten; it is the purchaser-provider divide; it is patient-oriented. We are going back to patient choice and devolution, but it is the delivery in practice which will count—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I am afraid that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's time is up.

5.58 pm

Ian Stewart (Eccles): I should like to return the debate to fact rather than opinion.

In recent years, Salford has seen a decline in population—some would even say a haemorrhage. That, coupled with reduced unemployment and a welcome reduction in the number of benefit recipients, means that in the past two years Salford has received the second-lowest and the fifth-lowest increase in its standing spending assessment of all metropolitan districts. At the same time, its council tax base has been reduced.

The paradox is that authorities such as Salford, which are facing population decline, need additional resources to attract new people to ensure that regeneration through capital resources is not undermined by a lack of revenue. They also need to provide high-quality services for the people who remain in urban areas who tend to be more needy. We do not have contingency funds or flexible mechanisms for dealing with unforeseen and unpredictable pressures, such as the dramatic increase in the number of looked-after children which Salford has experienced in recent years.

Currently, Salford council has considerable concern about funding for social services. Salford supports the function changes that the Government are introducing in 2002–03, particularly in relation to the care of the elderly. However, it believes that, to stay within Government allocated budgets, it will have to restrict eligibility criteria and reduce the number of elderly people receiving council support. This will have a detrimental effect on the Government's important objective of reducing bed blocking in the NHS.

In total, Salford estimates a shortfall of £1.4 million in its social services budget for 2002–03, yet, over the last three years, Salford social services has introduced significant efficiency measures. Furthermore, it was congratulated in October last year on being one of the top 15 performing authorities, and its social services director, Ann Williams, has been nominated and shortlisted for a public sector leadership award. That is a compliment to Ann and to all city of Salford workers.

Nevertheless, under pressure, Salford is now planning to reduce the number of residential and nursing home placements and community support. This will have an immediate effect on the council's ability to help people move from acute hospitals back into the community when they no longer need full-time nursing care.

Last year, the council met its target reduction for delayed discharges from hospitals. It wants to build on this achievement. Grant conditions under the building care capacity grant, however, require a further 20 per cent. reduction this year, and all of Salford's allocation for this year would be needed to meet the ongoing costs of placements and fee increases from 2001–02. It therefore currently anticipates a minimum of 158 delayed transfers from care.

Last month, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) organised a meeting with Social Services North West and all the local authorities present identified the same problems. The Association of Directors of Social Services and the Local Government Association have lobbied hard to get more money for social services, and I and many other MPs have raised the issue with Ministers and the Chancellor. Although I am very pleased that the Government are providing additional funding to the tune of a 6 per cent. real increase in spending over the next three years to help local authorities provide the high standard of care in the community that we all want, we must accept that, like the health service, social services have also been historically underfunded.

I was staggered at the structural underfund that was imposed on social services in Salford when the Tories transferred care from health to local social services—I suspect that it was as much as 3 or 4 per cent. Clearly, money must be made available both to sustain community placements for people already in local authority care and to fund new placements for people waiting to leave hospital. All of this is in a climate in which there is a problem in the supply of residential care for which local councils are not responsible.

Social services now receive a number of specific grants such as building care capacity and quality protects for children's services, and I trust that the additional 6 per cent. funding will be on top of those specific grants and general funding. I am sure that the Government will have extensive consultation with social services authorities about proposed penalties for authorities that do not meet their targets for reducing blocked beds. Although it is important that the Government ensure that health services and social services provide an efficient transition of patients from hospital to care or home, I am concerned that authorities could be punished for failing to provide services for which they have not been given sufficient or appropriate resources, or when there is a problem in the supply of residential care over which the local authority has no control.

What we must do is build on good existing partnership relations between health and social services authorities in my area and throughout the country. We must nurture co-operation and the dissemination of good practice. Different authorities may have different criteria to determine when a patient is fit for discharge. Delayed hospital discharges are not just a matter of funding: the availability of residential places or housing adaptations are just two factors that must be considered. There are also complex reasons for people being readmitted to hospital. What we must avoid is patients being caught in a game of ping-pong between different authorities that are anxious to avoid penalties. Notwithstanding those concerns, I believe the Government have taken a very important step in reducing the funding gap between health and social services and giving social services assured resources to enable them to plan for the medium term.

I warmly welcome the broad package of NHS audit and accountability reforms announced by the Chancellor and fleshed out by the Secretary of State for Health. They will make it easier for the public to see how the money is being spent and what is being achieved. More transparency is always healthy. Of course, I also loudly applaud the considerable additional funding to be made available to the NHS—an average annual increase of 7.4 per cent. in each of the next five years. This, of course,

[Ian Stewart]

builds on the substantial foundations established in Labour's first Administration, under which my local area of Salford benefited from investment in modernisation. Under the local capital modernisation fund, the Salford Royal Hospitals NHS trust received £675,000. In terms of accident and emergency modernisation, £660,000 went to the Manchester Children's Hospitals NHS trust for the Royal Manchester Children's hospital and £755,000 to the Salford Royal Hospitals NHS trust's Hope hospital. An additional £200,000 was invested in an existing scheme to improve the layout of the accident and emergency department. Action has been taken to reduce waiting lists and times: £499,000 was provided to aid early delivery of the maximum in-patient waiting time target of 15 months during 2001–02. In addition, there has been major capital investment in my area as the lead authority for the £114 million fourth wave scheme at the Salford Royal Hospitals NHS trust. Work to develop that scheme is due to start in 2001.

The link between poverty and poor health is well established. I therefore welcome not only the Budget investment in health but the more generous tax credit system that the Chancellor is introducing, which I am sure will play a part in reducing health inequalities.

As I am on my feet, I cannot pass up the opportunity to make a special plea. I hope that some of this extra money will be made available to voluntary hospices. The cost of running one of our local hospices is £7 million per annum, of which only 28 per cent. comes from public funds. The remaining £5 million has to be raised every year from the people of Salford, Manchester and elsewhere. A recent survey undertaken by the Independent Hospice Representative Committee, entitled "NHS Funding of Independent Hospices 2001", found that hospices in the south and in coastal areas fare a lot better than those in the north and in deprived communities. I hope that the Government will take action to reduce regional inequalities and to ensure that all patients have access to the highest quality of service.

This Budget is a significant morale booster for all health and social services workers. The Government have given us the framework and the monitoring procedures to deliver a high-quality service to patients and local authority residents. A sustained commitment has been given to the NHS, which will allow long-term plans to be developed and realised. Managers, doctors and patients have wanted that—and waited for it—for years.

Labour is delivering on its election promise and I am confident that the electorate will support our measures to deliver a national service that is responsive to local needs, which people can count on if they have a minor, chronic or life-threatening condition. The service that I want for my family is the one that I want for every family. Only Labour can guarantee equality of access and a service that is free to everyone. I am confident that this is what my constituents in Eccles in the city of Salford want.

We need only look at France this week to see the awful consequences of public disengagement from politics and the apathy that can result when people feel that they are not presented with real choice. The shadow Secretary of State for Health says that there is a debate to be had. I relish taking on the Tories on the choice that Labour has made, and I am confident that people will recognise that a publicly funded NHS is the best health insurance system around. I shall vote for that tonight.

6.10 pm

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): I intend to speak mainly about transport, but before doing so I shall pick up on the comments made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) about the Chancellor's folly in committing money to health in the way that he has done. The Chancellor's approach of making a vast commitment for the next five years surrenders any possibility of leverage that he might have exploited to bring about the changes that are required in the health service, and it will lead to inflation in just the sort of Budget headings that my right hon. and learned Friend mentioned. This afternoon, the Secretary of State for Health displayed extraordinary complacency and misunderstanding of the degree of change that is needed in the health service. As my right hon. and learned Friend pointed out, the Chancellor of the Exchequer—or perhaps his successors—will come to regret the day.

The House was treated to an extremely good speech by the shadow Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). However, although it is foolish of the Government to reiterate, as they do almost daily, that they see no alternative to a health service fully funded by taxpayers, the Opposition will require further time and thought to develop alternative or complementary systems. The Government are indeed foolish to continue to insist as they do: no other health system in the world attempts to fund itself as ours does, and no other system produces such levels of inequality as ours, unfortunately, does. For that reason alone, the Government are wholly wrong to have such a closed mind.

Mr. Levitt: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Portillo: No. I have only a short time and I have not yet progressed to the main part of my speech.

The proposal to introduce a national insurance surcharge across all employees and their employers looks, in the hands of a Labour Government, like the first stage of the abolition of the distinction between tax and national insurance. Paradoxically, if there were a Conservative Government today who were interested in introducing a system of social insurance, that same change might be an interesting first step in that direction. I mention that because naturally, understandably and rightly, there has been a strong reaction from business to the imposition of those surcharges, which are, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe said, a tax on employment. It is worth noting that one of the likely side effects of introducing a social insurance policy would be heavy taxes on employment, which is one of the reasons why we in this country have been reluctant to adopt that policy. Such consequences are among the things that must be carefully weighed in the balance.

Today the House has shown itself to be keener on discussing how money is raised than how health care is provided and how services in this country are run. I believe that how services are run remains the more important issue. In his response to the Budget, my right

hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition drew attention to the fact that in Germany there are no waiting lists. Recently, the British ambassador in Germany told me that when he makes a speech in Germany about health, he has to begin by explaining to the German audience what a waiting list is, because the concept is simply not understood there.

During my recent visit to Germany, it struck me that in the eastern half of that country until 1989 there were queues for food, and we Britons, in our rather superior way, used to tell the east Germans that there was no mystery about why they queued for food: it was not because they did not spend enough money on food, but because they had a nationalised food system. I am sorry to report to the House that Germans today, whether they are from the east or the west of the country, tell the British that it is not surprising that we queue for health—the reason is obvious: it is because we have a nationalised health system. We would do well to reflect on that.

Labour celebrated the return to the binge of tax and spend when the Chancellor and the Prime Minister visited the Chelsea and Westminster hospital in my constituency, where Leo Blair was born. My constituency also contains the Royal Brompton hospital and the Royal Marsden hospital, so we are well endowed with health facilities. It is perhaps for that reason that my constituents currently appear less alarmed by the health service than by the state of the transport system. They will be dismayed that the Budget made no mention of the public-private partnership for London Underground, even though decisions on that are imminent. I wish to use my speech to appeal to the Government at the eleventh hour to abandon the PPP.

My reasons are simple. The plan involves no risk transfer to the private sector, the books have been cooked in the effort to present the plan positively to the public, the PPP will offer extremely poor value to the taxpayer, things will get worse during the course of the proposed 30-year contracts, and London Underground will get less money invested than the taxpayer would spend.

Clive Efford: Would the right hon. Gentleman privatise it?

Mr. Portillo: I shall talk about that later.

It is common ground among many hon. Members that public-private partnership can be a good thing, and I am the first to admit that the genuine transfer of risk away from the public sector and into the private sector has a value and is worth paying for. That is the reason why the Government said that they would undertake the London Underground PPP only if value for money could be proved. At this stage, however, the Government have clearly and absolutely failed to demonstrate value for money.

The Government's main claim to have demonstrated that is that the PPP was endorsed—they say—by accountants Ernst and Young. In fact, Ernst and Young, which was employed by the Government, makes the following points clear. First, it found that the judgments used in the analysis to justify the PPP were subjective judgments. Secondly, although the contracts are for 30 years, they have prices for only the first seven and a half years, after which period everything is up for grabs and can be renegotiated. Thirdly, even Ernst and Young acknowledges that

"Risk transfer is complex and subject to various sharing and limitation procedures."

Let me focus on those points. An example of what is meant by subjective judgments having been used in the analysis is that the public sector costs used for comparison to determine whether the PPP offers value for money were arbitrarily increased during the course of the study, by up to 38 per cent. in some cases, whereas the private sector costs were arbitrarily reduced by quite large percentages, on the basis that private sector involvement would guarantee early completion of projects—although that is not a common experience. Accountants Deloitte and Touche said that the values that had been given to the increases and decreases in the basic figures were

"significantly greater than would be expected".

Even using those botched figures, it remains impossible to prove value for money because, as I said, the contracts contain prices for only the first seven and a half years; there are no prices covering the remaining 22 and a half years.

On the question of risk transfer, Transport for London said:

"there is no longer any validity to any claim that private equity is assuming material risk."

To be fair, I have some sympathy with the Government in their dealings with London Underground. It is not a body that inspires confidence and I myself did not find it easy to deal with. As the Government never tire of telling us, the Jubilee line was delivered late and it cost more than expected. However, it is the height of naivety for the Government to believe that simply getting a private contractor to do the work eliminates any danger of projects becoming more expensive than planned or taking longer than expected to complete.

When in government, we made a proper transfer of risk when the channel tunnel was built. The fact that private sector contractors built the tunnel did not prevent it from being vastly more expensive than planned or from being late. However, the risk transfer meant that even though it was late and over budget, the extra cost was not borne by taxpayers. The PPP for London Underground is basically condemned by its failure to transfer risk.

It is extraordinary what the Government have been able to do to London Underground in the five years that they have been in office. When the PPP was first conceived, London Underground was making an operating profit of £265 million a year, which was contributing to investment in the underground. Indeed, that money was counted on for the PPP: the 1998 comprehensive spending review assumed that no public subsidy would be necessary for London Underground by 2001–02, which underlines the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe that things do not turn out as expected. The costs per train mile on London underground have gone up by 62 per cent. since the Government have been in office. London Underground is now making a thumping loss, so there is no contribution from an operating profit for investment or the PPP. I dare say that the impossibility of running a shadow PPP, as management have been required to do for the past few years, is one reason why they have taken their eye off the ball and why profits have simply disappeared.

The Government have made grandiose claims about what the PPP will produce for London Underground, but the contracts guarantee virtually nothing at all. None of the major enhancements wanted by people in London—congestion relief, line extensions, improved station

[Mr. Portillo]

accessibility—are specified in the immensely complicated and expensive contracts which have hugely generous margins for private sector contractors. Money will clearly be spent much more badly with the PPP than without it.

As the House knows, the PPP has no friends. Deloitte and Touche is against it; the Mayor of London is against it; the London boroughs are against it; Transport for London is against it; members of every party in the House are against it; the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions is against it; most of London's Labour MPs are against it, and it is about time that they spoke up. The PPP is sustained not by logic or conviction, but by the obstinacy of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I have not mentioned safety, but I shall cite the Mayor of London, Mr. Livingstone, who said:

"It would be safer . . . if you just privatised the whole thing to one firm so the chain of command wasn't broken."

That seems pretty sound.

It is the eleventh hour for the PPP, but a really serious error is about to be made. Government money—taxpayers' money—is about to be wasted on a prodigious scale. Although it is late, I appeal to the Government to abandon the PPP, for which they have failed to make a case. It is an abuse of public money, it enjoys no support in the House or elsewhere, and it should be abandoned.

6.23 pm

Liz Blackman (Erewash): In a recent survey on health, the target group was asked two main questions. The first was, "What do you think of the NHS?", to which the majority replied, "It's in crisis." The second was, "What is your experience of the NHS?", to which the overwhelming answer was, "Extremely positive". There is a reality gap between most people's experience of the NHS and the headlines played for all they are worth by the Opposition. When the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) was speaking, Labour Members tried to count the number of times that he lapsed into the first phase of his plan to rubbish the NHS; we gave up because we got into double figures on the Tory lie.

Clearly, a great deal needs to be done in the NHS; it needs much more investment and a great deal needs to change. However, people's response to the second question in the survey showing that they are broadly satisfied is based on an already improving picture. I am in constant touch with health professionals in my constituency, the chief executive of Erewash primary care trust and local acute hospitals, and they tell me that good and quantifiable things are happening. I do not want to read out a great long list, but I shall give the House a flavour of what has happened during the past five years, especially the past two or three years.

Erewash PCT says that access to GPs in its area is better than the NHS target; the role of practice nurses managing patients with chronic diseases, such as diabetes, has been extended; clinical governance has vastly improved; there have been major improvements in managing patients with chronic heart disease—for example, the prescribing of statins—and personal medical services pilots have modernised contractual arrangements, leading to flexibility in GPs' employment and the use of nurses and allied health professionals to deliver care alongside them. In addition, we have had a valuable new minor injuries clinic at Ilkeston community hospital, which during the election did a sterling job treating three Labour campaigners for dog bites. All were seen and treated within the hour.

Mr. Salmond: I am not sure that the hon. Lady has caught up with events. I thought that we had abandoned the model in which everything is all right with the NHS and adopted one in which huge investment is required to put it right, so will she catch up?

Liz Blackman: The hon. Gentleman should wait, as I shall try to offer suggestions on the way forward later.

The Queen's medical centre, one of the largest teaching hospitals in the country and, indeed, in Europe, serves part of my constituency. The number of out-patients waiting for treatment there for more than 13 weeks has gone down from 12,000 in 1999 to 2,000; there are now no in-patients waiting more than 12 months; trolley waits are down; and a new accident and emergency centre is on the way. Interestingly, last February 83 per cent. of cancer patients were seen within two weeks, but last month 99 per cent. were seen; orthopaedic and out-patient clinics are expanding; there is a new day-case theatre, and another one—the third—is being built; the main X-ray department is being refurbished; there are new staff, including 14 consultants and 60 allied health care professionals; and 150 more nurses are on the way.

I will not go on about improvements, but I wanted to give the House a flavour of what has happened and explain the results of that survey. Change is happening, but I accept that there is a great deal more to do. I get some letters from constituents who tell me that they have had a good experience of the NHS, but a few tell me that they have not, which is a tragedy. I therefore fully accept that we need to do more and that there are no quick fixes.

I want to raise a few matters which, I hope, will be considered as ways of making progress. There is increasing pressure on statutory training as well as training to develop best practice. It must be recognised that training takes time and must be incorporated into work force planning in both primary and secondary care; it takes two years to train a nurse consultant, for example. Resources are needed to pay not just for training but for the backfill. Clinicians who provide much of the training are expected to deal with the same clinical case load. We must provide quality training, but not at the expense of clinical work.

We also need continued emphasis on recruitment of excellent managers. Every time that I make a speech about education or any other public service, I say that we can do nothing well without high quality management. I applauded my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health a few weeks ago when he announced that he was recruiting 100 excellent managers, not just from within the public services, but from the voluntary sector and the private sector. They are vital to make the changes by leading, motivating, problem solving and communicating. I hope that that drive continues.

Turning to audit, I welcome the streamlining of the Commission for Health Improvement, the work of the Audit Commission on value for money, and the Care Standards Commission. However, my conversation last Friday with the chief executive of the Queen's medical

centre convinced me that there is one aspect which we must consider carefully as we move to a more streamlined audit system. He told me that he was visited by the Commission for Health Improvement in January and by the Audit Commission a few weeks later. He was rather rude to the regional tier of the health authority when it visited him a few weeks after that. We must sort that out. We cannot have people asking for the same information time and again. I welcome the recognition that that is a problem, and we must move quickly to resolve it.

A further issue relating to audit is the fact that some outcomes are relatively easy to measure—for example, operations performed and infection rates. Others, such as community health promotion initiatives, delivered by good health partnership working, can produce enormously good results, but they are much more difficult to measure. We need to find ways of doing that effectively, and we should value those services. Many services have undergone multiple reconfiguration, making it difficult to produce an accurate picture of a moving target. Auditors need an in-depth understanding of the change that is taking place.

Where high quality initiatives are making significant improvements and are being rolled out—for example, the Bradford initiative for dementia care mapping—should we not consider mainstream funding? As someone who has a very good community hospital, I make a plea for greater emphasis on the development of community hospitals as new diagnostic and treatment centres. That is traditionally provided by acute providers, not by those smaller, and sometimes excellent, units.

Can we consider having chronic obstruction respiratory disease and heart failure specialists in primary care? That is not a service identified in the national priorities, but it is another partial solution to bed blocking. Can some evaluation be done on the effectiveness of making it a priority? Perhaps some thought has been given to that already.

I conclude on a more political note. At the weekend, I listened—as did many hon. Members, I imagine—to the radio programme "Any Questions?" hosted by Jonathan Dimbleby. The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) was asked how the Tories would fund the health service. His answer has been echoed so many times this afternoon in the Chamber—the Tories say that they need to explore other ways. The right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) also said that. The Welsh nationalist who was on the radio panel immediately cut in and said, "We don't need a debate. Stop navel gazing. We need to get on with it." The audience agreed.

If there is something valuable to say, the time to say it is now. Reform is happening, change is taking place and investment is going in. We are moving forward and changing the whole landscape. The Opposition cannot engage with that. All that they are doing is navel gazing and making noise, which people do not wish to hear.

6.34 pm

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): Until the hon. Lady's final remarks, I was about to say that there was a danger that the debate was approaching the level of seriousness that the public expect on matters of such importance. I am sorry that she lapsed back into narrow partisanship, which is a massive turn-off to the public and has led to the disengagement of so many people and the distrust and scepticism discernible not only in our conversations with members of the public, but in the opinion polls, about whether politicians can do even what they say they will do, let alone what the public want. It is important that we approach the debate with a high level of honesty and straightforwardness. We should treat the public with respect and tell them the truth. We should treat other people's views in the debate with respect. We should accept that none of us has a monopoly of the truth.

There is no health system in the world that is perfect. Our health system is manifestly imperfect, and we should be grown up enough to accept that change is needed and that not only is there room for a serious debate about what form that change should take, but that there is an absolute necessity for such a discussion. The attempt to close down the debate before it has even started is lamentable.

On the Budget more broadly, it is widely accepted that the Chancellor deserves some credit for the performance of the economy. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) made that clear and set out the case fairly. Equally, the Government should accept that the Chancellor had a fantastic legacy. Again, there is no point in being narrowly partisan about it. That is demonstrably the case.

The Chancellor deserves credit for the new monetary arrangements that he has put in place. They are not perfect, but they are a move in the right direction. He deserved some credit until this year—for reasons to which I shall return—for his approach to fiscal discipline, although there has sometimes been criticism of the way in which he achieved it. He deserves credit for a stated, broad commitment to enterprise, which I think he means. He goes on about it a great deal, and I do not think that that is just for the sake of form. He understands that a successful economy depends on successful enterprise.

The criticism of the Chancellor is that he never can resist meddling. There is hugely complex regulation and growing complexity of tax arrangements. For example, capital gains tax needed reform. The previous regime, if my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe will allow me to say so, was too high, but it was at least very simple. It needed reform, but not the creation of a level of complexity that is to the advantage of no one except the accountancy profession.

Others have spoken about the Chancellor's approach to tax credits. There are huge complaints to be made about the complexity, the instability and the meddling. For families alone, the Chancellor has created five new credits, scrapped four of them and introduced two new ones.

The main complaint about the Government's approach to welfare reform is that it goes in the wrong direction. The aim should be, as Labour argued fiercely and rightly in opposition, to reduce the extent of means-testing. What the Government have done has gone in the other direction. It is a pity that we cannot have a more straightforward debate about that.

The Government were elected with a huge majority, a fund of good will and much political capital, and they have, to give them credit, done quite a lot to contribute to an intellectual consensus about the kind of welfare reform that is needed. It is such a pity that when they were elected and had the ability to do it, they decided to go off in a different direction because the Chancellor could not resist the complexity and the engineering. That has made the

[Mr. Francis Maude]

welfare system less satisfactory. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe pointed out, 90 per cent. of families in receipt of what are effectively means-tested benefits does not make sense.

A great deal of complexity has been added—but returning to the theme of enterprise, higher taxes have also been introduced. In this case, they are overt taxes. I have spoken many times in the House about the stealth taxes that the Government introduced in the previous Parliament, when they were still trying to pretend that they were not a tax-increasing Government. They have now come out of the closet, however, and imposed direct extra taxes. Clearly, as everyone in the business world has told them, they are taxes on jobs, and there is no question but that they will affect the performance of the economy.

That is why there is genuine reason to question the Chancellor's commitment to fiscal discipline at this stage. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe devastated the sleight of hand with which the Chancellor increased his estimate on trend growth—he did so "just like that", as Tommy Cooper would have said—which is suddenly going to be 25 basis points higher than previously. There is such a thing as regression to the mean. It may be reasonable to assume that the mean will be higher in future when there is a genuinely low-tax economy with light regulation that will stimulate and encourage enterprise; it may be reasonable to assume that trend growth might increase in such circumstances—but everything that the Government are currently doing goes in the other direction. If anything, the Chancellor should be reducing his estimate of trend growth, not increasing it, especially in the aftermath of a year in which tax revenues grossly under-delivered because the economy under-performed in comparison with what was expected. It smacks much more of a short-term career plan than a long-term financial strategy.

Health care is obviously the nub of the Budget and I have a few observations to make about it. No one denies that more money is needed for health care. There is no arguing about that, and equally, there is no argument about the desperate need for NHS reform. I find much to agree with in the White Paper published by the Secretary of State for Health, about which he made a statement in the House last week. I would be more enthusiastic, however, if I thought that he had a high chance of achieving his aims. Indeed, if he were to achieve all that he set out in the White Paper, he would just about recreate the process of health service reform set in train by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe about 14 years ago—a process of devolution and of moving away from this country's obsession with centralised control of public services.

I applaud the White Paper's emphasis on choice, plurality and devolution, but although that is all good stuff, one must ask oneself whether the Secretary of State really means it. He said only last summer that

> "we . . . have one monopoly provider and that is the NHS. As long as a Labour Government are in power, that will remain the position."—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 500.]

Suddenly, all that has changed. Instead of monopoly, he is in favour of plurality and wants the private sector, the not-for-profit sector and international providers to come in. I think that that is very sensible and I approve of it, but can we believe that he means it when he was saying only 10 months ago something that was different by 180 degrees?

Such a rapid conversion does not have high credibility and again contributes to the public scepticism that we have seen. Some months ago, an announcement was made about the creation of a new diagnostic and treatment centre to be managed by BUPA at the Redhill hospital. The project, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), is good stuff and very sensible. Local people and the local trust want it, but it has not happened because it is not being pushed. There is always resistance on the part of a monopoly producer within a public service to the introduction of diversity. The issue will need to be pushed if these important reforms are to be carried out.

I also applaud devolution in the health service, which is absolutely what is needed, but it is hard to believe that it will really happen. It is very difficult to drive change in any big organisation, as there will be a huge amount of inertia. Real will and the investment of significant political capital will be required to make it happen. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) pointed out that, by committing so much extra funding in advance, the Secretary of State for Health and the Chancellor have abandoned much of the leverage and purchase that they could have had on the health service in ensuring that the changes occurred in time. Apart from that, however, they need absolute commitment and they need to mean what they say.

Even when we consider what the Government are saying about devolution, we see that their approach and mindset are very top down. They are saying that if hospitals do well and are given so many marks out of 10, they will give them a little bit more independence through the gracious dispensation of a beneficent Secretary of State. He needs to understand that when people who are close to the front line and to the delivery of service are given more power and the ability to make choices, implement them and make a difference by dint of what they do, they will generally get it right. Of course, they will not all get it right. Devolution and decentralisation involve risks, and some people will get things wrong and some experiments will go wrong.

It is absurd for us to aim for a completely uniform health service throughout the country. A health service that seeks uniformity will be committed to mediocrity. We should look for local health providers to find different, better and transforming ways of doing things. That is how general improvement will happen, but that is not the approach that the Government are taking, because in their heart they do not believe that such devolution is the answer. Their approach depends on dispensation and is very top down, which is why it is very hard to believe that the process genuinely will happen.

I hope that the programme of reform that the Secretary of State announced will work, but it is hard to believe that it will do so and easy to understand why the public are so sceptical about it. The Government's mindset does not seem to have progressed very much. They claim that they are moving away from the 1948 model—I seem to remember that Aneurin Bevan said in 1948 that he wanted to hear the clatter of the bed pan in his office in Whitehall. But why should we maintain the absurd pretence that the Secretary of State is to blame for every single thing that

goes wrong in the health service, any more than the pretence that he can take credit for every single thing that goes right?

The health service is very big and has been a monolithic organisation. We should seek to decentralise and devolve it, which will require a genuine, grown-up debate, and not the sort of juvenile approach in which we seek to suggest that anything that deviates from current orthodoxy is to be stigmatised as a desire to privatise or disband the national health service. That is the wrong approach. We need an open, serious, grown-up and honest debate; otherwise, I fear that the public's scepticism about the way in which we approach the matter and about whether the health service genuinely can be reformed and improved, as we all hope it can, will remain and may get worse.

6.48 pm

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I very much welcome the call made by the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) for a thorough debate. I hope that the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) will hear and will take note.

People have asked me what the Budget tells us about the Labour party and the Labour Government. They ask whether it is an old Labour Budget or a new Labour Budget, and whether it is a throwback or a third-way Budget. I say that it is a Labour Budget. It shows successful management of the economy in the face of an international downturn, commitment to fairness and equity through continued support of children and families, and absolute commitment to public services—not least the national health service, to which all Labour Members, without exception, are committed as a service that is free at the point of use, available to all in need irrespective of their income, and paid for from general taxation. For two thirds of its life—35 of 54 years—the national health service was run by Conservative Governments who did not believe in its values. The Conservatives opposed its formation, the shadow Chancellor recently called it Stalinist, and this evening a former Chancellor described new spending on it as reckless and irresponsible. In 1997, we inherited a damaged NHS. All that held it together was the supreme commitment of its staff and others, and its unique place in the hearts of the British public.

Listening to the hon. Member for Woodspring was an education, and I certainly agree with two of his comments. I am glad that he accepts that a fifth year in opposition is still early days, and I hope that he will have plenty of time to enter into the debate for which the right hon. Member for Horsham has rightly called. The hon. Gentleman also said that he wants a better health service, but the problem is that he does not know what he means by that. We do: a better health service is not just more of the same, but a diverse and flexible service that can provide an appropriate level of service to everyone who needs it, regardless of where they live and of what those needs may be.

Now more than ever, we need such a health service to demonstrate at least three important principles. First, good health provides a huge economic value—a point that has not been picked up on in this debate. The cost to our economy of absence through sickness is about eight times the additional sum that employers are being asked to contribute to national insurance. Reducing the economic cost of sickness would more than pay those employers, therefore, for their increased contributions. The second principle is an absolute civil right to good health for all individuals and families, and the third is simple: social justice. It is right that a health service be provided nationally, so that people can be treated according to need. To my mind, the national health service is the embodiment of social justice.

Chris Grayling: Can the hon. Gentleman explain how such social justice applies to those of my constituents who, under the national health service, continue to wait months or even years for operations? They survive in pain for long periods, under a system that seems simply unable to deliver improvements. Despite the additional moneys provided by the Government, no improvements have been delivered in the past five years. How can the hon. Gentleman reassure me that the changes in the Budget will deliver improvements for my constituents?

Mr. Levitt: No Labour Member has said that the situation is perfect. We regard the NHS as a glass half full and getting fuller; the Opposition and some in the media see it as a glass half empty, and wish to deride it. I shall discuss later some of the progress that has been made, and which I hope will be made.

We will carry for years the burden of Tory underinvestment in the national health service. Some buildings and working environments are still less than adequate. There is a shortage of many types of specialist consultant—to judge by my postbag, the two that particularly stand out are hip operation specialists and audiologists—and there remains a shortage of mainstream doctors and nurses. However, things are better than the Opposition and the media make them out to be. They have been getting better for the past five years, and they will continue to do so.

Across the country, there are already new hospitals, upgraded accident and emergency departments, and 20,000 more nurses and 6,000 more doctors, with record numbers in training. Tens of thousands of people have, or are about to get, digital hearing aids—a massive breakthrough for them. New standards of care have been established for care homes, along with free nursing care in that sector. Waiting lists and waiting times for in-patients and out-patients have improved, and personal experience has shown me that NHS Direct has been a success. After a telephone call to NHS Direct at half-past 2, I was in a hospital bed by half-past 4. By half-past 6 I was receiving intravenous antibiotics, which I was given for several days. In case any hon. Members are wondering, I can assure them no favouritism was shown. Three days after I was admitted, the nurse said, "Why didn't you tell us you were an MP?"

Mr. Barker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Levitt: I am pushed for time, but I shall invite the hon. Gentleman to contribute later if I can.

There are open minds in our health service on how and where to obtain health care if it is not available locally. I applaud the NHS for having the imagination to buy in operations from abroad, or from the private sector, where necessary. After all, almost all those who provide private sector health were trained at the public expense. I look

[Mr. Levitt]

forward to the establishment of contracts that oblige consultants to prioritise NHS work. Someone whom I know was released from hospital on a Wednesday, rather than a Monday, because the consultant did not do NHS work on Mondays and Tuesdays. As a result, that person had to stay in hospital for an extra two days.

I am the first to agree that investment that is committed blindfold may not be worth having. Investment must be targeted and strategic, and give value for money. It must improve services, and where the status quo is not acceptable, it must be replaced by something better. In my Derbyshire constituency, several modest improvements—I describe them as modest because it does not have an accident and emergency unit or a major hospital—have been made. However, Tameside hospital—a major hospital that serves my constituency—is due to be replaced completely in the next few years.

In New Mills, the NHS has established a salaried dentist to make up for the weakness in the dentistry-free market that we inherited. A community dentist is available to residents in Gamesley, the most deprived ward in High Peak. In rural Hope Valley, an innovative healthy living programme is building on previous schemes that provided—among other things—a citizens advice bureau contact in every GP surgery, and which thereby acknowledged that poverty and poor health go together. A couple of years ago, only 45 per cent. of category A emergency ambulance calls met the 8-minute target time; now, 75 per cent. do so. That major improvement in ambulance services is due in no small part to the commitment of ambulance staff.

Like the rest of the country, we have already enjoyed record year-on-year health service spending increases. In the past few weeks, an entire tier of administration has been removed, thereby promising spending that is much more sensitive to local needs. A recent survey of mine confirms that, for three quarters of my constituents, the national health service is the key policy area in which they expect Labour to deliver improvements in years to come. We have made a huge but worthwhile undertaking, on which we must—and will—deliver.

I cannot resist turning to the Conservative party. Anyone who really wants to know what the Conservatives think should turn to "Tory Talk", an anonymous and outrageous parody of a political leaflet that was distributed door to door in the week before the Budget, and which begins with the phrase:

"Welcome to 'Tory Talk' sent to you by High Peak Conservative Association."

Not a single local politician is mentioned in it—except me, I should modestly point out—and the only national one who is mentioned is the hon. Member for Woodspring. According to "Tory Talk", the hon. Gentleman has no health policies. At least they got that right.

On first looking at the leaflet, the most striking thing is the cartoon, which depicts a patient kicking a doctor in the face. I am sorry that hon. Members cannot see it, and I am happy to pass round the leaflet later. Evidently, that is the Tory attitude to people who work in the NHS. The leaflet's headline is, "New Labour and the Third World NHS." According to the text, the NHS provides a service that is below even that acceptable in the third world. That is the Tory view of the NHS.

Mrs. Browning: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Levitt: The hon. Lady and I have had many exchanges across the Floor of the House, and if there is time I shall let her intervene later on.

That is an outrageous way to describe the commitment, skill, dedication and success of the hundreds of thousands of people who work in the NHS. It is clear that those who wrote the leaflet have never seen third-world health facilities. I can assure them from first-hand experience that, on seeing such facilities, envy is not the emotion that one feels. What one feels is compassion. I want people in the third world to have some of the dignity, concern and good health to which we aspire for every patient in this country.

Mrs. Browning: Clearly, I do not want to take responsibility for something that I have not seen, but I worked in operating theatres in the 1970s, and in recent years I, like others, have had to nurse elderly dying relatives in NHS hospital wards, when our attendance ensured that they had liquid and comfort. Those are the third-world standards that concern people. That may not apply across the NHS, but it is becoming apparent to more and more of us who have had such personal experiences that something must be done.

Mr. Levitt: I exonerate the hon. Lady from responsibility for the leaflet. I congratulate her on having made a genuine point about some people's experience without trying to tell us that that is new and has only recently started to happen. We are not saying that the NHS is perfect. We believe that maintaining a patient's dignity is an important part of health treatment, and we try to do that for every patient at every stage in their health care experience.

I do not want to spend more time on the rag to which I have drawn the House's attention and which contains lies and distortion. The High Peak Conservative association has tried to rewrite history, so it is no surprise that the author wants to remain anonymous. If anyone is as outraged as I am, they can call Buxton 22521 and tell the High Peak Conservatives, so that they may learn for next time.

If we were to go back to a Tory NHS, as before, more beds would be scrapped; disillusioned staff would leave the NHS in droves; there would be no enforceable standards in care homes and nursing homes; people would be unable to afford private health insurance; some medical conditions would be virtually uninsurable even for the rich; lawyers would chase ambulances as they do in America; and the slimmest of safety nets would be provided for the underclass when they fell ill. When I hear Conservative Members criticise our management of the economy, our commitment to public services and our passion to rebuild the NHS, I know that we are right on this one.

The Chancellor is right to reform the national insurance system. The Prime Minister is right to prioritise the national health service. The Secretary of State for Health

is right to propose these NHS reforms. The NHS is at the heart of our commitment to public services available for all. We are doing what we are doing because it is right.

7.2 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am in an unusual position. For 15 years in the House, I have watched Chancellors come and go and I have never yet been able to support the amendments of the law in Budget motions, but unless the Chief Secretary completely mucks up his summing up, I shall support the Government on the first motion on the Order Paper. I shall be able to do so, because at last a Budget has been proposed whose central tenet I agree with, which is that taxation should fund public services, that public services have been inadequately funded and a major transformation is required, and that that should be done from general taxation. I support that, and we and our Plaid Cymru colleagues will be delighted to endorse it in the Lobby this evening.

I promise Treasury Ministers that that will be the last complimentary thing that I shall say about them in my speech. I can see the relief on the face of the Paymaster General, who once voted for me, although she may not like to be reminded of it. It was during controversy over a Budget some years ago, in March 1988. The then Chancellor is no longer in this place. Subsequently, everyone realised what a total disaster it was, but we saw it at the time. However, I promise not to embarrass her any further with revelations from the past.

I support the central theme of the Budget. Unfortunately, there are some drawbacks. Hon. Members may ask what they are, and the opinion polls will tell them. According to the polls, the central theme is hugely endorsed by the public, but the same polls tell us that people do not trust the Government or the Chancellor and feel that they have been misled. They have been misled, because the same Chancellor who now proposes a radical shift of resources into the health service has been living a lie—indeed, two lies—for the past five years.

First, after each and every Budget since 1997, the Chancellor told the House that the health service was adequately funded. We all know that he used smoke and mirrors, double counting, triple counting and, on one occasion, quadruple counting of the investment in public services. At each Budget, he told us that the health service was adequately funded, but we now know that that was not true. Even the Prime Minister has noted the scars, as he puts it, in the health service from his personal experience—perhaps it was one of the confrontations that he had during the general election campaign. The Government now accept that, far from being adequately funded, the health service has been systematically underfunded.

The former Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), strongly implied that, if he had been Chancellor in 1998, the health service and other public services would have received more funds than they have received from the current Treasury team. I see no reason to doubt his assertion, because that is an extremely embarrassing thing for any Conservative to say. Talking about himself as a big spender will hardly endear him to his Front-Bench colleagues, so I think that we can safely conclude that underfunding of our public services has been greater under the Labour party than it would have been under the outgoing Conservative Government.

Secondly, the Labour party has been living a lie because it has said that public services could be adequately funded without recourse to general taxation. For the first five years of the Labour Government, there was an ingenious search for sleekit, back-door, underhand taxation—anything that might not be noticed by the general public. Worst of all, in 1999 when, as the Secretary of State for Health told us earlier, public finance was out of control, Labour announced a 1p reduction in the basic rate of income tax. The Government tried to give the impression that a miracle could be worked: that public services could be adequately funded and there could still be a reduction in the headline rate of income tax. Now we know the truth. That was not possible—it was never possible. It was a deception, and that is why the public are totally cynical about the Government's arguments.

In Scotland, we fought an election in 1999 against that 1p reduction in tax. The Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the full panoply of the new Labour party, from the top right down to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander), attacked the SNP's proposal against a taxation reduction for the Scottish Parliament as wildly irresponsible. Labour's running dogs in the Scottish press corps tore into it, and said that it was dreadful to ask people to pay more for public services.

Now, three years later, the Labour party is doing exactly that, and the dogs in the Scottish press corps are running in the opposite direction, saying that this is the best thing since sliced bread and that a Chancellor should be brave enough to increase taxation to fund public services.

We and, to some extent, the Liberal Democrats, who pursued the same argument in opposition, although not in office in Scotland in the past three years—

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: Oh, all right.

Mr. Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly well aware that the activities of the Scottish Executive, who include Liberal Democrats, are prescribed and limited by the money that they receive from this place. That is why there has to be some compromise in the programme that they implement.

Mr. Salmond: I understood that the Scottish Executive could vary income tax. I also thought that the Liberal Democrats did not want taxation to be reduced, and that that was the programme on which they stood. They have the ability, if they so choose, to pursue that programme and to say that they will not sell their principles for a ministerial Mondeo. They actually sold them for two ministerial Mondeos.

Mr. Carmichael: That was a cheap shot.

Mr. Salmond: It may be a cheap shot, but not with regard to private prisons. We are down here in this place, where the Liberal Democrats argue strongly against privatising the Prison Service, but Scotland's Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice is at the forefront of privatising the Prison Service in Scotland. That is not a cheap shot, save at my constituents and others who will be on the receiving end of that deeply misguided policy.

[Mr. Salmond]

We and the Liberals can have fun at the Government's expense, but my resentment is caused by the fact that we are also having that fun at the expense of others—those whose operations have been delayed or cancelled and who have been on long waiting lists over the past five years. The casualties of the Labour party's deception are the people who have suffered from the inability of even the hard-working health service staff to cope over those five years, due to chronic and consistent underfunding. I should tell the Government that although many, including me, welcome the change in line, people will have long memories regarding that period.

In some ways, the Conservative party, and certainly the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), the former shadow Chancellor, has been kind about the Chancellor's economic record. For example, I note that growth in the UK economy over the past five years is marginally less than in the five years under the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe, although it must be said that his best year was his first, probably because he followed a right duffer as Chancellor. The right hon. and learned Gentleman was able to bounce back from that experience.

I also note that on competitiveness, which is the measure that the Chancellor used to describe as the critical one, the UK economy has declined from No. 4 in 1998 to No. 12, according to the World Economic Forum. UK growth over the economic cycle—the past 10 years—is 2.5 per cent., which is much less than Norway's 3.8 per cent., the USA's 3.3 per cent., the Netherlands' 2.7 per cent. and Ireland's 6.9 per cent.

Let us concede for a second that UK economic performance has been adequate over the past five years. That is certainly not true of the Scottish economy. Prophets are not honoured in their own country, so it is no surprise that the Chancellor is not honoured in Scotland. The UK economy bundles along at 2 to 2.5 per cent., but the growth rate in the Scottish economy is less than half that. In the Budget speech, the Chancellor talked of reaching out to full employment, but the International Labour Organisation measures Scottish unemployment at 6.6 per cent., which is a long way from full employment.

We might have expected the Scottish-based Chancellor to address the low growth in his own country and the relatively high unemployment in the Scottish economy. Instead, we get a series of measures that will make the position worse. A major revenue raiser in the Budget is the increase in oil taxation by the equivalent of £1 billion in a full year. *The Press and Journal* quoted the hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) as saying that that will increase North sea employment. I must say to him and to others that it is impossible to take £1 billion out of the industry and increase North sea activity and employment. There are less damaging ways to increase taxation in the oil sector, but the Government have not found that method.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about North sea taxation. Does he share my view that taking £6 billion out of business right across the UK through higher employers' national insurance contributions equally cannot but damage employment?

Mr. Salmond: The House will recall that employers' national insurance has been described as a tax on jobs. Indeed, the Chancellor should remember it as well, because *The Times* of 21 January 1997 revealed that sources close to him discounted any suggestion of increases in national insurance contributions, saying that they would amount to a tax on jobs. Obviously, an increase is serious for employment. Increased employers' national insurance contributions are serious for the public sector, including the health service, which will find itself giving back a substantial amount of the Chancellor's largesse. That is why, of course, I prefer the open and honest method of increasing income tax as opposed to the national insurance route. I suspect that the Chancellor would too, had he not made a previous commitment.

On oil taxation, my party tabled an amendment to the Budget resolutions asking the Government whether they have analysed the employment and activity impact of the major taxation change that they propose. Over the past 25 years, since we last had a popular Budget, £150 billion has come in from North sea revenues, which is £30,000 a head for every man, woman and child in Scotland. All I ask is whether the Government, in attempting to grab another £1 billion a year through the oil taxation change, have worked through the consequences for employment in Scotland.

I suggest that the Government look closely at the number of exploration and appraisal wells drilled last year in the North sea, which is half that for 1996. If they have done so and if they can tell us that they did their sums before introducing such a measure, they might also introduce a sensible concession to at least mitigate the otherwise serious employment consequences for the Scottish economy, which already suffers 6.6 per cent. unemployment according to the ILO figures.

The aggregates tax is a similar measure, although it is not on the same revenue raising scale. Indeed, it is not a revenue raising measure at all, according to the Government. None the less, as Scotland has plenty of aggregates and will not benefit proportionately from a 0.1 per cent. cut in employers' national insurance contributions, which is meant to be the balancing item, it will take about £20 million out of the Scottish economy. Extraordinarily, it will also make it extremely difficult for many trust harbours around Scotland to build sea defences to protect the shoreline against the rigours of the environment, unless the Government introduce a change. Have they thought through that aspect of taxation?

On that and other measures, the Chancellor's own economy—the Scottish economy—is suffering a much lower growth rate than elsewhere in the UK. He seems to be taking measures that will only make matters worse instead of better. Such is the perception of the Scottish economy under the Chancellor's stewardship that the chief executive of the National Australia bank—which owns Scotland's third largest bank, the Clydesdale—is reported to have said last week that the Scottish economy has been

"in permanent recession for . . . 200 years"

and that the business opportunities are therefore "inferior".

It has to be said that Mr. Frank Cicutto's analysis of the Scottish economy is deeply flawed, not least because 100 years ago Scotland was probably the most prosperous country per head in the world. His manner in putting his point is also rather insulting. My point to the House is that the fact that the chief executive of the third largest

bank in the country has such views, even if they are foolish, hardly shows rising expectations of the Scottish economy. I strongly suggest that the Treasury team take cognisance of the problems in the Scottish economy and start making them better instead of making them worse.

7.18 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I greatly welcome the Budget measures on health and welcome what they will do for people in Plymouth who need the service. I also welcome the role of the health service in Plymouth's economy, which has been a particular growth area since the decision to establish the Peninsula medical school was taken. Our local paper, the *Evening Herald*, has said in the past week that that decision will make the health service the largest employer in Plymouth as those measures work their way through.

I want to take the House back to the 1997 general election. I took a number of months out before it and spent a lot of time knocking on doors in my constituency. Unemployment was the most prominent issue raised with me. In every street and behind many doors, there were people who were unemployed or who knew an unemployed person or who feared unemployment.

In the 2001 election, I often knocked on doors during the day and found no one in. That was because people were at work. Moreover, I no longer had the team that helped me in 1997, and had to look elsewhere for volunteers. Again, that was because people were working.

That has a relevance for health. Several hon. Members have noted the welcome priority that has been accorded to health, but politics is the art of priorities. The priorities of this Government's early years mean that only 16p—or even less—of every new pound taken in tax is not now dedicated to investment in the public services, and especially in health services. The proportion used to be 43p, which went to tackling unemployment and to paying off debt.

The hon. Members for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) derided the Government's tactics, and said that priority should have been given to health earlier. However, we now have a much more sustainable base for this important investment in the public services.

Mr. Salmond: What then was the purpose of the 1p reduction in income tax in the 1999 Budget? If the aim was to build a sustainable base for public services investment, why was tax reduced then?

Linda Gilroy: The hon. Gentleman makes an appropriate point. That Budget was about making work pay, which was a very important part of our strategy aimed at tackling unemployment and getting us to the position that I have just described.

I do not argue that health was not an issue on the doorstep in the 1997 election, because it was. In 2000, I conducted a survey among 600 people in Plymouth, most of them constituents of mine. Those people knew about the severe and chronic problems with capacity that needed to be addressed, and about the need for more doctors and nurses. In that connection, we should not neglect the important role played by support staff, who often get left out.

The survey also found that people believed that we needed to improve access to general practitioners, that they wanted new treatments and technologies to be introduced, and that they thought that the Government should act to drive up quality standards. The need to improve the number of heart operations performed is of particular importance in Plymouth, and marked progress has been made. The new heart unit established only five years ago to tackle 500 heart operations a year now deals with 2,000 a year. That shows by how much demand for that very welcome resource was initially underestimated.

I was fortunate enough to secure an Adjournment debate early in 2001, in response to which investment in the health services in Plymouth rose. Other hon. Members have said that not much progress has been made, but the amount of cash available to acute services in Plymouth had risen by 30 per cent. to £165 million, from £123 million. We are still very pressed, however, and much remains to be done.

In addition, activity levels had risen by 8.2 per cent. to 108,000 finished consultant episodes, and there had been a 23 per cent. rise in the number of nurses. In numerical terms, that is nearly 400 more nurses, and we have had to work hard to recruit them. There are 40 new consultant posts, and I have referred already to the Peninsula medical school.

If the Tories had remained in government, it is unlikely that progress remotely on that scale would have taken place. I could go on with a long list of examples of the progress that has been made with accident and emergency services, cancer services, NHS Direct, Care Direct, and so on. Although these improvements are substantial, they are still not enough to put right the years of underinvestment, and we have to accept that people in 2001 were not aware of the scale of the progress being made.

Various hon. Members have spoken about the cost of the alternatives to the Government's strategy. That raises another question about awareness. We are told that it is proper for the Opposition to be vague about their proposals. However, they were not vague before the election, when they spoke about the costs of "non-urgent" operations. However, such operations—involving surgery on eyes, knees, hips and cataracts, for example—are very urgent for elderly people.

Mrs. Browning: That allegation—peddled by the hon. Lady and the Liberal Democrat party—was categorically denied. I hope that the hon. Lady will withdraw it. Conservative Members have never used the term.

Linda Gilroy: I do not propose to withdraw what I said. The Conservative proposals at the time of the general election would have cost substantially more than the proposals in this Budget. The Wanless report says that drawing money from general taxation is a fair and efficient way to finance public services such as health, and that there is no evidence that any other method would deliver a given level of health care at lower cost. It also found that other systems are likely to prove more costly.

The Budget proposals mean that people on median earnings of £21,400 will have to pay £3.70 more a week, and that those on 150 per cent. of median earnings—£32.000—will have to pay an extra £5.75. Those costs are known and evident, and they demonstrate that the payments represent what is, potentially, the best insurance in the world.

However, the people to whom I have spoken over the past week rightly want to be sure that the money is being used well. As I have said, there is a lack of awareness of

[Linda Gilroy]

how much has been done and of how much alternative strategies would cost. There is a lack of awareness, too, about how much devolution to front-line services and how much reform there has been already.

Plymouth had one of the first primary care trusts in the country—one of the largest and most innovative, and it has had some success in bringing partners together to ensure appropriate treatment for patients and value for money. It has examined the possibility of establishing a common formulary for prescribing drugs, and has shown that, for a community of only 250,000 people, spending on drugs is just short of £30 million a year. Such transparency has allowed the PCT to initiate projects to make more effective use of the money.

The PCT's approach has ensured that money is saved, and that more appropriate treatment is available for people before they end up in an acute hospital. The PCT has also set up a clinic for back pain. Faster and earlier treatment by, and advice from, community health professionals have prevented people's conditions from deteriorating so far that the acute hospital has to intervene.

Reforms and the achievement of value for money are not confined to the PCTs. The framework for clinical governance proposes major reforms to drive up standards. Under the new arrangements involving the litigation authority, responsibility for insurance is to be devolved down from hospitals to lower levels.

The Tamar science park is becoming renowned. It is situated next door to Plymouth Derriford hospital trust. Last week, it was visited by my noble Friend Lord Falconer of Thoroton, and my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for small business also visited recently. Their visits provide an interesting insight. One small business flourishing around the hospital is K2 Medical Systems. I believe that the company will make a significant contribution to reducing the huge bill for litigation mentioned earlier by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). The estimates in the Wanless report suggest that savings of £225 million a year could be made, especially in connection with obstetrics. About £4 billion in outstanding claims are with the litigation authority. Savings on that scale annually could be redeployed to much better effect. K2, at www.k2ms.com/—for those who want to look up that small business—employed only two people a few years ago but now employs 23 people.

Savings would make a large difference; about 70 per cent. of claims relate to obstetrics. An improvement would be good not only for health budget efficiency, but would reduce the incidence of damage to children—one of the most difficult things for anyone to deal with.

National service frameworks are important in achieving joined-up action and thinking—Wanless envisages their roll-out to more parts of the health service. We discussed with the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), the huge contribution that could be made by tackling osteoporosis. The incidence of fractures has risen inexorably: in 1960, there were 10,000 hip fractures; currently, there are 70,000 a year, at a cost of £1.7 billion. That has an effect on bed blocking. [illegible]al fractures take more time than elective hip surgery. The Osteoporosis Society—I am a president of our local branch—has worked hard at producing guidelines. The costs of £1.7 billion are detailed in section 6 of the national service framework for older people. If investment was made to deal with the problem, the health service would save a huge amount of money.

Clinical governance, dealing with more litigation locally and rolling out the national service frameworks to other aspects of health care are building blocks that my Front-Bench colleagues have contributed to the development and implementation of important policies. They will provide a robust foundation on which we can secure a health service delivered according to its original principles: free at the point of delivery; paid for from general taxation; and value for money that is second to none. It will be a true health service in the fullest sense of the word, not the ill health service that we have been used to experiencing.

7.32 pm

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I remind the House that I am a retired NHS doctor and that I have registered interests in some investments in health-related businesses.

With some provisos, I welcome the Budget, especially the Chancellor's commitment to the original ideals of the NHS. I am a passionate supporter of the NHS, having worked in it for a long time, and I am delighted that the Government are giving it what may be its final chance to improve and succeed when funded from taxation. The Government realise that they are putting their head on the block by staking all on improving the NHS.

As an Independent Member, I want to examine briefly some of the proposals and then discuss what is missing. I am delighted with the devolution of power to primary care trusts. That goes back a decade or more to the 1980s when local, small health authorities were responsible for running their small part of the health service. At that time, there was much more input from the hospital consultant; and, with the loss of the strict purchaser-provider split, I would like to see some input from hospital staff to PCTs. GPs should also have some accountability for hospital services.

I am delighted that power is moving away from the centre, but will devolution be real? Will central diktat still sway some decisions? I am thinking especially of NICE guidelines, which I fear might sway local priorities and override local decisions. Today, I received a letter signed by 30 senior clinical oncologists, expressing their disagreement with a recent NICE decision. The letter states:

"Quite simply, NICE has got this one wrong."

I am worried that NICE may sway priorities.

I am delighted that the Commission for Health Improvement has been given more power. It is a logical step to amalgamate it with the Audit Commission and the National Care Standards Commission. That will avoid so many visits to trusts and health authorities and demands on their time. The CHI showed its capabilities by promptly removing stars from hospitals that it had inspected, illustrating the lack of reliability in the current star rating system. I am waiting to see whether league tables become more reliable under the new organisation.

I am rather worried that local authorities may be penalised for delayed discharges, even when a strong reason for such delays could be that a health authority had reduced capacity without considering the need for intermediate care.

I approve of the plan for electronic booking of all appointments by 2005, although it is terribly challenging—an extremely tall order. It implies that IT systems throughout the health service will be able to talk to each other. We are also to have electronic patient records by 2008. The Government will be judged on such measures.

The loss of community health councils is disappointing. I cannot put it better than the Opposition health spokesman in the other place who, in a recent letter to *The Independent*, stated:

"CHCs will be replaced by an incomprehensible cats cradle of new committees moulded by the Government without the independence of CHCs."

I have one or two comments on what is missing from the proposals. We need open, honest discussion of health care rationing. Political parties tend to veer away from that and are frightened of it, but it is essential.

Other hon. Members have mentioned the reform of health care management. Sir Terence Conran, writing in *The Sunday Times* recently, pointed out how marvellous we are in this country at organising events such as the Queen Mother's funeral. We have some superb businesses in my constituency: we make the best carpets; and amazingly, in the middle of England, we make superb ocean-going cruisers. We can do things well. In parts of the NHS we are doing that, so why are we not doing it in every part of the NHS? Excellent management is important.

As other hon. Members have mentioned, there is nothing in the proposals about abolishing waste. Hon. Members have referred to the report by Stuart Emslie, although it has been somewhat brushed aside. In December 2001, it noted that the removal of waste and fraud could save the NHS £7 billion a year. Sick pay and agency nurses account for £2 billion of that amount. Hon. Members who read *The Sunday Times*—one of the more reliable papers—will have seen that it recommended that people buy shares in a firm specialising in nursing agencies. Seven years ago, its share value was 44p; at present it is 560p.

The answer to the problem is a massive pay rise for nurses. That would go against devolution, but it is the one measure on which the Government should override devolution. It would stop us losing nurses who go abroad. Nurses would not leave the profession. They are our most precious resource and we are wasting money on agencies when we should be paying it direct to them. That is the only directive that I want the Department of Health to give the devolved bodies.

I will not go into all the details of the waste, but I shall list a few of them. We have heard about adverse events, such as delayed discharges, hospital-acquired infections, the over-prescription of drugs and clinical negligence claims. However, we have not heard about two of them: the cost of pay and locum fees when doctors are suspended—those suspensions can go on for two years and more—and the cost of patients not turning up for appointments. I met representatives of a firm today who think that they have an answer to that issue, and they will be persuading some trusts and the health authority to try to get to grips with it.

Dr. Evan Harris: I always worry when I hear doctors attacking patients for not turning up. Patients are often too ill to do so because they have deteriorated while waiting—some may even have died. No clinic that I ever worked in—perhaps the hon. Gentleman will remember this, too—did not over-book to allow for missed appointments, so it is hard to argue that the predicted non-attendance rate costs money when clinics and operating lists are over-booked. That seems like blaming the patients.

Dr. Taylor: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I am certainly not blaming the patients, but published studies have shown that tremendous savings can be made in that way.

I shall move on to deal with local waste. I was very envious of the hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) because the majority of letters that she gets are complimentary. I wish I could say that since being elected I had had one letter that was complimentary about the NHS. I am sure that all hon. Members have examples of local waste in their own constituencies. I have the shining example of the closure of all acute in-patient services at a charter-marked efficient hospital, which many sources now readily admit was purely for financial reasons. One can imagine my constituents' derision when they are told that 40 new hospitals will be built, and one that stands largely empty could reduce that number to only 39.

Local affairs are made worse by the inadequacy of the replacement service provided; I receive letters about that almost daily. This weekend, a local Sunday newspaper damned, with local people, the replacement services that are available. Even worse, there is now a plan to spend £14 million on gutting a six-year-old block to recreate what, in the words of a disillusioned manager, we have got already.

Thus I shall support the Government's giving the NHS funded by taxation a final chance, but I draw to hon. Members' attention a quotation from a playwright. In 1624, in a play entitled "The Parliament of Love"—this is certainly not the Parliament of love, but it is a Parliament and the words are very relevant—Philip Massinger wrote:

"All words, and no performance."

The Government will be judged on their performance from now on. We have the words; we are waiting for the performance.

7.43 pm

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): The Budget will be welcomed in my constituency. Hon. Members will be aware that West Bromwich, West is in the heart of the industrial black country—the country's manufacturing heartland. Before I talk about the Budget's relevance to my constituency, I should like to say that today I am wearing the latest manifestation of the entrepreneurial spirit that still lives in the black country. I am of course talking about my St. George's rose, which is promoted and manufactured by the Tipton branch of the Royal British Legion. May I tell those hon. Members who have asked me where I got my rose that, for future St. George's days, I will be happy to contact the local officers to ensure that they are not denied that latest privilege and manifestation of the industriousness of the area that I represent?

I shall move to the specific Budget issues. My constituency was devastated by the monetarism and the boom and bust of the Tory Government. During this

[Mr. Adrian Bailey]

four-day debate, I have listened to dire warnings from Opposition Members about the state of British economy and the damage that the Budget would do to British industry. Those warnings sound hollow to my constituents. That so-called business-friendly Tory Government, who, by their long-established contacts and innate ability, are so good at managing the British economy, caused two recessions when almost every major manufacturer in my constituency—some of them household names—disappeared. They left behind devastation, and people's livelihoods and prospects were wiped out. To compound that, round after round of public sector cuts took further money out of the local economy and deprived people of their local services in the name of trying to create the very sort of enterprise and initiative that they had wiped out in the area.

Since then, under Labour, we have had two recessions, but employment has risen and economic growth has improved. My constituents will judge by their personal experience, and I am confident that they will know how to judge the improving prospects and public services under Labour, compared with their experience under the Tories, and that they will back the Government.

The reasons for those improvements are the low interest rates and low inflation which have underpinned our economic performance. To be fair, I have heard Opposition Members pay credit to the Government for that. However, Opposition Members have two explanations: one is that we inherited some sort of largesse from the previous Government; the other is that the true, debilitated state of our economy is being masked.

I have also heard Opposition Members say that the 1 per cent. extra national insurance cost will devastate local industry and be a tax on jobs. I am confident that that prediction will be as accurate as their prediction about the independence of the Bank of England and the possible cost in jobs of the minimum wage.

I do not deny that my constituency still has a long way to go before reaching the affluence of some areas, but unemployment in the most deprived ward has dropped from 25 per cent. in 1994, to 8 per cent. now—still too high, but an enormous improvement. Behind every percentage statistic, there is a tale of new hope, new commitment to work and a new contribution to the local economy.

The package of measures to help small businesses will be welcome. We no longer have the huge manufacturing employers in the area, but new businesses are starting up and creating jobs. The corporation tax reduction, VAT reliefs and research and development credits will all play a part. I also welcome the StepUp pilot scheme. Its aim is to provide a further 360 people in the most deprived ward in my constituency with the opportunity of a year's employment for the first time in many years, so that they can gain self-respect and self-discipline and enjoy the knowledge that they are contributing to the local economy.

I am sure that the 1 per cent. increase in national insurance contributions, which has been long debated in the Chamber, will be opposed by some. However, if one looks at what companies are getting for it, it is obvious that it is an investment that will benefit everybody. Yesterday, I heard my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) talk about the cost to industry of sickness at work—£10.7 billion a year. If only a proportion of that is saved, that will be an enormous benefit to industry.

I read in yesterday's *Guardian* that late trains cost every company £21,000 a year, so our investment in the transport system has an obvious dividend for business. Other transport investments are much sought after in my local area, and they are being provided. Similarly, local companies want more police—and we are investing in more police—because they know that that reduces the chance of burglaries and the costs that accrue from them.

I could go on, but in essence the 1 per cent. on national insurance will provide the investment for a healthy, well educated, more mobile work force. That is an enormous long-term investment for local industry. Investment in human capital is every bit as important as investment in other capital.

I turn to health and social services. When I hear Conservative Members talk about the health service, I am not surprised that they are slipping behind in the opinion polls in that respect. Smoke and windows is a phrase that is often used in this House.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Smoke and mirrors.

Mr. Bailey: Sorry, smoke and mirrors. That is evident in the contributions made by Conservative Members. They talk seductively about certain aspects of health services in other countries, and consistently and progressively rubbish those in this country, but provide no overall consistent picture of what their alternative would be, so that the electorate can make a judgment. People in my constituency want more doctors and nurses and better facilities, and they know that those must be paid for. In all the comments made by Conservative Members, I did not hear them once mention how their policies would be paid for. Ultimately, my constituents believe that the increase is the fairest way of funding the national health service.

I want to make a plea relating to my constituency. Like many industrial constituencies, it suffers a legacy of ill health owing to its industrial background, as well as poor life expectancy, lower birth weights and so on. Those statistics are improving, but there is still a long way to go. That is why the area was designated as a health action zone. Those involved in it are pioneering a range of joined-up activities for developing more healthy lifestyles, including campaigns on exercise, healthy eating, teenage pregnancies, sure start and smoking cessation programmes, to name but a few. The problem is that funding for those programmes is announced year by year, and those working on them do not feel confident that they will be able to do so over the long term. Now that we have a five-year commitment on health spending, I hope that the funding for health action zones will be made more specific for longer periods to reduce the risk that those who work in them, and do such a good job, may move elsewhere.

The Budget will be of enormous benefit to a company that we are privileged to have in my constituency—Huntleigh Nesbit Evans, the major manufacturer of NHS beds and trolleys. Those of my constituents who are employed there will be reassured by the long-term commitment to a 7.5 per cent. growth in health spending.

I want to comment briefly on social care. My local authority, Sandwell, welcomes the commitment on 6 per cent. growth. It believes that that should correct the difficulty that it, in common with most other major metropolitan authorities, has faced over the past few years in balancing its social services budget. It has a tradition of working in partnership with other agencies—it has received Government commendations for doing so—and welcomes the extra flexibilities and allowances that will be given to those who demonstrate good practice in that.

However, I have reservations about the penalty system for local authorities that are unable, for various reasons, to meet their targets on bed blocking. Although I can understand the Government's reasoning as regards the need to take action where partnership working is not taking place, in some areas local economic conditions and the scale of local private provision are such that local authorities have little control over the matter. Any penalty programme should be applied sensitively.

My constituency is crying out for the measures in the Budget. It is a Budget that will help the local economy; a Budget for the middle and lower income families who predominate; a Budget for better health care, which is greatly needed; a Budget to provide the basic requirements for a good standard of living for those on lower incomes; and a Budget for small businesses to develop in the area, which has suffered so much in the past. Above all, it is a fair Budget for constituencies like mine.

7.57 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I want primarily to deal with the aspects of the health service that are covered by the Budget. We have heard a lot today about the amount of taxation that will be raised specifically for the health service over a five-year period and the reason why the Government felt it necessary to focus the Budget on one particular Department.

Labour and Liberal Democrat Members have sought to paint the Conservative position as being that we are not in favour of spending more money on the health service and that even if we were, it would not be publicly funded money. That is not true. Our position is not that we are not willing to spend more money—or even more public money—on it, but that we believe that, over the past five years, the Government have spent more money on health without delivering improvements. We therefore question the proposal that the tax increase in the Budget will do so.

I want to be constructive in my comments by addressing how the NHS is organised, especially in relation to its management and what needs to be done to make it more effective and to help it to deliver the benefits that we all, as constituency Members, want for our constituents.

Conservatives

"believe in the ideals of the NHS—comprehensive care, available to all, on the basis of need not ability to pay. It is 'there when you need it, open to all, no matter what your circumstances . . . no ifs or buts, no small print'. These are ideals worth fighting for."

In putting that on record, I have cited the comments of the leader of the Conservative party in a consultation pamphlet that was published only this month as part of a genuine attempt to find solutions to problems and to put before the British electorate policies in our name that have been well researched, tested and costed.

Mr. David Miliband (South Shields): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but those of us who are speaking at the end of the debate agreed to limit our speeches, and I shall try to finish speaking before my 15 minutes are up.

I wanted to begin by putting the Conservative position on the record. I shall now concentrate on the current position of the health service. It is not the same as it was in 1997, when the Government took over. Ministers have made a plethora of pledges and announcements, sometimes accompanied by money. Despite that, the health service has not delivered. The Labour party's 1997 general election pledge card stated that it would reduce NHS waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients as a first step by releasing £100 million saved by cutting NHS red tape. We know that waiting lists did not decrease, but grew by almost 100,000 before they started to fall. There is more, not less red tape now. I shall give some examples of red tape that could be hacked not only to make savings but to affect people who work in the health service.

I worked in the health service under the previous Labour Government, when we were all crossing picket lines to get into operating theatres. *[Interruption.]* It is a matter of record. Nowadays, more and more health professionals at all levels find increasing bureaucracy. More decisions are made centrally and more systems and initiatives are set up while Ministers and other bureaucrats try to influence the way in which health professionals carry out their jobs. That not only detracts from resources at the sharp end, but has a terrible impact on the morale of people who work in hospitals and in the health service. I shall give a couple of examples.

I raised one example with the Secretary of State at Health questions. It was brushed aside, which is a typical occurrence at Health questions, and the Secretary of State implied that I was expressing only my view. I was not; I was conveying the view of doctors in my constituency. The problem that I raised must be sorted out if improvements are to be made.

In the past, when GPs believed that the condition of a patient on a waiting list had deteriorated, they had the opportunity to refer the patient back to a consultant because they believed that he should be seen again and perhaps be treated more quickly because, in their clinical judgment, the consultant should be made aware of the new circumstances.

A GP in my constituency wrote to a hospital consultant, and received a reply, which stated:

"As you know the government has specified that no patient should wait longer than 15 months and I am afraid that as . . . waiting lists are only a few weeks below this date we are presently only operating on long waiters, much against our better judgement. However if even a single patient waits longer than 15 months there are enormous financial implications for the Trust which will then result in even longer waiting lists for patients."

When that is unscrambled, it means that the consultant is telling the GP, "If you think your patient is deteriorating, don't refer him to me because I'm not going to do

[Mrs. Browning]

anything. Although I'm a consultant in a hospital, with all those years of training and experience, I am acting not on my clinical judgment but on a directive from central Government through the hospital management. If I fail to do that, there will be financial penalties."

In practice, financial penalties mean that hospitals that fulfil their waiting list targets will receive an additional sum of money that they can spend on patients. However, although some patients get treated more quickly, others who clinically deteriorate are not seen. Such micro-management and micro-interference with the judgment of GPs and consultants about what is right for an individual patient at any time in a specific hospital or on a waiting list does not deliver for patients. It makes GPs and consultants feel that they are not doing the job for which they trained because the executive decisions are not left to them. Instead, those decisions are second-guessed and orchestrated by others who do not have their experience.

We have discussed morale among medical professionals. I include nurses in that discussion because there is a big problem with nursing, not least our reliance on bank nurses. Of course, they have a use, but it is not the best way to proceed either economically or from a patient's point of view. Continuity of nursing on the ward helps to provide better patient care. Anyone who has worked on a hospital ward will appreciate the obvious advantages of continuity of care by a team of nurses who regularly deal with the same patients as they go on and off duty.

If we start to lose the professionals in our medical services and in our NHS, while we may successfully recruit new people, we will reach a point when we have lost a vast number of people with many years' experience. They will have left the system by early retirement or taking up other jobs. That will leave the health service, like all other public services, with a bank of professionals who tend to be younger but less experienced. We will not have the vital mix of experience that we need for continuity and training.

The way in which the money that the Budget allocates is spent and some key changes are important. A great orchestrated audit that will not kick in for another four years, and certainly not until after the next general election, is surely not the priority for the additional money. The Government should make practical suggestions for resolving the problems on the wards, low morale among medical staff and what patients perceive as simple matters. For example, people should be able to go into hospital in this country for general surgery and feel confident that they are not at risk from hospital-acquired infections.

I appreciate that there is an argument about prescribing antibiotics, but claiming that all MRSA is down to that problem is a smokescreen. I know from my constituency lists and debates in the House that people fear MRSA and that they acquire it in hospital. One constituent is confined to a wheelchair, but was not when he was admitted for a routine hip operation. He got MRSA; that was his experience of a hospital in this country. We must use the extra money to deal with such matters. It is worrying that despite such experiences in the NHS, so many resources are spent on unnecessary administration or double checking.

I support accountability but much double checking in the NHS appears bureaucratic and unnecessary. I received a report about GP appraisals, which will be introduced in my constituency. In principle, I agree with GP appraisals, but do they require so many resources, so much administration and bureaucracy?

A newsletter, which provides an update on GP appraisals, states:

"the most difficult areas remain: the funding for both appraisers and appraisees; the selection and training of sufficient appraisers to make the system viable; sufficient understanding or training appraisees so that the system is seen to be non-threatening, formative, educative and supportive; how long is needed for the process both in the set up and subsequent years. We are close to agreement on the cost of each appraisal based on a compromise of timing as to how long the process will take."

That is really out of this world. Surely to goodness our local medical committees should not have to get involved in something so complex and bureaucratic—which must, by definition, take up valuable resources, not least doctors' time—to set up a system that is so bureaucratic.

My worry about endorsing this Budget is not about the principle of spending more money or about the fact that the money is coming from the public sector; it is that there is no confidence in the Government to deliver. Throughout the public sector, there has been an inability to deliver. *[Interruption.]* It is not rubbish. If the House will bear with me, I shall find the piece of paper that I am looking for. Ah, here it is, to my right. I do not often move to the left.

Let me conclude with this comment about the Royal Bolton hospital, which was written by a 73-year-old gentleman. He says:

"The hospital is deep in debt, bottom of the league of North-West hospitals, and 80-year-old patients are kept on trolleys in its corridors for ten hours without meals."

This was written by a former Labour Member for Bolton, Mr. David Young. He goes on to say:

"As the longest-serving MP Labour has ever had in Bolton, I got the go-ahead for what is now the Royal Bolton Hospital. But New Labour has effectively destroyed all I worked for over 23 years."

That indictment, in a letter to the *Daily Mail* published only last month, shows only too clearly that the Government have got to start taking delivery seriously. The health service has deteriorated under their stewardship. That is a reflection not on the people who work in it, but on the Government's ability to manage and to deliver. I am very sceptical about their ability to deliver this money in a way that will make a difference to the staff and to the patients who rely on our NHS.

8.12 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): It is a great pleasure to take part in this debate on a very fine Budget indeed, even when suffering from a raging sore throat—highly appropriate in a health debate.

I have been sitting here for some time reflecting on the words of Opposition Members, which have often been elegantly expressed, although not as seductively as my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) might like to claim. The last few hours have been most instructive, because although we have heard fine words, pleas for debate, and good, intelligent points being made, we have heard no passion, commitment or determination to address the problems of the health

service. The point of the Opposition is to oppose, but in nothing that the Conservatives have said has there been any hint that, if this country were unfortunate enough to have them back in power, they would ever take on any of the real issues in the health service, invest properly in it or accord it the high priority that it needs.

I am going to stop using the term "health service" now, and start talking about health and social services, because this has been a Budget for social services. It is not true that we have not seen any investment or results in social care over the last few years. The quality protects programme, to name but one, has produced tremendous benefits by addressing the serious problems—bequeathed to us by the Conservative Government—of lack of support for young people in care, and by investing in residential care, fostering and adoption, advocacy and services for the most vulnerable children in society.

The point of this Budget is that it will allow local authorities to build their base budgets and develop their base-line services for social services, and to build on those opportunities. Most importantly, it will allow local authorities to address the serious issues facing elderly people in our constituencies—issues right at the interface of health and social care. They relate to the quality of care afforded to older people, the range of services that we provide for them, the way in which we deliver those services, and the need to ensure that they reflect the needs, wishes, feelings and views of those individual older people.

Thanks to the 6 per cent. increase for social care, councils will be able to increase fees to stabilise the care home market, and to work properly in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors. Councils will be able to develop different forms of care—rehabilitative care, for instance. They will also be able to offer older people more choice in the sort of care that can be made available to them in their own homes.

More important than anything that has been said in the Budget debate so far are the words and prescriptions of the Wanless report. Wanless explicitly says that health and social care are inextricably linked. The Government know that poverty and poor health are inextricably linked, and they recognise that the mechanisms of health and social care are inextricably linked. Those mechanisms are related to how long older people stay in hospital, to the quality and range of services that can be provided, and—most importantly—to the quality of life of older people and the way in which their range of needs can be met.

The excellent Wanless report points out that substantial increases in resources are needed, and the Government are introducing a 7.4 per cent. increase over five years for health and a 6 per cent. increase for social care. Wanless also says, however, that his review had neither the time nor the resources to develop a whole systems model and approach to reorganising care in the future. He had no time to build projections for social care at the same level of detail as he did for health care.

The Government cannot rest on their laurels over what has been achieved through this Budget; they need to move on. There needs to be an immediate extra study of the trends affecting social care to ensure that projections of need, of finance and of the sort of modernisation that is required just as much in social care as in health care are fully integrated, and that health and social care are brought together to meet the holistic needs—the all-round needs—of people living in our communities. That will require major work by the Government and also by the local authorities.

My local authority, Lancashire county council, is having a difficult experience at the moment; it is reviewing its provision for older people, which has been a painful process. I fully support the need to review services, but this review has not, so far, been developed in conjunction with health care—although health and social services need to work together—with the private or voluntary sectors, or with other organisations. The review has certainly not been conducted in close partnership with older people living in the community, or in residential care in Lancashire, or with their carers and families.

The opportunity offered by the Budget, the strictures of the Wanless report and the work that the Government have done on the NHS framework and to build capacity need to be taken to heart by local authorities and all agencies that work with older people so that all those measures are successful. We need to end the uncertainty for constituents throughout Lancashire. We need to stop the bickering between vital parts of the care system and to redevelop services so that they work in partnership on the basis of what the Government have laid down. We need to work back from the patient and carer so that we define their needs and how to provide services.

Health and social services need to adopt a corporate social responsibility across organisational barriers. They need to integrate staff and planning processes, to be quality driven and to derive from shared visions of how services should be delivered. Our services need to take a long-term perspective, to take account of the fact that there is an ageing population and to be financially and professionally viable. If we take the Wanless recommendations on board and develop an integrated projection for the future of health and social care in conjunction with the Budget proposals, it is clear that the Government are giving organisations such as Lancashire county council an opportunity to improve services.

I trust and hope that the social services department and the health service in Lancashire respond to those opportunities. I also hope that the private sector gets around the table with those agencies to deal with the problems properly so that from now on they work together in a true partnership. It is especially important that they work with elderly people in residential care and the wider community, and their carers and families, so that we develop the high-quality health and social care services that people need. We have to put the bickering, falling out, uncertainty and sheer anxiety of the past few months behind us.

8.22 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): "They've taken leave of their senses"; "It's a disaster"; "I can't believe what they've done"; "They've broken their general election promises"; "They've got it completely wrong"—those are just a few examples of the responses to the Budget that I received when I recently campaigned in the local elections. Where on earth the opinion pollsters get their ideas from, I do not know. They should come to Southend, West where they will find that the verdict of the electorate is that the Budget is a complete and utter disaster.

The Government have spent six years trying to massage the media response, but even they must admit that the response to the Budget has been a disaster. Indeed,

[Mr. David Amess]

the day after the Budget was delivered, the Government would have struggled to find a headline that was sympathetic to them, and that includes in the two tabloids that most consistently support them. The City also gave the Budget a big thumbs down.

However, the reaction of Labour MPs was the most interesting to observe. They were extremely excited last week. They waved their Order Papers at the end of the statement and thought that it was marvellous. As soon as I observed their reaction, I knew that the Budget was an absolute disaster for the Government, and it could not have happened to nicer people.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) made a magnificent speech in which he destroyed the reason behind the Budget. He outlined clearly just how the Chancellor has got it completely wrong. I also greatly enjoyed the speech by the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor). Long may he continue to make such unpleasant remarks about the Conservative party, further undermining the huge difference, thank goodness, between us and the Liberal and Labour parties. As long as the Liberals come up with such crazy ideas like the legalisation of cocaine, the general public will see what a complete shower they are.

In 1992, socialism was defeated and the ghastly new Labour party emerged, but last Wednesday Labour returned to type. It returned to the times when it said, "Whatever the problem is, we'll spend money on it and it will be solved." I was brought up in the east end of London on the ethic that every penny counts and people should spend money well, but this crazy Government waste money. In the past year, there has been a huge underspend in the Department of Health alone. I do not know how the Government think that £6 billion will fix things over the next five or six years.

The whole point of the NHS and its past successes is that it depends on human resources—the women and men who work in it. I know that the Labour party tries to cast aspersions on the Conservative party and to spread smears, but none of that will work any more. All Conservatives applaud the women and men who work in the health service. They do a magnificent job—it is the organisation that is wrong. Without root-and-branch reform, the Government's NHS plan will be a disaster. As ever with Labour, the plan was brilliantly written, giving the impression that the money will be well spent and that reform will follow. However, if one goes through it carefully, it is obvious that there are no big new ideas and that it will be a disaster.

The Conservative party believes in the NHS ideals, but Britain today is further from those than at any time since the NHS was founded. It is wrong that people should not be offered the best treatment regardless of their ability to pay, but that is what the Labour party has ended up offering the people of this country.

Waiting lists are rising again and hospital beds are blocked because care home beds have been closed, and all that is the Government's fault. During the Committee consideration of the Health and Social Care Bill the Government would not listen. They were telling us that they would get all the care home owners together and listen to their concerns, but certainly in my constituency it is too late and many care homes have closed. They are looking to develop other services for local residents.

The odds of surviving cancer in Britain are among the lowest in Europe. Last year, 250,000 people without any insurance paid for their operations—more than ever before. The Budget is a missed opportunity. The Government say that they have analysed systems in other countries and we have nothing to learn from them, but they have the brass neck to send our patients abroad to have operations. What hypocrisy! We do have something to learn from other countries. Germany has no national waiting lists and Danish patients have a legal right to treatment within four weeks of seeing their GP. The Conservative party has a completely open mind about the lessons that we can learn from other countries.

Derek Wanless is continually mentioned. Quite how he has been brought so dramatically into the equation I do not know. In his report he expresses doubt that the Government's existing spending commitments can be used wisely. His report outlining a 20-year vision is already flawed by a lack of information and will have to be rewritten in five years.

Three hours ago, two or three Labour Back Benchers rather tamely intervened on the Secretary of State, but it is interesting that no Labour Member has referred to the letter from the Local Government Association which all hon. Members have received today. I am interested by the letter because the LGA represents all councillors throughout the country, and the letter is signed by Jeremy Beecham, for Labour; Gordon Keymer, a Conservative; Chris Clarke, a Liberal Democrat; and Milner Whiteman, who is independent.

The LGA says that the Government have got things completely wrong. It castigates them for failing to consult local government. This Government do not consult on anything, except perhaps asking those in a Cabinet meeting whether they want a rich tea biscuit or shortbread. The LGA letter says that central Government are already chronically underfunding social services and that there is a problem in the supply of residential care, for which local councils are not responsible. Labour Members will find that more and more of their local councillors castigate them.

Unlike the Government Whip, I have been listening to the debate for more than four hours. We all draw on our personal experiences of the NHS, and I have had four such experiences recently, two involving relatives and two involving friends. The first case is that of an aunt who is now dead. She was an honest, straightforward lady who deserved better treatment than she received from the NHS. That case has been going on for 18 months and the family will not give up the fight to get justice for her. The husband of another of my relatives was offered a care plan when he went home following NHS treatment, but it was never delivered.

At a very early age, the wife of a friend of mine died within 45 minutes of having a brain haemorrhage after coming home from work at the blood bank centre. She was the mother of four children. When I went with my friend to view his wife's body at the hospital—you can imagine the emotion, Madam Deputy Speaker—we were given an appointment time, and we did not see the body for an hour and a half. That is a disgrace, and the organisation was shambolic. The £6 billion will not fix that at all.

Finally, perhaps the biggest insult of all concerns the guy who runs my office. He tripped over outside his property seven weeks ago, and the NHS failed to diagnose that he had broken his shoulder and the bones at the base of his thumb. He is well and truly messed up.

This Budget marks the end of new Labour, and for that the country and I rejoice.

8.33 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh): Since last week's historic Budget statement, there have been questions, not least from Opposition Members, about whether the NHS is the right model on which to spend the substantial resources that are about to flow from the Government. I would encourage anybody with such doubts to visit north America, as I did with the Health Committee, including, I might add, the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), to see health care in Canada and the US for themselves.

There, side by side, are two health care systems, one offering high-quality care to the whole population, and doing so cost-effectively, and the other proving excellent for a minority but inadequate for many and intensely bureaucratic and costly. I was struck by the number of US health professionals who bemoaned to us the inherent unfairness of the system in which they work. We were joined on our travels by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), a Conservative spokesman, and I am surprised that he has not taken those messages back to his Front-Bench colleagues who talk about learning from abroad.

Mr. Barker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andy Burnham: I am sorry. I do not have a great deal of time.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), like Mr. Eriksson, is keeping his options open. He is attracted to the Swedish and Italian models but does not fancy the British much. I am picking up a feeling that there is unease on the Conservative Benches about that policy, as the hon. Member for Woodspring scours Europe for a new policy of his own. I remind the Conservative party of something that the hon. Gentleman said during the general election:

> "I think my commitment to the NHS is quite clear. We've said we will maintain a fully comprehensive NHS free at the point of use in our manifesto. I've said that ever since I can remember being in politics and that's something that will go on."

Until now, that is, as *The Mirror* tells us that the hon. Gentleman is rubbishing the NHS as part of a deliberate strategy to run it down.

Clearly, Conservative politicians were quick to appear in media studios at the weekend to distance themselves from the views expressed by the hon. Member for Woodspring in *The Mirror*. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who has left the Chamber, was one of those who was quick to say that it would be nonsense to move away from and break up the NHS. Leading Tories were quoted in *The Times* yesterday expressing their doubts and saying that Labour will have a field day with the remarks of the hon. Member for Woodspring. They say that because they know that markets in health care create bureaucracy and two-tier access, which is what we saw when they introduced the NHS internal market.

If the Tories have a point, and occasionally—very occasionally—they do, it is that the NHS has hitherto had a flaw in that it has not been sufficiently patient-focused. I agree that, for too long, NHS managers have been too insulated from public opinion and patient opinion. They worry more about Whitehall hearing the echoes of dropped bed pans than their next door neighbours. With systems to check that new money is spent wisely, we need more patient-focused responsiveness and accountability.

A good illustration of the problem is provided by the NHS complaints system. I have long had concerns that people in the health service treat it as a paper exercise with limited value. I have recently had family experience of trying to make a complaint in the NHS, and the onus is on encouraging people to drop their complaint as soon as possible. When complaints are not big enough for the General Medical Council, they are referred back to local level. People quickly find, however, that there is often no appetite to pick up those complaints and address the issues head-on. I therefore believe that the reforms being considered by the House with regard to patient involvement and empowerment must be accompanied by a recognition that the public, who, after all, are paying the bill, have a right to be taken seriously when making a complaint.

As always, those rights must come with responsibilities. Across the national health service, we are hearing how the prescribing budget is soaring. Currently, in my constituency, overspend is 12.1 per cent., and it is 7.2 per cent, nationally. That is partly driven by national service frameworks, which have brought welcome improvements in my constituency. It is also the case, however, that the public are becoming more demanding.

I recently met a group of Leigh GPs and heard them talk of visiting patients with medicine cupboards full of unused prescription treatments. They also talked of a demand for lifestyle drugs such as Losec—an anti-indigestion treatment that also, I believe, happens to be the best hangover cure known to man. Perhaps it should be made available in the Tea Room. When prescriptions are given to the public, perhaps it would help if the price of that treatment was printed on the medicine bottle to encourage more responsibility when people have those treatments and go back for more. I also encourage Ministers to consider the example of Canada, where a very progressive system of prescribing according to ability to pay has been introduced.

It may also be time to review the exemptions for prescriptions and to come up with a fairer system. The prescribing of Statins, however, as required by the national service framework, will be one of the most effective health interventions and will tackle the very high rates of coronary heart disease in my constituency. The high rates of ill health in my constituency mean that that policy will cost more.

That brings me to the formula whereby the new resources are to be distributed. Just as welcome as the new money is the Department's commitment to review the formula. This year, the system will provide £858 per person in Leigh, which is £37 less per person than neighbouring East Lancashire health authority will receive, £53 less per person than North West Lancashire health authority, £61 less per person than Wirral health authority, and £67 less per person than Sefton health authority. Given that in his annual report the chief medical officer highlighted the fact that in parts of my

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constituency death rates are the same as they were in the 1950s, there must be something wrong with the current formula if those are the outcomes it produces.

The formula gives equal weight to four factors: age profile, additional need, market forces and emergency services. It will never give us the resources that we need to tackle health inequalities. Older people draw heavily on the NHS, but the older population is one that is, by and large, healthier and living longer as a result. Any new system must give greater weight to deprivation and rates of ill health, so that the money follows sickness.

I have a word of warning about the market forces factor in devising a new formula. We have heard today about the difficulties facing key workers in London, but inner London health authorities already get significant resources to reflect those difficulties: for example, Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority gets £1,076 per head, and Camden and Islington health authority £1,204 per head—substantially more than Leigh's £858 per head. There is a good reason for that, but we should be wary of creating a formula that gives even more, fuels the property market and widens the north-south divide further. In addition, it can cost more to attract good-quality staff to the most deprived areas, which offer fewer incentives to prospective workers.

As well as good staff, deprived areas need extra facilities, principally because the private sector tends to be less well developed in such areas. Perhaps the Government should consider siting the new diagnostic and treatment centres in constituencies such as mine, where the private sector is unlikely ever to develop substantial capacity of its own. With the new resources, efforts should be made to renew the primary care facilities base. Most people's direct contact with the system is through primary care, and I think that renewal could be achieved fairly quickly.

New ways have to be found to ensure that the extra money coming into the NHS in the next few years is not devoured by hungry acute trusts. Now is the time to alter the balance of funding and innovate to create new models of care delivery. As well as boosting primary care, which will relieve pressure on the acute sector, we should expand non-acute NHS nursing capacity in the community. As the problem of bed blocking shows, the NHS is not the master of its own destiny: it cannot order local authorities to move people out of hospital, nor does it control residential care places in private homes. More flexibility is needed to move people through the system.

The United States system offers us some interesting examples of financial incentives to move people quickly through the system, and of forward planning to adapt people's homes so that they can live as full and as normal a life as possible after leaving hospital. That is what the NHS should be all about—not only treating sickness, but taking the broadest possible view of helping people to live full and healthy lives. Now, it has the resources to do that.

8.43 pm

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): After five years of Labour Government, the Chancellor in his Budget has correctly identified the most pressing concern of the broad mass of the British electorate: the declining state of our great public services. No public service arouses more anxiety than the national health service. Despite extra cash, the number of cancelled operations in the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority has leapt by a staggering 138 per cent. in the five years since 1997. That is a clear illustration of the fact that behind the hundreds of thousands of committed individuals who staff our surgeries, hospitals and clinics, stands a 50-year-old system that is creaking at the seams. It is sad, but little wonder, that this year a record 250,000 patients who were without private insurance felt compelled to dig into their life savings to purchase private health care.

Despite publication of the final report of the Wanless inquiry just five hours before the Chancellor gave his categorical response in the Budget, we know that the Budget will not be the last word on health care in Britain—far from it—but has merely raised the political stakes. The Prime Minister said that he himself will carry the can if the Chancellor's massive tax and spend solution is found wanting, but the true arbiter of the success or failure of Labour health policy will not be the Prime Minister or even the Government's new army of super-auditors and cost accountants but the British people at the ballot box.

I wonder whether the Chancellor and the Prime Minister on their publicity tour of Chelsea and Westminster hospital found any nurse, doctor, staff member or patient enthusiastic about the prospect of yet more auditors and accountants. At the heart of this tax-raising Budget lies the Chancellor's plans to increase health spending above the rate of inflation for the next five years. To be fair, however we look at it, the significant increases amount to a huge boost for NHS funding, but we all know in our heart of hearts that the NHS has a proven ability to swallow large amounts of taxpayers' money without any discernible improvement in the organisation.

With the Budget, the Chancellor has embarked on a clear course to increase the burden of direct taxation to fund the growth of the NHS and welfare spending. He has brought forth an array of measures that will hit both individuals and families. Indeed, despite the Budget being presented as family-friendly, 50 per cent. of families with children will be worse off. Nor has business escaped, as there is yet another Government-imposed increase in employment costs. However, unlike previous Budgets, which relied on stealth taxes, the current full-frontal attack makes a welcome partial break with dishonest back-door taxation.

While we may disagree about particular fiscal measures, I believe—and our debate has confirmed it—that there is still broad consensus on a range of health care issues, particularly goals. We all want a world-class health care system available to all and based on need, not the ability to pay; that is sacrosanct. But a clear difference is opening like a chasm between the Opposition and the Government about the extent to which the NHS should embrace reform and to which we as a nation should embrace the best practice in health care that prevails in other parts of Europe, where waiting times are shorter and survival rates higher.

Looking positively at that political divergence, I hope that for the first time since the war, we can embark on a grown-up and sensible national debate about the best way

forward for the NHS without the usual partisan scaremongering and name calling that is such a big turn-off for the electorate.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Barker: I am afraid that I will not.

Scaremongering and sabre rattling serve only to stifle genuine debate. Sadly, the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) was not listening to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox); the American model is not on the table and forms no part of the examination that the Conservative party is undertaking. The hon. Member for Leigh lowered the tone of the debate by pretending that it does. Whatever differences emerge between the Government and the Opposition, we must always remember the day-in, day-out commitment of the thousands of people toiling in the NHS, trying to make it work.

I have many concerns about the Chancellor's ability to make his massive cash injection work and achieve the results that we all desire, but nothing is of greater concern to me than the state of cancer care services, particularly the crisis in radiotherapy treatment. The United Kingdom has an appalling survival rate for a range of cancers compared with many of our continental partners. In Scotland, where funding as a percentage of gross domestic product has already reached levels previously targeted by the Prime Minister, survival rates for cancer and coronary heart disease are among the worst in the UK. However, it is the plight of cancer patients in my constituency that most concerns me.

Shortly after Christmas, I was alerted to the case of a lady in my constituency who, after surgery for breast cancer, faced a wait of 16 weeks for radiotherapy treatment, whereas her surgeon had recommended that she begin radiotherapy within four to six weeks. Sadly, that has proved not to be an isolated case. Not only are there other women in Bexhill and Battle who have to wait 16 weeks, but others soon emerged who have to wait 18 weeks and 20 weeks, and last week, I spoke to a lady in Battle who must wait 24 weeks. She had surgery two days after Christmas for what her surgeon described as a particularly virulent strain of cancer, but she has been told that she cannot commence radiotherapy treatment at the oncology centre at Maidstone until late June.

No wonder the president of the Royal College of Radiologists, Dr. Dan Ash, writing to the general manager of the Kent oncology centre on 8 March, stated:

"I share your concern that many patients are being offered inappropriate alternative treatments or being denied radiotherapy altogether because of long waiting times. You can be sure the Royal College of Radiologists is doing everything it can to make the Government and health planners aware of the serious crisis in cancer care."

He continued:

"Although there are some improvements in the pipeline, it will be some time before they have an impact on waiting lists and I fear that it may still be too little too late."

Those are strong words.

I spoke earlier to the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), and I am grateful that she agreed to meet me and colleagues from my area next month to discuss this grave matter.

Despite the desperate pressure on the radiotherapy equipment—the linear accelerators—all too often those expensive machines lie idle outside office hours because there are not the staff to man them. The recruitment and retention crisis in radiotherapy is putting lives at risk. It is no good the Government blithely saying that historically we have not trained enough qualified staff and it will take years for more to come through, when a third of those who qualify as radiographers do not go on to practise radiotherapy.

The NHS must become more flexible and able to meet the different local demands of both patients and staff. In an age when we can do our supermarket shopping on a Sunday and our banking round the clock, it seems extraordinary that cancer care and so many other disciplines and services in the NHS are available only on a nine-to-five regime. I hope that the Chancellor will ensure that the money announced in the Budget, unlike the investment that has gone before it, will find its way to the front line and ensure that we smash the nine-to-five culture in the NHS and move towards a real 24/7 health care service that reflects the way patients choose to live their lives in the 21st century. I fear, however, that that may not happen.

I should like to say more, but I know that other hon. Members want to get in, so I shall draw my remarks to a close. With the Budget, the Chancellor has set a clear course that will ultimately present the British electorate with a clear choice: to retain in aspic the model of health care that for the past three decades has singularly failed to keep pace with our aspirations and ambitions for British health care, despite the dedication of those who work in the system, or to open our minds to the possibilities of standards of care and service that prevail in the rest of modern Europe.

I believe that the Budget asks the country to pay up with more tax, but singularly lacks the guts and vision to make the reforms necessary to give this country the world-class health care that Britain deserves.

8.54 pm

Mr. David Miliband (South Shields): We have had an interesting debate over the past five or six hours. It is not often that we get to hear two former Conservative Prime Ministers-in-waiting showing off their debating skills—or three former Conservative Prime Ministers-in-waiting, if we include the shadow Chancellor. They may be Tories, but at least they are classy Tories, as they showed this afternoon. The contrast with the pitiful Budget response of the Leader of the Opposition last week should set Opposition Members thinking and should also give Labour Members pause for thought.

I am very pleased to be able to contribute to this debate, because I think that the combined effects of last year's general election and last week's Budget have shifted in a distinctive and important way the course of British politics. I want to focus my remarks on two points: first, the change in the political terms of trade engineered by a Government who have altered not only the size of public spending, but its composition, moving away from economic failure and towards public investment; and, secondly, the challenge of delivery in the health service.

To understand the change that has occurred, we need a bit of political history. In 1979, only a month after the general election of that year, Sir Geoffrey Howe came to

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the House and set out in his first Budget speech the new philosophy that would govern public policy in Britain. He spoke of the need to reward work and reform collective bargaining, but he also set out two key principles of the approach that came to be known as Thatcherism that are particularly relevant today. First, he said:

"We need to enlarge freedom of choice for the individual by reducing the role of the State."

Secondly, he argued:

"We need to reduce the burden of financing the public sector, so as to leave room for commerce and industry to prosper."—[*Official Report*, 12 June 1979; Vol. 968, c. 240.]

I believe that last week's Budget, building on five years' experience in government, challenges those two arguments at their very heart.

First, Labour Members do not accept that greater choice requires a smaller state. It depends; if a smaller state means poorer education or a worse health service, it means less choice. If it means cutting training schemes, reducing employment advice or cutting child care, it means that choice is narrowed, not extended. Secondly, we do not accept that commerce and industry can prosper only if public financing is reduced or that it will necessarily prosper if that happens. Again, it depends; if support for research and development is reduced, so is industrial innovation. If education is reduced, so is the quality of production and design. If health cover is reduced, commerce and industry pick up the bill for what the CBI accepts to be the £11 billion annual cost of sickness and ill health.

It is wrongheaded to believe that more spending in itself promotes choice or helps industry. I think that Labour Members cured ourselves of the folly of that position some time ago. However, it is frankly absurd not to recognise that the Government have the responsibility and capacity to contribute to the good society. In that sense, the composition of public spending is as important as the amount in terms both of its effectiveness and the public's willingness to tolerate the taxes that are necessary to pay for it. Keynes's famous remark about tax being the membership fee of a civilised society is undermined if the money is not well spent.

I have asked the Library to compare the composition of public spending in the first term of the Conservative Government after Sir Geoffrey Howe's 1979 Budget with that in the first term of this Government. The comparison is rough and ready, but it is illuminating none the less. Under both Administrations, spending in real terms increased by 6 per cent., but there the comparison ends. Under Conservative stewardship, debt interest payments increased by 6 per cent., but under Labour, they fell by 18 per cent. Social security spending rose by 20 per cent. in four years under the Conservatives to pay for unemployment; under Labour, it has risen by 1 per cent., above all to cover pension and child benefit increases.

The figures on what I would call productive investment in education and health are a mirror image of the figures that I have just given. Education spending rose by 3 per cent. in real terms under the Conservatives; under Labour, it rose by 15 per cent. Under the Conservatives, health spending rose by 13 per cent. in real terms; under Labour, it increased by 19 per cent.

So it was the Conservative party that cut choices and constrained industry. Tax rises and penal interest rates, combined with spending cuts on productive investment, left businesses in bankruptcy and ordinary people without weapons in the fight against unemployment. All that was happening with public spending heading for 45 per cent. of national income and, according to table C24 in the Red Book, total managed expenditure that was higher every year than in any year under Labour.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is making an extremely interesting speech, but he seems to have overlooked one important factor in his comparison: the first Conservative Government in 1979 inherited an economy that was on its knees and were engaged in the very process of industrial restructuring that his former employer, the Prime Minister, seemed so keen to praise in his appearance on "Breakfast with Frost" on Sunday morning. However, the current Government inherited in their first term in office a very strong economy and had no need of the industrial restructuring of which the Prime Minister talked.

Mr. Miliband: I am sorry that the shadow Chancellor was not present when the former Conservative Chancellor was speaking. I believe that he and others argued that the 1977 Budget—its popularity has been discussed—fuelled great growth in the economy, which the Conservative Government had to control. In fact, so busy were they controlling it that they created the deepest recession of the 20th century.

In 1997, the Labour party promised to raise education spending as a share of national income as it cut the cost of economic failure. That has been done. It is good that the spending review will raise public spending, but more significant is the challenge to squeeze unproductive investment in favour of a further shift in the spending bias towards productive use—towards education above all, but also towards transport and crime prevention—so that year on year, the composition of public spending continues to change.

Of course, shifting input is the first step to better outcomes. I have spoken before in the House about education reform in South Shields, and about policing reform and changes to the Employment Service, but today I want to focus on the NHS. The official Opposition claim that the NHS is different from other services. The shadow Chancellor calls it Stalinist, and the Leader of the Opposition describes it as Soviet-style. The Opposition say that it cannot improve because it is a predominant provider, and that only by changing the funding system can we spur improvement in delivery.

However, experience in my constituency proves that that assertion is wrong. Over the past four years, an under-performing trust with a £4 million deficit has turned South Tyneside district general hospital into a hospital at the leading edge of change. Waiting times have been cut: some 69 per cent. of patients are seen within two months, and currently only 151 patients have to wait longer than six months. Consultants from Germany and Austria are being recruited, and they are making a fantastic contribution to the hospital. The treatment of elderly people with fractured hips is being transformed; more than nine out of 10 with routine breaks are admitted to a ward within an hour. Maternity services are being improved through the investment of £1.3 million in new delivery suites, and treatment time has been cut to less than 30 minutes for more than seven in 10 heart attack victims.

Tough reforms and big challenges lie ahead. We need to use the new powers of primary care trusts to tackle the health inequalities that disfigure our community. Our lung cancer and heart disease rates are more than 70 per cent. higher than the national average. We need to discuss with the new strategic health authority how we can be a good partner with other providers in the region, so that secondary care is spread out to centres of excellence. We need to discuss with the Department of Health the potential and flexibility of foundation status, and to continue to change working practices, so that a patient-centred service can be delivered.

Of course, change is hard, but the vast majority of people in the health service know that it is vital. In fact, the health service offers what the private sector would die for: 1 million staff who are committed to their work and, above all, to their patient-customers. It is not a system unable to change, trapped by sclerotic structures and doomed by vested interests. With national standards and national inspection, we can ensure that such structures and attitudes are exposed and tackled wherever they are found, as they must be. With decentralised delivery, and front-line staff and patients empowered by information and financial clout, they can be overcome.

The second political divide is not just about the theoretical role of the state, but what counts in the delivery of care. The Conservatives have had nearly a year to tackle the issue of public service reform, and they have committed themselves to searching far and wide for the answer, but what is the question that they have been addressing? They have considered not how to deliver better health care, but how to get the state out of paying for it. They are the only people with no view on the powers of primary care, the functions of doctors and nurses, and the role of national standards. Why? Because they are obsessed with breaking the link between tax finance and medical care.

During the debate on the pre-Budget report, the shadow Chancellor took part in an extremely revealing exchange. When he was challenged to reaffirm the Conservative manifesto commitment to a comprehensive service that is free at the point of use, he could confirm only the first part of that commitment. He could not confirm the commitment to a service free at the point of use—the one thing that the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) did not mention in her speech.

The Conservatives say that they need time. They say they need a mid-career gap year to broaden the mind, allowing them to set off on a policy safari to discover new truths and to find new friends. But instead of looking like trendy young students with a future in front of them, full of idealism and promise, the wanderings of the Conservative party remind me of nothing so much as the pitiful window shopping of a faltering old dowager. All she desires from the winter sales is that elusive foreign frock, but none of them will fit either her waist or her purse.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Miliband: If other hon. Members will not penalise me later, I will give way briefly to the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Clarke: It has taken the Labour Government five years to get where they are now. The NHS plan, at least in its rhetoric, says that by 2005 every patient will have the right to choose whether to be treated in an NHS hospital, a private hospital, an independent hospital or a hospital abroad. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) would agree with a word of that? Does he think that the right hon. Gentleman was saying that when he first came into office? Does he wonder why the first Secretary of State for Health under the Labour Government has absented himself from these entire proceedings?

Mr. Miliband: I am flattered that the current shadow Chancellor and the former Chancellor should intervene on a humble Back Bencher. I believe that my right hon. Friend, who set up the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the Commission for Health Improvement to crack down on standards in every hospital trust, has much to be proud of in his record on the health service.

I am afraid that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has interrupted my flow, but I shall finish my speech. In the 1970s, the Labour party lost the confidence of the people that it would spend their money wisely. From scepticism about bureaucratic spending came anger about taxation, and from the weakness of taxation as a mechanism for regulating the economy came the final death of traditional tax and spend. Tax policy could not, on its own, stimulate growth, and spending could not, on its own, drive improvement.

That was the basis of Sir Geoffrey Howe's appeal to rein back the state that I talked about earlier. Instead of liberating individuals, it took away the floor on which they stood. Instead of supporting businesses, it left them hamstrung by social failure. Today the terms of trade of politics have changed. No one on the Labour Benches believes that the Government are perfect, have a monopoly of wisdom and can do it alone. That is why reform and partnership are vital.

The Government have earned the confidence of the people that they can run the economy, cut unemployment and reform the welfare state. They have earned the confidence of the people that they can improve education, which in my book remains the key motor of social and economic advance in a country that is still held back by scarring social divisions. Now the Government are setting out to earn the confidence of the people that the health service can be brought up to European standard. I believe that they will earn that confidence, and in the process will contribute further to the renewal of progressive politics that represents the best values and the best traditions of this country.

9.7 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I shall keep my remarks brief, as we shall shortly move on to the winding-up speeches, but some important points need to be raised. We have rightly talked largely about the health service, because health is at the heart of the Budget. However, we must also remember that the Chancellor said that it was a Budget for enterprise and fairness. When we look beneath the surface of the Budget, those claims appear pretty thin.

The fair measures for the family involve a massive expansion of means-testing on a level that I have not seen in my lifetime. The few good ideas for some businesses

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frankly leave me cold, because they fail to address the fundamental flaw in the Budget, which is the decision to increase employers' national insurance contributions. That will damage companies and organisations across the nation.

The Red Book says that raising the United Kingdom's sustainable rate of productivity growth is central to the Government's economic strategy, so why take billions of pounds out of the pockets of our businesses? Why put a tax on employment, which will cost small businesses thousands of pounds a year? Where do the Government think that money will come from? Salary bills are fixed: most companies cannot adapt those bills to cope with the change in taxation. Rents and rates are fixed, and are often rising. Most of the costs of small businesses cannot be changed in a few months just to cater for tax changes. Cuts in costs are made by cutting expenditure on new equipment, training or marketing. How does that help a company's productivity? How do the Government expect additional costs through this taxation to encourage productivity in our companies?

Companies are not all that will be affected, because employers' national insurance does not simply apply to the private sector. There are consequences for education. A typical secondary school will probably lose about £30,000 or £40,000 a year from its budget in extra NIC costs, which is equivalent to a teaching post. Will those schools get that money back in the financial settlement for next April?

A primary school typically has a salary bill of £300,000 to £500,000 a year, so it will pay between £3,000 to £5,000 a year extra in tax. Where will that money come from? Anyone who has spoken to a head teacher knows that they have little discretionary spend available, so what will go? Will it be books, playground equipment or classroom facilities or, next April, will the Government give back to those schools the money that they are taking from them in NICs?

Universities are under pressure to raise student numbers and they already need to find significant additional resources to cope with the intake that the Government are asking them to accept in the next few years. How will they fund the extra cost of employers' NICs? How will our other public organisations and public services cope? Consignia faces huge losses and a bill from the tax man for between £30 million and £50 million a year extra. How many extra neighbourhood post offices will have to close as a result of the Government's changes?

On policing, my own force in Surrey is overstretched and underfinanced. Where will it get the funding to pay its extra tax bill? Will that come in next year's settlement or in the form of fewer officers on our streets and fewer services available to members of the public?

Nowhere will the impact of higher NICs be felt more than in the health service itself. My local hospital in Epsom will probably have to pay an additional £300,000 a year in tax from next April. Every GP surgery in the country will have to find thousands of pounds of extra tax. Our community-based care services will have to find thousands of pounds more in tax. Care homes, about which we hear so much, will have to find thousands of pounds a year more in tax. Why tax the NHS to pay for the NHS? Will the NHS get a refund next year or will funds that would have gone through the system to pay for new staff and new equipment be devoted to paying extra tax to the Chancellor?

The tax increases will affect not only employers in our public services, but newly qualified teachers, junior doctors, nurses, care home assistants, bus drivers and train drivers, all of whom are in perilously short supply in parts of the country, particularly London and the south-east. They will all pay more tax. As a result, they will all find it more difficult to afford high housing costs. How will that tax increase help to retain, maintain and improve our public services across the south-east of England?

There is no doubt that the Budget will provide a substantial increase for the NHS, but the public are rightly sceptical, as the polls show clearly, about whether the Government taking away all that money from our companies, public services, schools and hospitals to recycle it back into the NHS will deliver the results and improvement that the country needs.

There is no doubt that we all want better health care—there is a consensus on that on both sides of the Chamber—and all hon. Members want a better system of health care in this country. Week after week, we all see at our surgeries constituents who have been waiting desperately for treatment, in pain and anguish for months and months, but are unable to get it. We all want improvement, but no other country runs its health care system in the way that we do and every other country does it better.

The great shame about the Budget and the Chancellor's attitude to the Wanless report is that he does not seem willing to listen and learn. He seems to be stuck, saying dogmatically, "I know what is right. We will do that." Look elsewhere. There is no evidence whatever to support the assertion that running health care through a large national state-run bureaucracy will deliver the health care service that our constituents want and need.

Will the Budget work? That is the key question. Will the money raised deliver improvements in the health service? If that does not happen, there will be an extra burden on employers, schools and hospitals. Head teachers and chief constables will have to find extra money because public service workers will have to pay the tax bills that make up the money that the Chancellor wants to put into the NHS.

David Taylor: Is not the hon. Gentleman overstating the case? The NHS will grow in real terms over the next five years by more than 7 per cent. The extra national insurance contributions will impose a burden of perhaps 0.5 per cent., which will trim the total slightly. However, that is part of the way in which the finance is to be raised, and it is not as hugely significant as the hon. Gentleman suggests. Is he not over-egging the pudding?

Chris Grayling: If that is true, will the Minister give a clear undertaking to head teachers, chief constables and care home owners that, in the public sector funds allocated to them next year, they will receive a refund for the money that is being taken away in taxation?

I do not believe that the Government's proposals will transform the health care system. I have not met any health care professionals who think that it will. The evidence from those parts of the UK with higher spending per head of population is that higher spending does not

improve health performance. No other country runs its health care system as we do, and all other countries do it better. The Budget, on what I fear will be a wing and a prayer, places a huge tax burden on organisations and individuals. The Budget is a gamble, for which there has been no proper debate. It is based on dogma put forward by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It does not deserve the support of the House.

I should love there to be a modern and excellent health care system in this country. We must have it, and we need it. However, this is not the way to deliver it. I fear that the strategy will fail.

9.17 pm

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): I shall be brief, and concentrate on the effect of the extra resources that have been given already to the hospitals in Great Yarmouth, and on the future needs that will be financed by what is probably the best Budget for many years.

I believe that the James Paget hospital trust in my area has done remarkably well, as the facts show. The national waiting time target for out-patients for the end of March 2002 was that no patient should wait more than 26 weeks for a first out-patient appointment. The trust achieved that target.

Another target was to reduce the total number of patients waiting more than 13 weeks; the target was that no more than 831 patients should be required to wait for longer than that. The trust did well with this target too, with only 463 patients waiting in excess of 13 weeks.

The national waiting time target for in-patient and day cases was that no patient should be waiting more than 15 months. The trust exceeded the target by ensuring that no patient was waiting more than 12 months.

However, the total number of patients on the waiting list rose, and there were some 160 more patients on the waiting lists than the target required. That was due to the lack of elective beds available as a result of the number of non-elective cases on the wards. The trust is working with the local primary care trusts to reduce the number of patients on the waiting lists.

The trust is striving to maintain the standards that have been achieved. By 31 March 2003, it is aiming to achieve the national target that no patient will wait more than 21 weeks for a first out-patient appointment.

The national target for in-patient and day cases is that no patient should spend more than 12 months on the waiting list by 31 March 2003. The trust aims to achieve a maximum wait of nine months.

To achieve those targets, the locality is investing in additional staff and facilities. The additional staff will include medical, nursing and other professional and support staff. There will also be a new dermatology unit, additional theatre facilities, an intensive care unit, a day case ward, and an endoscopy suite. In addition, the trust has planned its largest-ever capital programme, worth a total of more than £7 million.

Problems with staffing exist, but it is clear that the Budget could help. The James Paget hospital trust says that that depends on how the money is spent, and whether it reaches trust level. For example, it appears that a lot of the additional money—quite rightly—will be earmarked for capital expenditure. The implementation of the information management and technology strategy will be a significant element of that expenditure, as will making additional equipment available to staff. That is fine, but new IT equipment will be of value only if the staff exists to run it.

9.20 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I begin by drawing the attention of the House to my declaration in the Register of Member's Interests, and by congratulating all those Members who took part in the debate on their contributions. The debate has been distinguished—I wish that I could say the same about the Budget.

The Budget will be remembered for the way in which it breaks Labour's promises; for the way in which it penalises hard work; and for the tax on jobs that is its most distinguishing feature. When the history of the Government is written, it will be one of wasted opportunities. When the Labour Government came into office in 1997, they had an unprecedented opportunity for reform. They had a huge parliamentary majority. They had inherited a strong economy. There was an appetite for and an expectation of reform and they had the unparalleled good will of the British people.

The Government have failed to reform, however. They have squandered all those assets and wasted that golden opportunity.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Would the right hon. and learned Gentleman's recommendations for reform include changing the tradition that British people receive health care that is free at the point of use?

Mr. Howard: We have made it clear that we entirely support the ideals of the national health service. We want to see a first-class health service available to the people of this country when they need it and entirely without regard to ability to pay. The difficulty is that we are further away from those ideals today than we have been since the national health service was set up more than 50 years ago.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): What will the Conservatives do about the health service?

Mr. Howard: I shall deal with health in a moment; first, I want to talk about some other matters.

The Government came to office promising to reward enterprise. They promised to build a new partnership with business, but this is what business leaders have said about the Budget. The head of economic analysis at the CBI said that there is

"an extra incentive to keep employment to an absolute minimum".

In the words of the Forum of Private Business, the result of the Budget will be

"a further disincentive to employ".

The chief executive of recruitment specialists, Reed Executive, said that the national insurance increase goes

"directly against the Government's professed objective of full employment".

He highlighted the warnings from employers that they might move jobs abroad—*[Interruption.]* The Chancellor says that is nonsense. Of course, he knows much more

[Mr. Howard]

than business leaders about the effect of the Budget on business. In due course, perhaps he will tell us what experience he has of employing people and what experience he has of dealing with those difficulties. What experience does he have of trying to decide where to employ people? What experience does he have of the impact of those bills on his ability to make a profit?

The tax on jobs does not hit the companies with the largest profits but those with the largest work force. What sort of Government preach job creation while introducing a direct incentive for job destruction? What sort of Government talk about helping the low paid, but levy an extra tax on the jobs of the self-employed who are often the lowest paid of all? What sort of Chancellor uses the bulk of his speech to talk about enterprise—a word that he mentioned a dozen times—before outlining a measure that will do as much to undermine and damage enterprise as anything that he has done during the past five years?

The Chancellor does all that at a time when business is already struggling under the weight of £6 billion a year of extra taxes and £5 billion a year of red tape, and when our competitive tax advantage is already being eroded. CBI figures show that, among our top five trading partners, only France has a larger burden of business taxation—that was before the Budget. At the same time, manufacturers are struggling to emerge from recession.

Despite some recent encouraging signs, manufacturing output is forecast to contract this year. The director general of the Engineering Employers Federation—no doubt, the Chancellor will also say that he is talking rubbish—has said that the rise in national insurance contributions could not have come at a worse moment. He said:

"Its timing was awful and its emotional impact was appalling."

Of course some other Budget measures, such as help with research and development, have been welcomed, but as the Federation of Small Businesses has put it,

"all the welcome measures have been undone."

National insurance was not the only business tax to rise. The change in the treatment of United Kingdom branches of foreign companies is likely to hit the financial services sector, particularly foreign banks, the hardest.

An article in yesterday's *Evening Standard* made it clear that

"the City is home to more foreign banks than any other place in the world. They may or may not pay a lot of tax, but their contribution to critical mass, to the credibility of the City, to its appearing on overseas radar, to broadening and deepening the banking market and to employment cannot be argued against. Changing the tax rules can only mean there will be fewer such banks in future and the City will be the weaker for that."

In fact, apart from and in addition to the £4 billion increase in national insurance contributions, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that the Budget's net cost to business is £1.1 billion, even after the positive measures for business have been taken into account.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree with the comments made by the president of the British Chambers of Commerce yesterday in which he said that business understands that it costs money to get a world-class health service and that business would pay if we did not have such a service?

Mr. Howard: I did not hear the remarks to which the hon. Lady refers, but she ought to set those remarks—if they were made as she reports them—against the other remarks to which I have referred, and she may find that the president of the British Chambers of Commerce, whom I know and who is a notable supporter of the Labour party, may turn out to be rather an isolated voice in the business community on that issue.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Does the shadow Chancellor not accept that business, too, benefits from a health service that is comprehensive and free at the point of need? Does he recollect a leaflet that he issued during the last election campaign, which said that

"Conservatives will retain a free and comprehensive NHS"?

Is that still his position?

Mr. Howard: I have explained very clearly our position on health, and I shall have some more to say about health in a moment. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is replying to a question.

Mr. Howard: So much for the Government's promises on enterprise. Now we come to their promises on tax. Ministers claim that they did not mislead people at the last election. Last week, the Prime Minister said in that characteristic way of his:

"I think we have been very straightforward with people."

Well, let me remind the House of three examples of straightforwardness from the Prime Minister and his colleagues. He was asked by the BBC during the election campaign whether any reasonable person would not suppose that Labour proposed to increase national insurance contributions. He replied: "They shouldn't."

The Prime Minister then spoke straightforwardly to the *Daily Express*. It ran the story under the headline, "Blair in Vow not to Punish High Earners". I do not recollect the Prime Minister making any attempt to correct that headline. He told the *Daily Express:*

"We are certainly not going back to 1992 and the Shadow Budget . . . We have not the slightest intention of hammering people on £30,000 and £35,000 and the higher income brackets."

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—who, alas, is not with us this evening—engaged in some straightforwardness of her own. She said:

"We've got no plans at all to raise that ceiling on National Insurance contributions . . . It is not going to happen."

Before the election they make these promises; afterwards, they break them.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is a regular reader of *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, so he will perhaps have noted the recent poll in which 56 per cent.

of Conservative voters thought that it was right to raise national insurance. Does he not agree with those who would normally support his party?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady will be aware that initial reactions to Budgets often do not last very long, and I suspect that that will turn out to be so in the case of this Budget.

Last November, the Chancellor called for a debate on the national health service. There is certainly a need for that debate. The Government's policies on the NHS are simply not working. Only yesterday, I received a letter from a nursing sister, who says that the NHS has

"got worse over the past five years"

and that she now feels

"undervalued, spending over 50 hours a week dealing with bureaucracy and troubleshooting."

She continues:

"I cannot remember the last time that my hands touched a patient or I even had time to teach and train my staff".

She says that she speaks on behalf of many of her colleagues.

In Britain in 2002, people are being forced to use their life savings to save their lives. Last year, 250,000 people without any insurance paid for their own operations. In Britain in 2002, people are dying of conditions from which they would not die elsewhere. Twenty-five thousand lives could be saved every year in this country if cancer provision were as good as it is in the best of the rest of Europe. In Britain in 2002, more than 1 million people languish on waiting lists, with another 360,000 on the waiting list for a waiting list—up by more than 100,000 since March 1997.

So there is certainly plenty to debate, but the Chancellor closed off the debate in advance. He rigged the terms of reference of the Wanless report so that it would only consider a "publicly funded . . . health service". As Mr. Wanless himself pointed out, the review was asked to look only at the level of resources required. He said:

"It is not set up to examine the way in which those resources are financed".

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I know that Labour Members do not like listening to this—they do not like being reminded of the failures of the health service over which their Government are presiding—but they are going to have to listen to a little bit more.

Not content with laying down the terms of reference for the Wanless report in that way, the Chancellor did not even bother to wait for its conclusions. Before he had received the final report, he told the Social Market Foundation that there were no lessons to be learned from the ways in which health care is provided elsewhere.

During this debate and previously, the Health Secretary has talked about reform, but he and his colleagues have been talking about reform for years. That is all that they have been doing—talking. In March 1998, the Chancellor assured the House that

"investment and reform"—

would—

"go hand in hand."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. 1097.]

Four months later, the Prime Minister said:

"By tying the money to reform and modernisation, we shall ensure that it is spent well and wisely".—[*Official Report*, 15 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 402.]

That was in 1998.

In March 2000, the Prime Minister said that

"everybody knows . . . that the NHS needs fundamental reform".—[*Official Report*, 22 March 2000; Vol. 346, c. 981.]

He was certainly right about that. Last year he said:

"But investment is not enough. Public services need reform . . . It is reform or bust".

On 30 November 2001, the Chancellor told *The Sun:*

"There will not be one penny more until we get changes to let us make reforms and carry out the modernisation the health service needs".

So where is the reform? The British people were promised that a transformation of the national health service would flow from the 1997 election and the 2001 election, and they were promised it every year in between. But where are the reforms that we were assured would accompany the last spending review? Where are the improvements that were to flow from the 10-year plan and the public service agreements? Those targets were meant to focus attention on outputs, not inputs. There has been no genuine change, and without it, we will not experience the difference.

Every year, the Government promise better public services for higher taxes, but we simply get the higher taxes. They threaten the economic prosperity on which our public services depend. We all support the ideals of the national health service: high-quality health care, available to all when they need it, regardless of ability to pay. However, the tragedy is that Britain is further away from those ideals now than at any time since the NHS was founded.

The NHS is, unfortunately, not the only service in decline. In our schools, teachers are swamped with bureaucracy. On our streets, internal Home Office figures show a 26 per cent. rise in crime in recent months. On the trains, delays caused by track and signal failure increased by 45 per cent. in the weeks after Labour renationalised the railways.

The Government have given up on reform and decided that it is all about money. Before the Budget, they were already taking £1,600 more in tax every year for every man, woman and child in the country. Spending on the national health service has already increased by a third, but the service has got worse. We do not have to look far for more evidence. In Scotland—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is clearly not giving way.

Mr. Howard: Hon. Members should listen to what has been happening in Scotland, where spending on health has increased by 28 per cent. in real terms over the past

[Mr. Howard]

five years. Yet the average waiting time for an out-patient appointment has gone up by more than 25 per cent. since September 1997.

In Wales, spending has increased by 30 per cent. in real terms since 1997. However, since March 1997, the number of people waiting more than six months for an out-patient appointment has increased from only 6,000 to 70,000. Of course, we acknowledge that more resources are required for the NHS, but the problem is not only down to money. It is caused by patients and professionals alike being let down by the system.

Mr. Levitt: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The Government have admitted that public sector employers will have to pay an additional £1.2 billion because of the increase in national insurance contributions. That shows the sheer absurdity of their position. First, they refuse to change and reform the public services, and we will therefore not get the improvements that we all want. Next, they increase employee contribution rates for many public sector service workers on whom we rely to improve services. Finally, they hit the services with a £1.2 billion tax bill in the name of raising more resources for the same services.

The Government promise a world-class service, but they fail to recognise that the world exists beyond the English channel. The challenge is to maintain the ideals of the NHS while borrowing the best from health care systems overseas. The Government have flunked that challenge.

Last week's Budget showed that the Government have run out of ideas. They promised to save the NHS in 24 hours, and they believed that public services would improve if they were centralised through directives, targets and performance agreements. They have failed on all counts. They promised a new approach but they have turned back to the only way that they know: higher taxes.

When Governments face a crisis, they go back to their instincts. The Government face a crisis in the NHS, and they have made it clear where their instincts lie. They pressed the panic button marked "higher taxes". Without change, we shall not see the difference or get the improvements that we all want, or deliver to the people of this country the health service that they deserve. Without change—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take the point of order from the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor), although it will probably not be a point of order.

David Taylor: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could you advise us whether "Erskine May" describes this continuous rebuttal of would-be interventions as either intellectual weakness or political cowardice?

Mr. Speaker: I knew that it was not going to be a point of order.

Mr. Howard: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman will like this much more either. This is not a Budget for change. It is not a Budget for enterprise, or for the health service. It is a Budget that will do great damage to business and jobs for no appreciable benefit, and that is why we shall vote against it tonight.

9.40 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): On the foundation of all the steps that the Government have taken towards stability, to build enterprise and fairness in our country, there is one question right at the heart of this Budget and this debate. It is the only question on which the shadow Chancellor had anything to say. It is the question that he addressed in his leaflet in the general election campaign only last year, in which he said:

> "Do not believe the lies that are being spread by our opponents. Conservatives will retain a free and comprehensive national health service."

He talked about "free and comprehensive", yet he challenged us time and again tonight. I will give him the opportunity to respond to this point. He will not take that opportunity because the Conservatives have abandoned half a century of consensus in this country, and abandoned what they were once proud to call one-nation Conservatism by abandoning a national health service that is comprehensive and free at the point of need.

This debate has been very interesting—

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman because he has contributed to the debate.

Mr. Barker: What does the Minister have to say to the 250,000 people who felt compelled to abandon the national health service this year and, without insurance, to dig into their life savings to save their own lives?

Mr. Smith: The way to address that challenge is precisely to put in the investment that this Budget provides. The hon. Gentleman and all his hon. Friends must tell us—just as they will have to tell the people of this country—whether they believe in a health service that is free and comprehensive.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I want to make some progress.

There was a very interesting contrast between the contributions of my right hon. and hon. Friends and those of right hon. and hon. Members on the Conservative Benches. My hon. Friends spoke positively, with knowledge, passion and conviction, about the national health service, as well as about what we are doing for enterprise and to encourage investment to build social cohesion in this country. I listened very carefully to the speeches by Conservative Members. *[Interruption.]* Yes, I did. The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) had the nerve to go on about GP recruitment when G str— *[Laughter.]*—when GP registrar numbers fell by 20 per cent. under his Government. Those numbers are

now going up by 20 per cent. under this Labour Government thanks to the investment that we are putting in.

Dr. Fox: I am sorry about the right hon. Gentleman's Freudian slip there. He will know that the number of extra GPs in 1996–97 was 111, and that last year it was 18. I think that that record speaks for itself.

Mr. Smith: Those figures are completely unfounded. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has demolished the hon. Gentleman's argument many times when he has quoted those figures. The number of GP registrars has risen by 40 per cent. under the Government after they had been cut by 20 per cent. under the Conservatives.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No.

I listened to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). The right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) spoke only about the public-private partnership for London Underground—perhaps it was his putative bid to be Mayor of London. I heard speeches by the hon. Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), who gave his usual dispassionate appraisal of the situation, for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) and for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). My hon. Friend the Paymaster General took notes on the comments made by the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude). I sat through all that and there was not one iota of a positive suggestion by the Conservative party on an alternative for the NHS.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Chief Secretary may recall that that was because I talked about the Budget which, despite being a Treasury Minister, he has not mentioned in the first five minutes of his response. Does he recall my saying that in the last Budget, the Government cut taxation; that during the election, they promised not to raise taxation; and that now they are raising taxation across the board and imposing it on working people and those who employ them? Does he have anything to say on that subject, which does fall, I think, within his responsibilities?

Mr. Smith: I will take no lectures from the right hon. and learned Gentleman who was responsible for 22 tax rises, all of them based on broken promises. Moreover, we said in our general election manifesto that tax policy will be governed by the health of the public finances, by the requirements of public investment and by the needs of business, families and the environment. That was a promise made and a promise kept, just as we kept every promise we made in the general election campaign.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman did not say whether he believes in a health service that is free, comprehensive and available at the point of need. He is smiling, so I take it that he does. He is clearly one of those who still adheres to the old one-nation Conservatism that his colleagues who responded to the Budget have abandoned when it comes to the NHS.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I must make some progress.

The Budget recognises that the health service that was built in the 20th century was among the greatest achievements of an earlier generation. Renewing the NHS for the 21st century is among the great challenges for our generation. After decades of underinvestment, we needed significant new investment to rebuild it, so the Budget contains the largest sustained increase in spending ever announced for the NHS. We will ensure that the extra money, together with reforms, secures results. The new resources, backed up by reform, will make our NHS what it should be—free at the point of need for everyone and the best insurance policy in the world.

The Opposition have not proposed a single alternative. The shadow Chancellor may consider it an achievement to go through a whole four days of Budget debate without one of his colleagues admitting the truth about their policies. I read in *The Times* yesterday that

> "Senior Tories say that Iain Duncan Smith's open-ended review of healthcare could be an electoral disaster".

Many Labour Members would agree, but it would prove an even greater electoral disaster for the Conservative party if it told the truth about its plans—the truth that Conservatives dare speak of only in private, which was famously revealed by their health spokesman, the hon. Member for Woodspring, when he admitted that their real policy was to break up the NHS and bring in charges for patients.

The shadow Chancellor may think it preferable to say nothing on these issues, but with the passing of every day on which he fails to deny that truth, the British people will be more convinced that that is the Tories' plan for the NHS. On Sunday, the shadow Chancellor was given a perfect opportunity—

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order to have a summing up of a Budget debate in which absolutely nothing is said about the Budget?

Mr. Speaker: The Chief Secretary is in order. Had he been out of order, I would have let him know about it.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman has to accept, as indeed do his right hon. and hon. Friends, that the future of the NHS is the central issue of the Budget for the people of this country as well as for Members of the House. With this Conservative threat, people want to know how much they would have to pay for an operation or a visit to a GP.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew).

Michael Fabricant: Coward.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should withdraw that remark. Calling any hon. Member a coward is unparliamentary.

Michael Fabricant: Of course I withdraw. It is not at all cowardly to give way to a Labour Member but not to a Conservative Member.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way to a Labour Member for the first time. Perhaps the House could calm down.

[Mr. Eric Martlew]

This is a constituency issue regarding taxation, but it is very important. I totally agree with the Government's policy of raising taxation for the NHS, but I believe that it is as important to collect taxes as it is to raise them. Yesterday, the owner of Carlisle United announced that he was going to take the club out of the Football League. I understand that the club and Carlisle United Holdings owe in excess of £700,000 in taxation. Will my right hon. Friend look into the matter? Is not it a fact that if more people paid the tax that they owed, we would have a better health service?

Mr. Smith: I can well understand my hon. Friend's worries and the concern that the matter must be causing his constituents. He will understand that, consistent with long-standing practice, I cannot comment on the affairs of any individual taxpayer. I shall draw his remarks to the attention of the Inland Revenue and, if appropriate, to the Department of Trade and Industry.

Chris Grayling: Will the Minister give the people of my constituency—the head teachers, the police and the people running the health service—a firm commitment that the money he will take away from them in extra national insurance contributions will be refunded by the Government this time next year? Or will we lose teaching posts as a result of his actions?

Mr. Smith: A spending review is under way. As the hon. Gentleman can see from the figures that we have presented, we have put £5 billion extra into 2003–04 expenditure, and in the following two years there will be a 2.5 per cent. real-terms increase in non-health spending.

Matthew Taylor: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No, I must make progress.

I was making a point about the opportunities that the shadow Chancellor has had to clear up the uncertainty about the health service. He had the chance this evening to answer four simple questions about his policies—questions that any serious Opposition party must be able to answer about such an important issue for the country.

The shadow Chancellor points to aspects of performance in Denmark and Germany that he says he admires. What features of their system does he therefore want us to adopt? He would say nothing about that tonight. He said he recognises that the NHS needs more resources, but he did not say how much would be required in terms of extra resources and where those resources would come from. He says that our proposed reforms will not work, but what alternative reforms does he have in mind? He will not tell us. Most important, he would not give us a commitment to an NHS that is free to all at the point of need. He has refused to deny the comments of his health spokesman that the Tories plan to introduce charges for health care. He has therefore been unable to rule out introducing charges.

The British people will draw a very simple conclusion from this evening's debate: while this Government are investing in a reformed NHS that is free to all at the point of need, the real Tory agenda is to break up the NHS, to force people into having private medical insurance and to introduce charges for health care. That is the Tory agenda that dare not speak its name.

Mr. Howard: Is the Chief Secretary aware that most right hon. and hon. Members would expect him, in his winding-up speech, to defend the Budget? Has this Budget become, for him, the truth that dare not speak its name?

Mr. Smith: It is evident to the whole House that the central issue in this Budget, and a key issue facing the country, is the funding of our national health service and how we secure its principles for the future. That is the biggest question facing the country—whether or not we maintain a consensus for an NHS that is comprehensive and free at the point of need.

Matthew Taylor: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I am afraid I cannot.

The shadow Chancellor asked about all the other policies in the Budget. I am proud of everything that we do to maintain stability in place of the boom and bust under the Tories. If he wants me to speak about the measures that we are bringing forth to stimulate enterprise—cutting the 10p rate on small companies to zero, and cutting the corporation tax rate—I would like to do so if I had more time.

Matthew Taylor *rose—*

Mr. Smith: The key issue before us is that on Budget day the Chancellor appealed for an all-party consensus to renew our national health service. Labour Members want a consensus on an NHS that is free and available to all, which has served for the past 50 years, to be reaffirmed for the next 50 years. The shadow Chancellor, however, refuses to join this consensus.

In the days since the Budget, not a single shadow Cabinet member has said that they still believe in an NHS that is accessible to all and free at the point of need. In public, they are unwilling to defend any alternative policy. Instead, they talk vaguely about examining other systems, and spend their time travelling around Europe without ever arriving at a public decision. For the truth of their policies, we have to rely on what they say in private. In private, they talk of breaking up the NHS and introducing charges for patients—heading not even towards a European system of social insurance but towards an American system of charging. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health said, that is an example of travel narrowing the mind.

This Budget reaffirms the basic principles of the NHS. It combines enterprise with fairness, and it is supported by the British people. I commend this Budget to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 408, Noes 155.

Division No. 213] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barnett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne

Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and Mr. Nick Ainger.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

(1) That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance.

(2) Subject to paragraph (3) below, this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for any relief, other than a relief that—

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.

(3) Paragraph (2) above does not exclude the making of amendments with respect to value added tax providing for relief on the acquisition from another member State of any goods in relation to which, if they were imported from a place outside the member States, relief would be given by an order under section 37 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994.

MR. SPEAKER *then, pursuant to Standing Order No. 51(3) (Ways and Means Motions), put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of the further motions.*

2. RATES OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS DUTY

Resolved,

That—

(1) For the Table of rates of duty in Schedule 1 to the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 there shall be substituted—

TABLE

1. Cigarettes	An amount equal to 22 per cent of the retail price plus £94.24 per thousand cigarettes.
2. Cigars	£137.26 per kilogram.
3. Hand-rolling tobacco	£98.66 per kilogram.
4. Other smoking tobacco and chewing tobacco	£60.34 per kilogram.

(2) This Resolution shall have effect as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 17th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

3. RATES OF DUTY ON CIDER

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 62(1A) of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979—

(a) in paragraph (b), for "£39.21" there shall be substituted "£38.43";

(b) in paragraph (c), for "£26.13" there shall be substituted "£25.61".

(2) This Resolution shall have effect as from 28th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

4. DUTY ON BEVERAGES MADE WITH SPIRITS

Resolved,

That—

(1) Section 1(9) of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979 shall be omitted.

(2) This Resolution shall come into force on 28th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

5. BEER (SMALL BREWERIES: REDUCED RATES OF DUTY)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In subsection (1) of section 36 of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979, for "at the rate of £11.89 per hectolitre per cent of alcohol in the beer" there shall be substituted "at the rates specified in subsection (1AA) below".

(2) In that section, after that subsection there shall be inserted—

"(1AA) The rates at which the duty shall be charged are—

(a) in the case of beer that is not small brewery beer, £11.89 per hectolitre per cent of alcohol in the beer;

(b) in the case of small brewery beer produced in a singleton brewery, the rate per hectolitre per cent of alcohol in the beer that is given by section 36D below;

(c) in the case of small brewery beer produced in a co-operated brewery, the rate per hectolitre per cent of alcohol in the beer that is given by section 36F below.".

(3) In that Act, after that section (and before the heading "*Reliefs from excise duty*") there shall be inserted—

"*Reduced rates of excise duty*

36A Beer from small breweries: introductory

(1) For the purposes of section 36(1AA) above (but subject to subsection (2) below)—

(a) whether beer produced in a singleton brewery is "small brewery beer" is determined in accordance with section 36C below, and

(b) whether beer produced in a co-operated brewery is "small brewery beer" is determined in accordance with section 36E below.

(2) Beer is not small brewery beer if it is produced by a person on any premises in circumstances in which he is required to be, but is not, registered under section 47 below in respect of those premises.

36B Interpretation of provisions relating to small brewery beer

(1) The following provisions of this section have effect for the purposes of section 36(1AA) above, section 36A above, this section and sections 36C to 36F below.

(2) A brewery is a "singleton brewery" at any particular time in a calendar year if it is not a co-operated brewery at that time.

(3) A brewery is a "co-operated brewery" at any particular time in a calendar year if—

(a) a person who produces beer in the brewery at that time or any earlier time in that year, or

(b) a person connected with such a person,

also produces beer in any other brewery at that time or any earlier time in that year.

(4) "Brewery" means premises (whether or not in the United Kingdom) on which beer is produced and that are situated physically apart from any other premises on which beer is produced.

(5) "The standard beer duty rate" means the rate of duty specified by section 36(1AA)(a) above.

(6) References to "the grossed-up amount" of an estimate of the amount of a brewery's production in a calendar year are to the amount given by—

$$\frac{E}{(365-N)} \times 365$$

where—

E is the amount of the estimate, and

N is the number of days (if any) in the calendar year before the brewery begins to be used as beer-production premises.

(7) References to a brewery being used as beer-production premises are, in the case of a brewery in the United Kingdom, to there being at least one person who is required to be registered under section 47 below in respect of the brewery.

(8) Any question whether a person is connected with another shall be determined in accordance with section 839 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

36C Meaning of "small brewery beer" beer from singleton breweries

(1) section applies to beer produced in a brewery at a time in a calendar year ("the current year") when the brewery is a singleton brewery.

(2) beer is "small brewery beer" if the following conditions are satisfied; but this is subject to subsections (9) and (10) below.

(3) The first condition is that either—

(a) no beer was produced in the brewery in the previous calendar year ("the previous year"), or

(b) the amount of beer produced in the brewery in the previous year was not more than 30,000 hectolitres.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (3)(b) above, where the brewery was in use as beer-production premises during part only of the previous year, the amount of beer produced in the previous year in the brewery shall be taken to have been—

$$\frac{A}{D} \times 365$$

where—

A is the amount of beer actually produced in the previous year in the brewery, and

D is the number of days in that part of the previous year.

(5) The second condition is that the amount of the estimate under subsection (9) below of the brewery's production in the current year is not more than 30,000 hectolitres.

(6) The third condition is that if the brewery begins to be used as beer—production premises part-way through the current year, the grossed-up amount of that estimate is not more than 30,000 hectolitres.

(7) The fourth condition is that less than half of the beer produced in the brewery in the previous year was produced under licence.

(8) The fifth condition is that the beer is not produced under licence.

(9) Beer produced in the brewery in the current year before the person who first produces beer in the brewery in that year has made a reasonable estimate of the amount of beer that will be produced in the brewery in that year is not small brewery beer.

(10) Beer produced in the brewery in the current year after the amount of beer produced in the brewery in the current year has reached 30,000 hectolitres is not small brewery beer.

(11) Subsection (10) above is without prejudice to section 167(4) of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 (recovery of duty unpaid by reason of untrue document or statement).

36D Rate of duty for small brewery beer from singleton breweries

(1) This section applies to small brewery beer produced in a brewery at a time in a calendar year ("the current year") when the brewery is a singleton brewery.

(2) The rate of duty in the case of that beer ("the brewery rate") is determined in accordance with this section.

(3) Subsection (4) below applies if—

(a) beer was produced in the brewery in the previous calendar year ("the previous year") and the amount produced in the brewery in that year was not more than 5,000 hectolitres, or

(b) no beer was produced in the brewery in the previous year and the grossed-up amount of the estimate under section 36C(9) above of the brewery's production in the current year is not more than 5,000 hectolitres.

(4) If this subsection applies, "the brewery rate" is 50% of the standard beer duty rate at the time concerned; but this is subject to rounding under subsection (7) below.

(5) Subsection (6) below applies if—

(a) beer was produced in the brewery in the previous year and the amount produced in the brewery in that year was more than 5,000 hectolitres but not more than 30,000 hectolitres, or

(b) no beer was produced in the brewery in the previous year and the grossed-up amount of the estimate under section 36C(9) above of the brewery's production in the current year is more than 5,000 hectolitres but not more than 30,000 hectolitres.

(6) If this subsection applies, "the brewery rate" is, subject to rounding under subsection (7) below, given by—

$$\frac{P-2,500}{P} \times \text{the standard beer duty rate at the time concerned}$$

where—

if this subsection applies by reason of subsection (5)(a) above, P is the amount, in hectolitres, of beer produced in the brewery in the previous year, and

if this subsection applies by reason of subsection (5)(b) above, P is the grossed-up amount (expressed in hectolitres) mentioned in subsection (5)(b).

(7) Where a rate given by subsection (4) or (6) above would (apart from this subsection) not be a whole number of pennies, the rate given by that subsection shall be taken to be the rate actually given by that subsection rounded up to the nearest penny.

(8) Where the brewery was in use as beer-production premises during part only of the previous year, for the purposes of subsections (3)(a), (5)(a) and (6) above the amount of beer produced in the brewery in the previous year shall be taken to have been—

$$\frac{A}{D} \times 365$$

where—

A is the amount of beer actually produced in the previous year in the brewery, and

D is the number of days in that part of the previous year.

36E Meaning of "small brewery beer": beer from co-operated breweries

(1) This section applies to beer produced in a brewery at a time in a calendar year ("the current year") when the brewery is a co-operated brewery.

(2) The beer is "small brewery beer" if the following conditions are satisfied; but this is subject to subsections (10) and (11) below.

(3) In this section—

"the group" means the group of breweries consisting of—

(a) the co-operated brewery, and

(b) every brewery (other than the co-operated brewery) in which beer is produced at the time mentioned in subsection (1) above, or at any earlier time in the current year, by—

(i) a person who produces beer in the co-operated brewery at the time so mentioned or at any earlier time in the current year, or

(ii) a person connected with such a person;

"group brewery" means a brewery that is in the group;

"the previous year" means the calendar year immediately preceding the current year.

(4) The first condition is that either—

(a) no beer was produced in the previous year in the group, or

(b) the amount given by PY+GE is not more than 30,000 hectolitres, where—

PY is the amount of beer produced in the previous year in the group, and

GE is the aggregate of the grossed-up amount of each estimate that—

(i) is an estimate for the purposes of subsection (10) below of the amount of the production in the current year in a group brewery in which no beer was produced in the previous year, and

(ii) is made no later than the time mentioned in subsection (1) above.

(5) For the purposes of subsection (4)(b) above, where a group brewery was in use as beer-production premises during part only of the previous year, the amount of beer produced in the previous year in that brewery shall be taken to have been—

$$\frac{A}{D} \times 365$$

where—

A is the amount of beer actually produced in the previous year in that brewery, and

D is the number of days in that part of the previous year.

(6) The second condition is that the aggregate of each estimate that—

(a) is an estimate for the purposes of subsection (10) below of the amount of a group brewery's production in the current year, and

(b) is made no later than the time mentioned in subsection (1) above,

is not more than 30,000 hectolitres.

(7) The third condition is that if any group brewery begins to be used as beer-production premises part-way through the current year, the aggregate of the grossed-up amount of each estimate that—

(a) is an estimate for the purposes of subsection (10) below of the amount of a group brewery's production in the current year, and

(b) is made no later than the time mentioned in subsection (1) above,

is not more than 30,000 hectolitres.

(8) The fourth condition is that less than half of the beer produced in the previous year in each group brewery was produced under licence.

(9) The fifth condition is that the beer is not produced under licence.

(10) Beer produced in the co-operated brewery at an unestimated time is not small brewery beer; and here "unestimated time" means a time in the current year when there is a group brewery for which there does not exist a reasonable estimate, made by the person who first produces beer in that brewery in that year, of the amount of beer that will be produced in that brewery in that year.

(11) Beer produced in the co-operated brewery in the current year after the amount of beer produced in the group in the current year has reached 30,000 hectolitres is not small brewery beer.

(12) Subsection (11) above is without prejudice to section 167(4) of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 (recovery of duty unpaid by reason of untrue document or statement).

36F Rate of duty for small brewery beer from co-operated breweries

(1) This section applies to small brewery beer produced in a brewery at a time in a calendar year ("the current year") when the brewery is a co-operated brewery.

(2) The rate of duty in the case of that beer ("the brewery rate") is determined in accordance with this section.

(3) In this section—

"the group" means the group of breweries consisting of—

(a) the co-operated brewery, and

(b) every brewery (other than the co-operated brewery) in which beer is produced at the time mentioned in subsection (1) above, or at any earlier time in the current year, by—

(i) a person who produces beer in the co-operated brewery at the time so mentioned or at any earlier time in the current year, or

(ii) a person connected with such a person;

"group brewery" means a brewery that is in the group;

"the previous year" means the calendar year immediately preceding the current year;

"the notional previous year's production" has the meaning given by subsection (4) below.

(4) In this section "the notional previous year's production" means the amount, in hectolitres, given by PY + GE where—

PY is the amount of beer produced in the group in the previous year, and

GE is the aggregate of the grossed-up amount of each estimate that—

(a) is an estimate for the purposes of section 36E(10) above of the amount of the production in the current year in a group brewery in which no beer was produced in the previous year, and

(b) is made no later than the time mentioned in subsection (1) above.

(5) Where a group brewery was in use as beer-production premises during part only of the previous year, in calculating PY for the purposes of subsection (4) above the amount of beer produced in that brewery in the previous year shall be taken to have been—

$$\frac{A}{D} \times 365$$

where—

A is the amount of beer actually produced in the previous year in that brewery, and

D is the number of days in that part of the previous year.

(6) Subsection (7) below applies if—

(a) beer was produced in at least one group brewery in the previous year and the notional previous year's production is not more than 5,000 hectolitres, or

(b) no beer was produced in the group in the previous year and the aggregate of each estimate that—

(i) is an estimate for the purposes of section 36E(10) above of the amount of a group brewery's production in the current year, and

(ii) is made no later than the time mentioned in subsection (1) above,

is not more than 5,000 hectolitres.

(7) If this subsection applies, "the brewery rate" is 50% of the standard rate at the time mentioned in subsection (1) above; but this is subject to rounding under subsection (10) below.

(8) Subsection (9) below applies if—

(a) beer was produced in at least one group brewery in the previous year and the notional previous year's production is more than 5,000 hectolitres but not more than 30,000 hectolitres, or

(b) no beer was produced in the group in the previous year and the aggregate mentioned in subsection (6)(b) above is more than 5,000 hectolitres but not more than 30,000 hectolitres.

(9) If this subsection applies, "the brewery rate" is, subject to rounding under subsection (10) below, given by—

$$\frac{P-2,500}{P} \times \text{the standard rate}$$

where—

if this subsection applies by reason of subsection (8)(a) above,

P is the previous year's notional production,

if this subsection applies by reason of subsection (8)(b) above,

P is the amount, in hectolitres, of the aggregate mentioned in subsection (6)(b) above, and

"the standard rate" means the standard beer duty rate at the time mentioned in subsection (1) above.

(10) Where a rate given by subsection (7) or (9) above would (apart from this subsection) not be a whole number of pennies, the rate given by that subsection shall be taken to be the rate actually given by that subsection rounded up to the nearest penny.

36G Assessments where incorrectly low rate of duty applied

(1) Subsection (3) below applies if—

(a) duty is charged by section 36 above on any beer, and

(b) it appears at the excise duty point that the beer is small brewery beer for the purposes of section 36(1AA) above, but

(c) it turns out that the beer was not small brewery beer for those purposes (because, for example, circumstances were not as they appeared at that point or they subsequently changed).

(2) Subsection (3) below also applies if—

(a) duty is charged by section 36 above on any beer that is small brewery beer for the purposes of section 36(1AA) above, and

(b) the rate of duty that at the excise duty point appeared to be the correct rate turns out to have been lower than the correct rate (because, for example, circumstances were not as they appeared at that point or they subsequently changed).

(3) In any such case the Commissioners—

(a) may assess the amount that is the difference between—

(i) the actual amount of the duty charged on the beer by section 36 above, and

(ii) the lower amount that, at the excise duty point, appeared to be the amount charged,

as being excise duty due from the person liable to pay the duty charged on the beer by section 36 above, and

(b) may notify him or his representative accordingly.

(4) Where two or more persons are liable to pay the duty charged on the beer—

(a) the reference in subsection (3)(a) above to the person liable to pay the duty is to any one or more of those persons, and

(b) the reference in subsection (3)(b) above to notifying the person liable or his representative is to notifying each person assessed or his representative.".

(4) In the Finance Act 1994—

(a) in section 12A(3)(bb), for "or 11" there shall be substituted ", 11 or 36G";

(b) in section 12B(2), after paragraph (eb) there shall be inserted—

"(ec) in the case of an assessment under section 36G of that Act, the time at which the requirement to pay the duty took effect (which time, in a case where there was an excise duty point for the beer fixed under section 1 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1992, is that excise duty point);"; and

(c) in section 14(1)(ba), for "or 11" there shall be substituted ", 11 or 36G".

(5) This Resolution shall come into force on 1st June 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

6. BIODIESEL

Resolved,

That provision may be made—

(a) imposing an excise duty on biodiesel and mixtures containing biodiesel,

(b) for the application in relation to biodiesel of the provisions of the enactments relating to hydrocarbon oil or any description of hydrocarbon oil, and

(c) defining biodiesel for those purposes and conferring power to amend the definition by order.

7. HYDROCARBON OIL DUTIES (REBATES)

Resolved,

That provision may be made as to the meaning of references to "rebate" in provisions of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979.

8. HYDROCARBON OIL DUTIES (FUEL SUBSTITUTES)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 6A of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979 and section 10 of the Finance Act 1993.

9. AMUSEMENT MACHINE LICENCES (EXCEPTED MACHINES)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 21 of the Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981, for paragraphs (c) and (d) of subsection (3A) there shall be substituted—

"(c) a fifty-penny machine that is not a gaming machine.".

(2) For subsection (3B) of that section there shall be substituted—

"(3B) For the purposes of this section an amusement machine is a fifty-penny machine if, and only if—

(a) where it is a machine on which a game can be played solo, the price for a solo game does not exceed 50p; and

(b) where it is a machine on which a game can be played by more than one person at a time, the price to participate in such a game does not exceed 50p.".

(3) In subsection (3C) of that section, for "35p", in both places where it occurs, there shall be substituted "50p".

(4) In section 25 of that Act, in subsections (4) and (6), for "an excepted video machine falling within section 21(3A)(d) above" there shall be substituted "a fifty-penny machine within section 21(3B) above".

(5) This Resolution shall have effect in relation to the provision of an amusement machine at any time on or after 1st May 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

10. AMUSEMENT MACHINE LICENCE DUTY (RATES)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In the Table in section 23(2) of the Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981, for columns (4) and (6) there shall be substituted—

(4) Category C £	(6) Category E £
80	225
160	435
235	630
305	820
370	990
430	1155
485	1300
535	1440
585	1560
625	1675
665	1775
695	1860

(2) Paragraph (1) above shall apply in relation to any amusement machine licence for which an application is received by the Commissioners of Customs and Excise after 30th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

11. GAMING DUTY (SIC BO AND THREE CARD POKER)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 10(2) of the Finance Act 1997—

(a) after "American roulette" there shall be inserted "sic bo";

(b) after "super pan 9" there shall be inserted "three card poker".

(2) This Resolution shall have effect in relation to games begun on or after 24th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

12. POOL BETTING DUTY ETC

Resolved,

That—

(1) The Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981 shall be amended in accordance with paragraphs (2) to (10).

(2) For sections 6 to 8 there shall be substituted—

"*Pool betting duty*

6 The duty

A duty of excise to be known as pool betting duty shall be charged in accordance with sections 7 to 8C.

7 Duty charged on net pool betting receipts

(1) If the amount of a person's net pool betting receipts for an accounting period is greater than zero, pool betting duty is charged on those receipts.

(2) The amount of that duty is 15 per cent of the amount of the receipts.

7A Calculating net pool betting receipts

For the purposes of section 7, the amount of a person's net pool betting receipts for an accounting period is—

$S + E - W$

where—

S is the aggregate of amounts falling due to the person in the accounting period in respect of dutiable pool bets,

E is the aggregate of expenses and profits falling within section 7E(2) that are attributable to the accounting period, and

W is the aggregate of amounts paid by the person in the accounting period by way of winnings on dutiable pool bets (irrespective of when the bets were made or determined).

7B Net pool betting receipts: meaning of "dutiable pool bet"

(1) For the purposes of a calculation under section 7A of the amount of a person's net pool betting receipts for any accounting period, a bet (wherever made) is a "dutiable pool bet" if—

(a) the bet is made by way of pool betting, and

(b) the following conditions are satisfied.

(2) The first condition is that—

(a) the bet is made by means of a totalisator situated in the United Kingdom and that person is the operator, or

(b) the bet is made otherwise than by means of a totalisator and that person is the promoter and is in the United Kingdom.

(3) The second condition is that the bet is not—

(a) made by way of sponsored pool betting,

(b) made as mentioned in section 4(3), or

(c) made for community benefit.

(4) The third condition is that if the bet was made before 31st March 2002, at least one event to which it relates takes place on or after that date.

7C Net pool betting receipts: calculating stake money

(1) This section applies for the purpose of calculating S in a calculation under section 7A.

(2) Any payment that entitles a person to make a bet shall, if he makes the bet, be treated as stake money on the bet.

(3) All payments made—

(a) for or on account of or in connection with bets that are dutiable pool bets for the purposes of the calculation,

(b) in addition to the stake money, and

(c) by the persons making the bets,

shall be treated as amounts due in respect of the bets except in so far as the contrary is proved by the person whose net pool betting receipts are being calculated.

7D Net pool betting receipts: when stakes etc fall due

(1) Subsections (2) to (5) apply for the purpose of calculating S in a calculation under section 7A.

(2) Where—

(a) a person makes a bet, and

(b) the bet relates to a single event, or to two or more events all taking place on the same day,

any sum due to a person in respect of the bet shall be treated as falling due on the day on which the event or events take place.

(3) Where—

(a) a person makes a bet, and

(b) subsection (2) does not apply,

any sum due to a person in respect of the bet shall (subject to subsection (5)) be treated as falling due when the bet is made.

(4) Subsections (2) and (3) have effect in relation to a sum irrespective of when it is actually paid or required to be paid (even where a sum that those subsections require to be treated as falling due on or after 31st March 2002 was actually paid, or required to be paid, before that date).

(5) As respects a bet made before 31st March 2002 that relates to events at least one of which takes place before that date and at least one of which takes place on or after that date, any sum paid on or after that date in respect of the bet shall be treated as falling due when it is paid.

7E Net pool betting receipts: expenses and profits

(1) Subsections (2) and (3) apply for the purpose of calculating E in a calculation under section 7A.

(2) The expenses and profits falling within this subsection are (subject to subsection (3))—

(a) those of the person whose net pool betting receipts are being calculated, and

(b) those of any other person concerned with or benefiting from the promotion of the betting concerned.

(3) Expenses and profits do not fall within subsection (2) so far as they are—

(a) provided out of amounts due, in respect of bets that are dutiable pool bets for the purposes of the calculation, to the person whose net pool betting receipts are being calculated, or

(b) referable to matters other than—

(i) the promotion or management of the betting concerned, or

(ii) activities ancillary to, or connected with, such promotion or management.

7F Net pool betting receipts: calculating winnings

(1) Subsections (2) to (5) apply for the purpose of calculating W in a calculation under section 7A.

(2) The reference to paying an amount to a person includes a reference to holding it in an account if the person is notified that the amount is being held for him in the account and that he is entitled to withdraw it on demand.

(3) The return of a stake shall be treated as a payment by way of winnings.

(4) Only payments of money shall be taken into account.

(5) Where a bet made before 31st March 2002 relates to events at least one of which takes place before that date and at least one of which takes place on or after that date, no account shall be taken of any payment by way of winnings on the bet.

8 Payment and recovery

(1) Pool betting duty charged on a person's net pool betting receipts for an accounting period—

(a) becomes due at the end of the period,

(b) shall be paid by the person, and

(c) shall, subject to any directions under paragraph 3 of Schedule 1 to this Act, be paid when it becomes due.

(2) Pool betting duty that is due to be paid may be recovered from the following persons as if they were jointly and severally liable to pay the duty—

(a) the person on whose net pool betting receipts the duty is charged ("the primary payer");

(b) a person responsible for the management of any business in the course of which any bets have been made that are dutiable pool bets for the purposes of calculations under section 7A of the amount of the primary payer's net pool betting receipts for any accounting period;

(c) a person responsible for the management of any totalisator used for the purposes of any such business;

(d) where a person within any of paragraphs (a) to (c) is a company, a director.

8A Meaning of "bet made for community benefit" in sections 6 to 8

(1) For the purposes of sections 6 to 8 (but subject to any direction under subsection (3)), a bet is made "for community benefit" if—

(a) the promoter of the betting concerned is a community society or is bound to pay all benefits accruing from the betting to such a society, and

(b) the person making the bet knows, when making it, that the purpose of the betting is to benefit such a society.

(2) In the case of a bet made by means of a totalisator, the reference in subsection (1) to the promoter of the betting concerned is a reference to the operator.

(3) The Commissioners may direct that any bet specified by the direction, or of a description so specified, is not a bet made for community benefit.

(4) The power conferred by subsection (3) may not be exercised unless the Commissioners consider that an unreasonably large part of the amounts paid in respect of the bets concerned will, or may, be applied otherwise than—

(a) in the payment of winnings, or

(b) for the benefit of a community society.

(5) In this section "community society" means—

(a) a society established and conducted for charitable purposes only, or

(b) a society established and conducted wholly or mainly for the support of athletic sports or athletic games and not established or conducted for purposes of private gain.

(6) In this section "society" includes any club, institution, organisation or association of persons, by whatever name called.

8B Meaning of "accounting period" in sections 6 to 8

For the purposes of sections 6 to 8, each period that ends with the last Saturday in a calendar month, and begins with the Sunday immediately following the previous such Saturday, is an accounting period.

8C Meaning of "bet" in sections 6 to 8A

(1) For the purposes of sections 6 to 8A, "bet" does not include the taking of a ticket or chance in a lottery.

(2) Where payments are made for the chance of winning any money or money's worth on terms under which the persons making the payments have a power of selection that may (directly or indirectly) determine the winner, those payments shall be treated as bets for the purposes of sections 6 to 8A notwithstanding that the power is not exercised.

(3) Subsection (2) has effect subject to section 12(3).

(4) Where any payment entitles a person to take part in a transaction that is, on his part only, not a bet made by way of pool betting by reason of his not in fact making any stake as if the transaction were such a bet, the

transaction shall be treated as such a bet for the purposes of pool betting duty (and section 7C(3) shall apply to any such payment).".

(3) In section 2(2)—

(a) in paragraph (b), after "bet," there shall be inserted "or", and

(b) paragraph (d), and the word "or" immediately preceding it, shall be omitted.

(4) In section 4(6), for the words from "do not apply" to the end there shall be substituted "do not apply to on-course bets.".

(5) In section 9(2), the words "or coupon betting" shall be omitted (in both places).

(6) In section 9(3)—

(a) in paragraph (a), the words "or coupon betting" shall be omitted,

(b) for sub-paragraphs (i) to (iv) of paragraph (a) there shall be substituted—

"(i) the bet is not made by means of a totalisator, and

(ii) the promoter is in the Isle of Man; or", and

(c) in paragraph (aa)(i), the words "or coupon betting" shall be omitted.

(7) For section 9(6) there shall be substituted—

"(6) Section 8C(1) to (3) above shall have effect for the purposes of subsections (2)(a) and (5) above as it has effect for the purposes of sections 6 to 8A above.".

(8) Section 11 shall be omitted.

(9) In section 12(3), the words "(except in sections 6, 7, 8, 9(2)(a) and 9(5) in their application to coupon betting)" shall be omitted.

(10) Schedule 1 shall be amended as follows—

(a) in paragraph 1, in the definition of "pool betting business", at the end there shall be inserted "or would or might involve such sums becoming so payable if receipts from bets made for community benefit (as defined by section 8A of this Act) were not excluded from that duty.";

(b) in paragraph 4(2), for "sub-paragraphs (3) and (4)" there shall be substituted "sub-paragraph (3)";

(c) paragraph 4(4) to (6) shall be omitted;

(d) in paragraph 5(1), for "made entry or given notice in accordance with paragraph 4(2) or (4)" there shall be substituted "made entry in accordance with paragraph 4(2)";

(e) paragraph (b) of paragraph 5(2) shall be renumbered as paragraph 5(3);

(f) in what remains of paragraph 5(2) after that renumbering, for the words from "paragraph 12(3) below, except that" to the end there shall be substituted "sub-paragraph (3) below.";

(g) in paragraph 6(2), paragraph (b) shall be omitted;

(h) paragraphs 8 and 12 shall be omitted;

(i) in paragraph 14(1), the words after paragraph (b) shall be omitted; and

(j) in paragraph 15(4), for "the said Schedule 1" there shall be substituted "Schedule 1 to the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963".

(11) In section 1(3) of the Excise Duties (Surcharges or Rebates) Act 1979, the words from ", except that if the duty is pool betting duty" to the end shall be omitted.

(12) In paragraph 6 of Schedule 5 to the Finance Act 1994, after sub-paragraph (2) there shall be inserted—

"(3) Any decision consisting in the giving of a direction under section 8A(3) of the Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981 (pool betting duty: direction that bet is not made for community benefit).".

(13) If—

(a) stake money is paid before 31st March 2002 in respect of a bet to which paragraph (17) applies, and

(b) pool betting duty charged on that money before that date is not paid before 24th April 2002,

that duty ceases on 24th April 2002 to be charged on that money.

(14) If—

(a) stake money is paid before 31st March 2002 in respect of a bet to which paragraph (17) applies, and

(b) pool betting duty charged on that money before that date is paid before 24th April 2002,

the person who paid that duty becomes entitled on 24th April 2002 to a credit equal to the amount of the duty.

(15) Effect is given to such a credit by setting it (until fully utilised) against pool betting duty that the person is liable to pay in respect of accounting periods beginning on or after 31st March 2002 (taking earlier such periods before later ones).

(16) Such a credit does not—

(a) carry interest,

(b) affect the payability of the duty mentioned in paragraph (14), or

(c) entitle any person to any payment in respect of the credit.

(17) This paragraph applies to a bet if—

(a) it is a dutiable pool bet for the purposes of a calculation, under the section 7A of the Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981 inserted by this Resolution, of the amount of a person's net pool betting receipts for any accounting period, and

(b) it is made before 31st March 2002 but all the events to which it relates take place on or after that date.

(18) Any notification under paragraph 4(4) of Schedule 1 to the Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981 that is effective immediately before 24th April 2002 shall on and after that date have effect (until withdrawn) as a notification made on 31st March 2002 under paragraph 4(3) of that Schedule.

(19) The amendments made by paragraph (2) shall have effect for the purposes of accounting periods beginning on or after 31st March 2002.

(20) The amendments made by paragraphs (3) and (4) shall apply to bets made on or after 31st March 2002.

(21) Subject to paragraph (22), this Resolution shall be deemed to have come into force on 31st March 2002.

(22) Paragraphs (5), (6)(a) and (c) and (7) to (18) shall come into force on 24th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

13. GENERAL BETTING DUTY (SPREAD BETS)

Resolved,

That provision may be made as to the bets that are spread bets for the purposes of general betting duty.

14. VEHICLE EXCISE DUTY (CARS REGISTERED ON OR AFTER 1ST MARCH 2001)

Resolved,

That—

(1) For the Table in paragraph 1B of Schedule 1 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 there shall be substituted—

CO_2 emissions figure		*Rate*		
(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*
Exceeding	*Not exceeding*	*Reduced rate*	*Standard Rate*	*Premium rate*
g/km	g/km	£	£	£
—	120	60	70	80
120	150	90	100	110
150	165	110	120	130
165	185	130	140	150
185	—	150	155	160

(2) This Resolution shall apply to any licence taken out on or after 18th April 2002 for a period beginning on or after 1st May 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

15. VEHICLE EXCISE DUTY (MOTORCYCLES)

Resolved,

That—

(1) For paragraph 2(1) to (1B) of Schedule 1 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 there shall be substituted—

"2(1) The annual rate of vehicle excise duty applicable to a motorcycle that does not exceed 450 kilograms in weight unladen is—

(a) if the cylinder capacity of the engine does not exceed 150 cubic centimetres, £15;

(b) if the vehicle is a motorbicycle and the cylinder capacity of the engine exceeds 150 cubic centimetres but does not exceed 400 cubic centimetres, £30;

(c) if the vehicle is a motorbicycle and the cylinder capacity of the engine exceeds 400 cubic centimetres but does not exceed 600 cubic centimetres, £45;

(d) in any other case, £60.".

(2) In sections 13(3)(a), 35A(5)(b) and 36(3)(b) of that Act, and in section 13(4)(a) of that Act as substituted under paragraph 8 of Schedule 4 to that Act, for "(1)(c)" there shall be substituted "(1)(d)".

(3) Paragraph (1) of this Resolution, and the amendments in section 13 of that Act, shall apply to any licence taken out on or after 18th April 2002 for a period beginning on or after 1st May 2002.

(4) The amendments in sections 35A and 36 of that Act shall apply where the relevant period begins on or after 1st May 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

16. VEHICLE EXCISE DUTY (REGISTERED VEHICLES ETC)

Motion made and Question put.

That provision may be made for vehicle excise duty to be charged in respect of—

(a) vehicles registered under the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 that are neither used nor kept on a public road (within the meaning of that Act);

(b) things that have been but have ceased to be mechanically propelled vehicles.

The House divided: Ayes 397, Noes 155.

Division No. 214] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry

George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick

Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, [illegible]
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

17. Vehicle excise duty (calculation of cylinder capacity)

Resolved,

That provision may be made for the calculation of the cylinder capacity of engines for purposes of vehicle excise duty.

18. VALUE ADDED TAX (DISALLOWANCE OF INPUT TAX WHERE CONSIDERATION NOT PAID)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about entitlement to credit for input tax where some or all of the consideration for the supply is not paid within a certain period.

19. VALUE ADDED TAX (FLAT-RATE SCHEME)

Resolved,

That—

(1) Before section 27 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 there shall be inserted—

"26B Flat-rate scheme

(1) The Commissioners may by regulations make provision under which, where a taxable person so elects, the amount of his liability to VAT in respect of his relevant supplies in any prescribed accounting period shall be the appropriate percentage of his relevant turnover for that period.
A person whose liability to VAT is to any extent determined as mentioned above is referred to in this section as participating in the flat-rate scheme.

(2) For the purposes of this section—

(a) a person's "relevant supplies" are all supplies made by him except supplies made at such times or of such descriptions as may be specified in the regulations;

(b) the "appropriate percentage" is the percentage so specified for the category of business carried on by the person in question;

(c) a person's "relevant turnover" is the total of—

(i) the value of those of his relevant supplies that are taxable supplies, together with the VAT chargeable on them, and

(ii) the value of those of his relevant supplies that are exempt supplies.

(3) The regulations may designate certain categories of business as categories in relation to which the references in subsection (1) above to liability to VAT are to be read as references to entitlement to credit for VAT.

(4) The regulations may provide for persons to be eligible to participate in the flat-rate scheme only in such cases and subject to such conditions and exceptions as may be specified in, or determined by or under, the regulations.

(5) Subject to such exceptions as the regulations may provide for, a participant in the flat-rate scheme shall not be entitled to credit for input tax.
This is without prejudice to subsection (3) above.

(6) The regulations may—

(a) provide for the appropriate percentage to be determined by reference to the category of business that a person is expected, on reasonable grounds, to carry on in a particular period;

(b) provide, in such circumstances as may be prescribed, for different percentages to apply in relation to different parts of the same prescribed accounting period;

(c) make provision for determining the category of business to be regarded as carried on by a person carrying on businesses in more than one category.

(7) The regulations may provide for the following matters to be determined in accordance with notices published by the Commissioners—

(a) when supplies are to be treated as taking place for the purposes of ascertaining a person's relevant turnover for a particular period;

(b) the method of calculating any adjustments that fall to be made in accordance with the regulations in a case where a person begins or ceases to participate in the flat-rate scheme.

(8) The regulations may make provision enabling the Commissioners—

(a) to authorise a person to participate in the flat-rate scheme with effect from—

(i) a day before the date of his election to participate, or

(ii) a day that is not earlier than that date but is before the date of the authorisation;

(b) to direct that a person shall cease to be a participant in the scheme with effect from a day before the date of the direction.

The day mentioned in paragraph (a)(i) above may be a day before the date on which the regulations come into force.

(9) Regulations under this section—

(a) may make different provision for different circumstances;

(b) may make such incidental, supplemental, consequential or transitional provision as the Commissioners think fit, including provision disapplying or applying with modifications any provision contained in or made under this Act.".

(2) In section 83 of that Act, after paragraph (f) there shall be inserted—

"(fza) a decision of the Commissioners—

(i) refusing or withdrawing authorisation for a person's liability to pay VAT (or entitlement to credit for VAT) to be determined as mentioned in subsection (1) of section 26B;

(ii) as to the appropriate percentage or percentages (within the meaning of that section) applicable in a person's case.".

(3) In section 84 of that Act, after subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(4ZA) Where an appeal is brought—

(a) against such a decision as is mentioned in section 83(fza), or

(b) to the extent that it is based on such a decision, against an assessment,

the tribunal shall not allow the appeal unless it considers that the Commissioners could not reasonably have been satisfied that there were grounds for the decision.".

(4) This Resolution shall come into force on 24th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

20. VALUE ADDED TAX (INVOICES)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about VAT invoices

21. INCOME TAX (CHARGE AND RATES FOR 2002-03)

Motion made and Question put,

That income tax shall be charged for the year 2002-03, and for that year—

(a) the starting rate shall be 10%;

(b) the basic rate shall be 22%;

(c) the higher rate shall be 40%.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 344, Noes 56.

Division No. 215] **[10.29 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam

Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev Ian
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Archy
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Bob Russell and
Sir Robert Smith.

Question accordingly agreed to.

22. INDEXED RATE BANDS FOR 2002-03: PAYE DEDUCTIONS ETC

Resolved,

That for the year 2002-03—

(a) section 1(5A) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, and

(b) section 257C(2A) of that Act as it has effect for the application of sections 257AA(2) and 265 of that Act,

shall have effect as if "17th June" were substituted for "17th May".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

23. CORPORATION TAX (CHARGE AND RATE FOR 2003)

Resolved,

That corporation tax shall be charged for the financial year 2003 at the rate of 30%.

24. CORPORATION TAX (SMALL COMPANIES' RATE FOR 2002)

Resolved,

That for the financial year 2002—

(a) the small companies' rate shall be 19%, and

(b) the fraction mentioned in section 13(2) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be 11/400ths.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

25. CORPORATION TAX (STARTING RATE)

Resolved,

That for the financial year 2002—

(a) the corporation tax starting rate shall be 0%, and

(b) the fraction mentioned in section 13AA(3) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be 19/400ths.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

26. STATUTORY PATERNITY PAY AND STATUTORY ADOPTION PAY

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the taxation of statutory paternity pay and statutory adoption pay.

27. SCHEDULE E CHARGE

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending Chapters 1 and 2 of Part 5, and section 595, of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

28. DEDUCTIONS UNDER THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY SCHEME

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the treatment of sums deducted under section 559 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

29. CHARGEABLE GAINS (PROVISION IN CONNECTION WITH SUBSTANTIAL SHAREHOLDING EXEMPTION)

Resolved,

That provision may be made in connection with provision conferring exemptions for disposals by companies with a substantial shareholding in another company—

(a) restricting allowable losses, and

(b) restricting the operation of relieving provisions.

30. CHARGEABLE GAINS (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 with respect to—

(a) share exchanges and company reconstructions;

(b) taper relief.

31. TAX RELIEF FOR R&D EXPENDITURE OF SMALL OR MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending Schedule 20 to the Finance Act 2000.

32. CHANGE OF BASIS OF COMPUTATION OF PROFITS

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made about the effect of a change of basis of computation of profits for tax purposes.

33. DEDUCTION OF EXPENDITURE INVOLVING CRIME

Resolved,

That provision may be made that, in calculating profits chargeable under Schedule D, no deduction shall be made for any expenditure incurred in making a payment outside the United Kingdom where the making of a corresponding payment in any part of the United Kingdom would constitute a criminal offence there.

34. LOAN RELATIONSHIPS ETC

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made for the purposes of corporation tax in relation to—

(a) loan relationships; and

(b) other relationships where a company stands, or is treated as standing, in the position of a creditor or debtor in relation to a debt.

35. FOREIGN EXCHANGE GAINS AND LOSSES

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made for the purposes of corporation tax in relation to gains and losses arising as a result of comparing at different times the expression in one currency of the valuation put on an asset or liability by a company in another currency.

36. CORPORATION TAX (CURRENCIES OTHER THAN STERLING)

Resolved,

That provision may be made in relation to the use of currencies other than sterling for purposes relating to corporation tax.

37. DERIVATIVE CONTRACTS

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made for the purposes of corporation tax in relation to—

(a) futures;

(b) options;

(c) contracts relating to fluctuations in the value or price of property or in an index or other factor;

(d) instruments entitling a person to subscribe for shares in a company or for assets representing a loan relationship of a company; and

(e) contracts which are qualifying contracts for the purposes of Chapter 2 of Part 4 of the Finance Act 1994.

38. GAINS AND LOSSES FROM A COMPANY'S INTANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the taxation of gains, and the allowing of losses, of a company from its intangible fixed assets, including—

(a) provision restricting capital gains roll-over relief on the disposal of existing assets, and

(b) provision affecting the value of an intangible fixed asset in the hands of a company's counter-party (as transferor or transferee) for any purposes of the Tax Acts.

39. GAINS OF INSURANCE COMPANY FROM VENTURE CAPITAL LIMITED PARTNERSHIP

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the taxation of the gains of an insurance company from a limited partnership that invests in unquoted shares or securities.

40. LLOYD'S UNDERWRITERS

Resolved,

That provision be made about Lloyds's underwriters.

41. CONTROLLED FOREIGN COMPANIES

Motion made and Question put,

That provision may be made amending Chapter 4 of Part 17 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

The House divided: Ayes 387, Noes 151.

Division No. 216] **[10.41 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy

Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex

Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Straw, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

42. PETROLEUM EXTRACTION ACTIVITIES (COMPANIES CARRYING ON RING FENCE TRADES)

Motion made, and Question put,

That provision may be made in relation to companies carrying on ring fence trades, as defined in section 502(1) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

As an Amendment to Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer's proposed Motion (Petroleum extraction activities (companies carrying on ring fence trades)):

Mr Alex Salmond

Mr Elfyn Llwyd

Line **2**, at end add 'That any such provision shall not have effect until a full economic assessment has been conducted about the impact of any changes to current and future employment and exploration related to North Sea activities.'.

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 209.

Division No. 217] **[10.53 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*

Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan

Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

43. FILMS: RESTRICTION OF RELIEF

Resolved,

That provision may be made restricting relief under the following provisions—

(a) section 40D of the Finance (No.2) Act 1992;

(b) section 41 of that Act;

(c) section 42 of that Act;

(d) section 48 of the Finance (No.2) Act 1997.

44. DISTRIBUTIONS (REASONABLE COMMERCIAL RETURN FOR USE OF PRINCIPAL SECURED)

Resolved,

That provision may be made as to the cases in which any interest or other distribution out of assets of a company is a distribution, within the meaning of the Corporation Tax Acts, by virtue of section 209(2)(d) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

45. REFERENCES TO ACCOUNTING PRACTICE ETC

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made standardising references in the Tax Acts to accounting practice and periods of account.

46. DISCOUNTED SECURITIES ETC

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made amending Schedule 13 to the Finance Act 1996.

47. VALUATION OF TRADING STOCK

Resolved,

That provision may be made as to the valuation of trading stock sold or transferred together with other assets.

48. MANUFACTURED DIVIDENDS AND INTEREST

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending Schedule 23A to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

49. VENTURE CAPITAL TRUSTS (WINDING UP, MERGERS AND FURTHER SHARE ISSUES)

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made—

(a) for cases where venture capital trusts are wound up;

(b) for mergers (including takeovers) of venture capital trusts;

(c) for disapplying, or restricting the application of, section 842AA(5B) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

50. STAMP DUTY (LAND IN DISADVANTAGED AREAS)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about stamp duty on a conveyance or transfer of an estate or interest in land situated wholly or partly in a disadvantaged area, or on a lease of such land.

51. STAMP DUTY (WITHDRAWAL OF GROUP RELIEF)

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall have effect for the period beginning with 24th April 2002 and ending 31 days after the earliest of the dates mentioned in section 50(2) of the Finance Act 1973—

(1) Paragraph (2) of this Resolution shall apply where—

(a) an instrument ("the relevant instrument") transferring land in the United Kingdom from one company ("the transferor company") to another ("the transferee company") has been stamped on the basis that group relief applies,

(b) before the end of the period of two years beginning with the date on which the instrument was executed the transferee company ceases to be a member of the same group as the transferor company, and

(c) at the time when it ceases to be a member of the same group as the transferor company it holds an estate or interest in land—

(i) that was transferred to it by the relevant instrument, or

(ii) that is derived from an estate or interest that was so transferred,

and that was not subsequently transferred to it by a duly stamped instrument for which group relief was not claimed.

(2) In those circumstances—

(a) group relief in relation to the relevant instrument, or an appropriate proportion of it, is withdrawn, and

(b) the stamp duty that would have been payable on stamping the relevant instrument but for group relief if the estate or interest in land transferred by that instrument had been transferred at market value, or an appropriate proportion of the duty that would have been so paid, is payable by the transferee company within 30 days after that company ceases to be a member of the same group as the transferor company.

(3) In paragraph (2) of this Resolution "an appropriate proportion" means an appropriate proportion having regard to what was transferred by the relevant instrument and what the transferee company holds at the time it ceases to be a member of the same group as the transferor company.

(4) In this Resolution "group relief" means relief under any of the following provisions—

(a) section 42 of the Finance Act 1930 or section 11 of the Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 1954;

(b) section 151 of the Finance Act 1995.

(5) In this Resolution—

(a) references to the transfer of land include the grant or surrender of an estate or interest in or over land;

(b) "company" includes any body corporate; and

(c) references to a company being in the same group as another company are to the companies being associated bodies corporate within the meaning of the relevant group relief provision.

(6) Where the relevant instrument transfers land in the United Kingdom together with other property, the provisions of this Resolution apply as if there were two separate instruments, one relating to land in the United Kingdom and the other relating to other property.

(7) Paragraph (2) of this Resolution does not apply if the transferee company ceases to be a member of the same group as the transferor company by reason of the latter company leaving the group.

(8) The transferor company is regarded as leaving the group if the companies cease to be members of the same group by reason of a transaction relating to shares in—

(a) the transferor company, or

(b) another company that as a result of the transaction ceases to be a member of the same group as the transferee company.

(9) Paragraph (2) of this Resolution does not apply if—

(a) the transferee company ceases to be a member of the same group as the transferor company as a result of an acquisition of shares by another company ("the parent company") in relation to which acquisition relief applies, and

(b) the transferee company is immediately after that acquisition a member of the same group as the parent company ("the new group").

(10) For this purpose—

(a) "acquisition relief" means relief under section 75 of the Finance Act 1986; and

(b) references to an acquisition in relation to which such relief applies are to an acquisition such that an instrument effecting the transfer of the shares is exempt from stamp duty by virtue of that provision.

(11) But if before the end of the period of two years beginning with the date on which the relevant instrument was executed—

(a) the transferee company ceases to be a member of the new group, and

(b) at the time when it ceases to be a member of the new group it holds an estate or interest in land that—

(i) was transferred to it by the relevant instrument, or

(ii) is derived from an estate or interest that was so transferred,

and that was not subsequently transferred to it by a duly stamped instrument for which group relief was not claimed,

the provisions of this Resolution shall apply as if the company had then ceased to be a member of the same group as the transferor company.

(12) Where an amount of duty is payable under this Resolution, interest on that amount is payable as from the end of the period of 30 days from the day on which the relevant instrument was executed.

(13) The provisions of section 15A(3) to (5) of the Stamp Act 1891 apply in relation to interest under paragraph (13) of this Resolution.

(14) The transferee company shall, within the period of 30 days mentioned in paragraph (2)(b) of this Resolution within which payment is to be made, notify the Commissioners of—

(a) the date on which it ceased to be a member of the same group as the transferor company,

(b) the relevant land held by it at that time,

(c) the nature of the relevant instrument, the date on which it was executed, the parties to the instrument and the date on which the instrument was stamped,

(d) the market value of the land transferred to it by the relevant instrument at the date on which that instrument was executed, and

(e) the amount of duty and interest payable by it under this Resolution.

(15) In paragraph (14)(b) of this Resolution the "relevant land" held by the transferee company means every estate or interest in relation to which paragraph (1)(c) of this Resolution applies.

(16) Section 98 of the Taxes Management Act 1970 shall have effect as if a reference to paragraph (14) of this Resolution were inserted in the second column of the Table in subsection (5) of that section.

(17) The provisions of regulations under section 98 of the Finance Act 1986, and the provisions of the Taxes Management Act 1970 applied by those regulations, have effect with the necessary modifications in relation to—

(a) the determination by the Commissioners of the duty payable under this Resolution or the interest payable thereon,

(b) appeals against any such determination, and

(c) the collection and recovery of any such duty or interest,

as if it were an amount of stamp duty reserve tax.

(18) This paragraph applies where—

(a) an amount is payable under this Resolution by the transferee company,

(b) a notice of determination of the amount payable has been issued by the Commissioners, and

(c) the whole or part of that amount is unpaid six months after the date on which it became payable.

(19) The following persons may, by notice under paragraph (22) of this Resolution, be required to pay the unpaid amount—

(a) any company that at any relevant time was a member of the same group as the transferee company, and

(b) any person who at any relevant time was a controlling director of the transferee company or of a company having control of the transferee company.

(20) For this purpose a "relevant time" means any time between the execution of the relevant instrument and the transferee company ceasing to be a member of the same group as the transferor company.

(21) In paragraph (19) of this Resolution—

(a) "director", in relation to a company, has the meaning given by section 168(8) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (read with subsection (9) of that section) and includes any person falling within section 417(5) of that Act (read with subsection (6) of that section); and

(b) "controlling director", in relation to a company, means a director of the company who has control of it (construing control in accordance with section 416 of that Act).

(22) The Commissioners may serve a notice on a person within paragraph (19) of this Resolution requiring him, within 30 days of the service of the notice, to pay the amount that remains unpaid.

(23) Any such notice must be served before the end of the period of three years beginning with the date on which the notice of determination mentioned in paragraph (18)(b) of this Resolution is issued.

(24) The notice must state the amount required to be paid by the person on whom the notice is served.

(25) The notice has effect—

(a) for the purposes of the recovery from that person of the amount required to be paid and of interest on that amount, and

(b) for the purposes of appeals,

as if it were a notice of determination and that amount were an amount of stamp duty reserve tax due from that person.

(26) A person who has paid an amount in pursuance of a notice under paragraph (22) of this Resolution may recover that amount from the transferee company.

(27) A payment in pursuance of such a notice is not allowed as a deduction in computing any income, profits or losses for any tax purposes.

(28) The Commissioners may by notice require any person to furnish them within such time, not being less than 30 days, as may be specified in the notice with such information (including documents or records) as the Commissioners may reasonably require for the purposes of this Resolution.

(29) A barrister or solicitor shall not be obliged in pursuance of a notice under paragraph (28) of this Resolution to disclose, without his client's consent, any information with respect to which a claim to professional privilege could be maintained.

(30) Section 98 of the Taxes Management Act 1970 shall have effect as if a reference to paragraph (28) of this Resolution were inserted in the first column of the Table in subsection (5) of that section.

(31) This Resolution shall be construed as one with the Stamp Act 1891.

(32) This Resolution shall apply where the relevant instrument is executed after 23rd April 2002.

(33) But this Resolution does not apply to an instrument giving effect to a contract made on or before 17th April 2002, unless—

(a) the instrument is made in consequence of the exercise after that date of any option, right of pre-emption or similar right, or

(b) the instrument transfers the property in question to, or vests it in, a person other than the purchaser under the contract because of an assignment (or, in Scotland, assignation) or further contract made after that date.

(34) This Resolution shall come into force on 24th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of section 50 of the Finance Act 1973.

52. STAMP DUTY (RESTRICTION OF RELIEF FOR COMPANY ACQUISITIONS)

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall have effect for the period beginning with 24th April 2002 and ending 31 days after the earliest of the dates mentioned in section 50(2) of the Finance Act 1973—

(1) Section 76 of the Finance Act 1986 shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2) for "the condition mentioned in subsection (3) below" substitute "the first and second conditions (as defined below)".

(3) In subsection (3) for "The condition" substitute "The first condition".

(4) After subsection (3) insert—

"(3A) The second condition applies only in relation to an instrument transferring land in the United Kingdom and is that the acquiring company is not associated with another company that is a party to

arrangements with the target company relating to shares of the acquiring company issued in connection with the transfer of the undertaking or part.

(3B) Where an instrument transfers land in the United Kingdom together with other property, the provisions of this section apply as if there were two separate instruments, one relating to land in the United Kingdom and the other relating to other property.".

(5) In subsection (5) for "subsection (2) above" (twice) substitute "this section".

(6) After subsection (6) insert—

"(6A) For the purposes of subsection (3A) above—

(a) companies are associated if one has control of the other or both are controlled by the same person or persons, and

(b) "arrangements" includes any scheme, agreement or understanding, whether or not legally enforceable.".

The references in paragraph (a) above to control shall be construed in accordance with section 416 of the Taxes Act 1988.".

(7) This Resolution shall apply to instruments executed after 23rd April 2002.

(8) But this Resolution does not apply to an instrument giving effect to a contract made on or before 17th April 2002, unless—

(a) the instrument is made in consequence of the exercise after that date of any option, right of pre-emption or similar right, or

(b) the instrument transfers the property in question to, or vests it in, a person other than the purchaser under the contract because of an assignment (or, in Scotland, assignation) or further contract made after that date.

(9) This Resolution shall come into force on 24th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of section 50 of the Finance Act 1973.

53. STAMP DUTY (WITHDRAWAL OF RELIEF FOR COMPANY ACQUISITIONS)

Resolved.

That the following provisions shall have effect for the period beginning with 24th April 2002 and ending 31 days after the earliest of the dates mentioned in section 50(2) of the Finance Act 1973—

(1) Paragraph (2) of this Resolution shall apply where—

(a) an instrument ("the relevant instrument") transferring land in the United Kingdom from one company to another company ("the acquiring company") has been stamped on the basis that relief under section 76 of the Finance Act 1986 ("section 76 relief") applies,

(b) before the end of the period of two years beginning with the date on which the instrument was executed control of the acquiring company changes, and

(c) at the time control of that company changes the acquiring company holds an estate or interest in land—

(i) that was transferred to it by the relevant instrument, or

(ii) that is derived from an estate or interest so transferred,

and that was not subsequently transferred to it by a duly stamped instrument on which ad valorem duty was paid and in relation to which section 76 relief was not claimed.

(2) In those circumstances—

(a) section 76 relief in relation to the relevant instrument, or an appropriate proportion of it, is withdrawn, and

(b) the additional stamp duty that would have been payable on stamping the relevant instrument but for section 76 relief if the estate or interest in land transferred by that instrument had been transferred at market value, or an appropriate proportion of that additional duty, is payable by the acquiring company within 30 days after control of that company changes.

(3) In paragraph (2) of this Resolution "an appropriate proportion" means an appropriate proportion having regard to what was transferred by the relevant instrument and what the acquiring company holds at the time control of it changes.

(4) In this Resolution—

(a) references to the transfer of land include the grant or surrender of an estate or interest in or over land;

(b) "control" shall be construed in accordance with section 416 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988; and

(c) references to control of a company changing are to the company becoming controlled—

(i) by a different person,

(ii) by a different number of persons, or

(iii) by two or more persons at least one of whom is not the person, or one of the persons, by whom the company was previously controlled.

(5) Where the relevant instrument transfers land in the United Kingdom together with other property, the provisions of this Resolution apply as if there were two separate instruments, one relating to land in the United Kingdom and the other relating to other property.

(6) Paragraph (2) of this Resolution does not apply by reason of control of the acquiring company changing as a result of any of the transactions listed in the Schedule to the Stamp Duty (Exempt Instruments) Regulations 1987.

(7) Paragraph (2) of this Resolution does not apply by reason of control of the acquiring company changing as a result of a transfer of shares ("the intra-group transfer") in relation to which group relief applies.

(8) For this purpose—

(a) "group relief" means relief under section 42 of the Finance Act 1930 or section 11 of the Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 1954; and

(b) references to a transfer in relation to which group relief applies are to a transfer such that an instrument effecting the transfer is exempt from stamp duty by virtue of either of the group relief provisions.

(9) But if before the end of the period of two years beginning with the date on which the relevant instrument was executed—

(a) a company ("company B") holding shares in the acquiring company to which the intra-group share transfer related, or that are derived from shares to which that instrument related, ceases to be a member of the same group as the company referred to in section 76 as the target company ("company C"), and

(b) the acquiring company, at that time, holds an estate or interest in land—

(i) that was transferred to it by the relevant instrument, or

(ii) that is derived from an estate or interest so transferred,

and that was not subsequently transferred to it by a duly stamped instrument on which ad valorem duty was paid and in relation to which section 76 relief was not claimed,

the following provisions apply.

(10) In those circumstances—

(a) section 76 relief in relation to the relevant instrument (or an appropriate proportion of that relief) is withdrawn, and

(b) the additional stamp duty that would have been paid on stamping the relevant instrument but for that relief if the land in question had been transferred by that instrument at market value, or an appropriate proportion of that

amount, is payable by the acquiring company within 30 days after company B ceases to be a member of the same group as company C.

(11) In paragraphs (7) to (10) of this Resolution—

(a) "company" includes any body corporate; and

(b) references to a company being in the same group as another company are to the companies being associated bodies corporate within the meaning of the relevant group relief provision.

(12) Paragraph (2) of this Resolution does not apply by reason of control of the acquiring company changing as a result of a transfer of shares ("the exempt transfer") to another company ("the parent company") in relation to which share acquisition relief applies.

(13) For this purpose—

(a) "share acquisition relief" means relief under section 77 of the Finance Act 1986; and

(b) references to a transfer in relation to which such relief applies are to a transfer such that an instrument effecting the transfer is exempt from stamp duty by virtue of that provision.

(14) But if before the end of the period of two years beginning with the date on which the relevant instrument was executed—

(a) control of the parent company changes at a time when that company holds any shares transferred to it by the exempt transfer, or any shares derived from shares so transferred, and

(b) the acquiring company, at that time, holds an estate or interest in land—

(i) that was transferred to it by the relevant instrument, or

(ii) that is derived from an estate or interest so transferred,

and that was not subsequently transferred to it by a duly stamped instrument on which ad valorem duty was paid and in relation to which section 76 relief was not claimed,

the following provisions apply.

(15) In those circumstances—

(a) section 76 relief in relation to the relevant instrument (or an appropriate proportion of that relief) is withdrawn, and

(b) the additional stamp duty that would have been paid on stamping the relevant instrument but for that relief if the land in question had been transferred by that instrument at market value, or an appropriate proportion of that additional duty, is payable by the acquiring company within 30 days after control of the parent company changed.

(16) Where an amount of duty is payable under this Resolution, interest on that amount is payable as from the end of the period of 30 days from the day on which the relevant instrument was executed.

(17) The provisions of section 15A(3) to (5) of the Stamp Act 1891 apply in relation to interest under paragraph (16) of this Resolution.

(18) The acquiring company shall, within the period of 30 days within which payment is to be made, notify the Commissioners of—

(a) the date on which the event occurred by reason of which it is liable to make a payment of duty under this Resolution,

(b) the relevant land held by it at that time,

(c) the nature of the relevant instrument, the date on which it was executed, the parties to the instrument and the date on which the instrument was stamped,

(d) the market value of the land transferred to it by the relevant instrument at the date on which that instrument was executed, and

(e) the amount of duty and interest payable by it.

(19) In paragraph (18)(b) of this Resolution the "relevant land" held by the acquiring company means every estate or interest in relation to which paragraph (1)(c) of this Resolution applies.

(20) Section 98 of the Taxes Management Act 1970 shall have effect as if a reference to paragraph (18) of this Resolution were inserted in the second column of the Table in subsection (5) of that section.

(21) The provisions of regulations under section 98 of the Finance Act 1986, and the provisions of the Taxes Management Act 1970 applied by those regulations, have effect with the necessary modifications in relation to—

(a) the determination by the Commissioners of the duty payable under this Resolution or the interest payable thereon,

(b) appeals against any such determination, and

(c) the collection and recovery of any such duty or interest,

as if it were an amount of stamp duty reserve tax.

(22) This paragraph applies where—

(a) an amount is payable under this Resolution by the acquiring company,

(b) a notice of determination of the amount payable has been issued by the Inland Revenue, and

(c) the whole or part of that amount is unpaid six months after the date on which it became payable.

(23) The following persons may, by notice under paragraph (26) of this Resolution, be required to pay the unpaid amount—

(a) any company that at any relevant time was a member of the same group as the acquiring company, and

(b) any person who at any relevant time was a controlling director of the acquiring company or of a company having control of the acquiring company.

(24) For this purpose a "relevant time" means any time between the execution of the relevant instrument and the change of control by virtue of which the liability to pay the amount arises.

(25) In paragraph (23) of this Resolution—

(a) references to companies being in the same group are to one company having control of the other or both companies being under the control of the same person or persons;

(b) "director", in relation to a company, has the meaning given by section 168(8) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (read with subsection (9) of that section) and includes any person falling within section 417(5) of that Act (read with subsection (6) of that section); and

(c) "controlling director", in relation to a company, means a director of the company who has control of it.

(26) The Commissioners may serve a notice on a person within paragraph (23) of this Resolution requiring him, within 30 days of the service of the notice, to pay the amount that remains unpaid.

(27) Any such notice must be served before the end of the period of three years beginning with the date on which the notice of determination mentioned in paragraph (22)(b) is issued.

(28) The notice must state the amount required to be paid by the person on whom the notice is served.

(29) The notice has effect—

(a) for the purposes of the recovery from that person of the amount required to be paid and of interest on that amount, and

(b) for the purposes of appeals,

as if it were a notice of determination and that amount were an amount of stamp duty reserve tax due from that person.

(30) A person who has paid an amount in pursuance of a notice under paragraph (26) of this Resolution may recover that amount from the acquiring company.

(31) A payment in pursuance of such a notice is not allowed as a deduction in computing any income, profits or losses for any tax purposes.

(32) The Commissioners may by notice require any person to furnish them within such time, not being less than 30 days, as may be specified in the notice with such information (including documents or records) as the Commissioners may reasonably require for the purposes of this Resolution.

(33) A barrister or solicitor shall not be obliged in pursuance of a notice under paragraph (32) of this Resolution to disclose, without his client's consent, any information with respect to which a claim to professional privilege could be maintained.

(34) Section 98 of the Taxes Management Act 1970 shall have effect as if a reference to paragraph (32) of this Resolution were inserted in the first column of the Table in subsection (5) of that section.

(35) This Resolution shall be construed as one with the Stamp Act 1891.

(36) This Resolution shall apply where the relevant instrument is executed after 23rd April 2002.

(37) But this Resolution does not apply to an instrument giving effect to a contract made on or before 17th April 2002, unless—

(a) the instrument is made in consequence of the exercise after that date of any option, right of pre-emption or similar right, or

(b) the instrument transfers the property in question to, or vests it in, a person other than the purchaser under the contract because of an assignment (or, in Scotland, assignation) or further contract made after that date.

(38) This Resolution shall come into force on 24th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of section 50 of the Finance Act 1973.

54. STAMP DUTY (CONTRACTS FOR SALE OF LAND)

Resolved,

That provision may be made with respect to stamp duty on contracts or agreements for the sale of an estate or interest on land.

55. STAMP DUTY (ABOLITION ON INSTRUMENTS RELATING TO GOODWILL)

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall have effect for the period beginning 23rd April 2002 and ending 31 days after the earliest of the dates mentioned in section 50(2) of the Finance Act 1973—

(1) No stamp duty shall be chargeable on an instrument for the sale, transfer or other disposition of goodwill.

(2) The provisions of paragraphs (3) to (7) of this Resolution shall apply where stamp duty under Part 1 of Schedule 13 to the Finance Act 1999 is chargeable on an instrument that relates partly to goodwill and partly to property other than goodwill.

(3) In such a case—

(a) the consideration in respect of which duty would otherwise be charged shall be apportioned, on a just and reasonable basis, as between the goodwill and the other property, and

(b) the instrument shall be charged only in respect of the consideration attributed to the other property.

(4) Where part of the property referred to in section 58(1) of the Stamp Act 1891 consists of goodwill, that provision shall have effect as if "the parties think fit" read "is just and reasonable".

(5) Where part of the property referred to in section 58(2) of the Stamp Act 1891 consists of goodwill, and both or (as the case may be) all the relevant persons are connected with one another, that provision shall have effect as if the words from "for distinct parts of the consideration" to the end of the subsection read ", the consideration shall be apportioned in such manner as is just and reasonable, so that a distinct consideration for each separate part or parcel is set forth in the conveyance relating thereto, and such conveyance is to be charged with ad valorem duty in respect of such distinct consideration.".

(6) In a case where paragraph (4) or (5) of this Resolution applies and the consideration is apportioned in a manner that is not just and reasonable, the enactments relating to stamp duty shall have effect as if—

(a) the consideration had been apportioned in a manner that is just and reasonable, and

(b) the amount of any distinct consideration set forth in any conveyance relating to a separate part or parcel of property were such amount as is found by a just and reasonable apportionment (and not the amount actually set forth).

(7) For the purposes of paragraph (5) of this Resolution—

(a) a person is a relevant person if he is a person by or for whom the property is contracted to be purchased;

(b) the question whether persons are connected with one another shall be determined in accordance with section 839 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

(8) Goodwill shall be disregarded for the purposes of paragraph 6 of Schedule 13 to the Finance Act 1999.

(9) Any statement as mentioned in paragraph 6(1) of that Schedule shall be construed as leaving out of account any matter which is to be so disregarded.

(10) Section 12 of the Finance Act 1895 does not require any person who is authorised to purchase any property as mentioned in that section after 23rd April 2002 to include any goodwill in the instrument of conveyance required by that section to be produced to the Commissioners.

(11) If the property consists wholly of goodwill no instrument of conveyance need be produced to the Commissioners under that section.

(12) Paragraphs (1) to (9) of this Resolution shall apply to instruments executed on or after 23rd April 2002.

(13) Paragraphs (10) and (11) of this Resolution shall apply where the Act mentioned in that section, and by virtue of which property is vested or a person is authorised to purchase property, is passed after 23rd April 2002.

(14) In this Resolution "the enactments relating to stamp duty" means the Stamp Act 1891 and any enactment amending that Act or that is to be construed as one with that Act.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of section 50 of the Finance Act 1973.

56. INHERITANCE TAX (POWERS OVER SETTLED PROPERTY OR A SETTLEMENT)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending the Inheritance Tax Act 1984 in relation to powers over, or exercisable (whether directly or indirectly) in relation to, settled property or a settlement.

57. RATE OF LANDFILL TAX

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 42(1)(a) and (2) of the Finance Act 1996, for "£12" there shall be substituted "£13".

(2) This Resolution shall have effect in relation to taxable disposals made, or treated as made, on or after 1st April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

58. CLIMATE CHANGE LEVY (COMBINED HEAT AND POWER STATIONS AND RENEWABLE SOURCES)

That provision may be made in relation to electricity produced in combined heat and power stations or from renewable sources.

59. CLIMATE CHANGE LEVY (INCORRECT CERTIFICATES)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In Schedule 6 to the Finance Act 2000, in sub-paragraph (2)(a) of paragraph 101—

(a) in sub-paragraph (ii) for "18 and 21, or" there shall be substituted "15, 18 and 21,";

(b) before the word "and" at the end of sub-paragraph (iii) there shall be inserted "or

(iv) a reduced-rate supply (or reduced-rate supplies),".

(2) This Resolution shall apply in relation to certificates given in respect of any supplies made on or after 24th April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

60. CLIMATE CHANGE LEVY (INVOICES INCORRECTLY SHOWING LEVY DUE)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the issuing of invoices that show an amount chargeable as climate change levy where no levy is chargeable in respect of the supply in question, or the amount so chargeable is less than the amount shown.

61. AGGREGATES TAX (AMENDMENTS TO PROVISIONS EXEMPTING SPOIL ETC)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 17(3) of the Finance Act 2001—

(a) in paragraph (e) after "or other by-products" there shall be inserted ", not including the overburden,";

(b) after that paragraph there shall be inserted—

"(f) it consists wholly of the spoil from any process by which—

(i) coal, lignite, slate or shale, or

(ii) a substance listed in section 18(3) below,

has been separated from other rock after being extracted or won with that other rock;".

(2) Section 17(4)(b) of that Act shall be omitted.

(3) This Resolution shall be deemed to have come into force on 1st April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

62. AGGREGATES LEVY (CRUSHING AND CUTTING ROCK)

Resolved,

That—

(1) The following provisions of the Finance Act 2001 shall be omitted—

(a) section 17(3)(a);

(b) in section 20(1)—

(i) the words "and is not rock" in paragraphs (a) and (b), and

(ii) paragraph (c);

(c) section 21(2)(b);

(d) section 24(6)(b) and (8)(a).

(2) In section 18(2)(a) of that Act, for "dimension stone" there shall be substituted "stone with one or more flat surfaces".

(3) This Resolution shall be deemed to have come into force on 1st April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

63. AGGREGATES LEVY (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS)

Motion made, and Question put,

That—

(1) In section 197(2) of the Finance Act 1996, in paragraph (h)(ii) for "paragraph 8(3)(a)" there shall be substituted "paragraphs 6 and 8(3)(a)".

(2) In section 16(1) of the Finance Act 2001, for "A levy" there shall be substituted "A tax".

(3) In section 17 of that Act—

(a) for paragraph (2)(d) there shall be substituted—

"(d) it is aggregate that on the commencement date is on a site other than—

(i) its originating site, or

(ii) a site that is required to be registered under the name of a person who is the operator, or one of the operators, of that originating site.";

(b) in subsection (3)(d)(ii), for "otherwise than wholly or mainly" there shall be substituted "not";

(c) in subsection (4)(d)—

(i) after "the Petroleum Act 1998" there shall be inserted "or the Petroleum (Production) Act (Northern Ireland) 1964 (c. 28 (N.I.))";

(ii) the words from "otherwise" to the end shall be omitted.

(4) In section 18 of that Act—

(a) in subsection (2)(c), for "some other substance" there shall be substituted "anything else";

(b) in subsection (3), paragraphs (d) and (h) shall be omitted.

(5) In section 19 of that Act—

(a) in subsection (2)(b) for the words from "who is the operator" to the end there shall be substituted "under whose name that originating site is also registered";

(b) after subsection (3) there shall be inserted—

"(3A) For the purposes of subsection (3)(a) above "business" includes any activity of a Government department, local authority or charity.";

(c) in subsection (4), for the words "adjacent land" in both places there shall be substituted "other land".

(6) In section 22 of that Act, at the end of subsection (2) there shall be inserted—

"For the purposes of this subsection "business" includes any activity of a Government department, local authority or charity.".

(7) In section 24(6) of that Act, after paragraph (c) there shall be inserted—

"(ca) for mixing, otherwise than in permitted circumstances (within the meaning given by section 19(7)), any aggregate with any material or substance other than water,".

(8) In section 37(7) of that Act, paragraphs (g) to (j) shall be omitted.

(9) In paragraph 1 of Schedule 4 of that Act—

(a) for sub-paragraph (1) there shall be substituted—

"(1) An unregistered person who—

(a) is required to be registered for the purposes of aggregates levy, or

(b) has formed the intention of carrying out taxable activities that are registrable,

shall notify the Commissioners of that fact.

(1A) An unregistered person who—

(a) would be required to be registered for the purposes of aggregates levy but for an exemption by virtue of regulations under section 24(4) of this Act, or

(b) has formed the intention of carrying out taxable activities that would be registrable but for such an exemption,

shall, in such cases or circumstances as may be prescribed in the regulations, notify the Commissioners of that fact.

(1B) For the purposes of sub-paragraphs (1) and (1A) above, taxable activities are "registrable" if a person carrying them out is, by reason of doing so, required by section 24(2) of this Act to be registered for the purposes of aggregates levy.";

(b) in sub-paragraphs (2) and (5), after "sub-paragraph (1)" there shall be inserted "or (1A)".

(10) In paragraph 11(2) of Schedule 8 to that Act, paragraphs (f), (g) and (h) shall be omitted.

(11) This Resolution shall be deemed to have come into force on 1st April 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

As an Amendment to Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer's proposed Motion (Aggregates Levy (miscellaneous amendments)):

Mr Alex Salmond

Mr Elfyn Llwyd

Leave out paragraph (11) and insert—

"( ) That any provision for the enforcement of the aggregates levy shall not have effect until a full environmental and economic impact assessment has been made relating to each country and region within the United Kingdom.".

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 32.

Division No. 218] **[11.5 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*

Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Burnside, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Öpik, Lembit
Paisley, Rev Ian
Price, Adam
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Thurso, John
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Thomas and
Pete Wishart.

Question accordingly agreed to.

64. AGGREGATES LEVY (AMENDMENTS TO PROVISIONS ABOUT CIVIL PENALTIES)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In Schedule 6 to the Finance Act 2001—

(a) in sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 7—

(i) the word "and" shall be inserted at the end of paragraph (a);

(ii) paragraph (b) and the words from "equal to the amount" to the end shall be omitted;

(b) after that sub-paragraph there shall be inserted—

"(1A) The amount of the penalty shall be—

(a) equal to the amount of the levy evaded, or (as the case may be) intended to be evaded, by the person's conduct if at the time of engaging in that conduct he was or was required to be registered;

(b) equal to twice that amount if at that time the person neither was nor was required to be registered.";

(c) in sub-paragraph (3) and (4) of paragraph 7, for "sub-paragraph (1)" there shall be substituted "sub-paragraph (1A)";

(d) after paragraph 9 there shall be inserted—

"Incorrect records etc evidencing claim for tax credit

9A(1) This paragraph applies where—

(a) a claim is made for a tax credit in such a case as is mentioned in—

(i) section 30(1)(c) of this Act (aggregate used in a prescribed industrial or agricultural process), or

(ii) section 30A of this Act (transitional tax credit in Northern Ireland);

(b) a record or other document is provided to the Commissioners as evidence for the claim; and

(c) the record or document is incorrect.

(2) The person who provided the document to the Commissioners, and any person who provided it to anyone else with a view to its being used as evidence for a claim for a tax credit, shall be liable to a penalty.

(3) The amount of the penalty shall be equal to 105 per cent of the difference between—

(a) the amount of tax credit that would have been due on the claim if the record or document had been correct, and

(b) the amount (if any) of tax credit actually due on the claim.

(4) The providing of a record or other document shall not give rise to a penalty under this paragraph if the person who provided it satisfies the Commissioners or, on appeal, an appeal tribunal that there is a reasonable excuse for his having provided it.

(5) Where by reason of providing a record or other document—

(a) a person is convicted of an offence (whether under this Act or otherwise), or

(b) a person is assessed to a penalty under paragraph 7 or 9 above,

that person shall not by reason of the providing of the record or document be liable also to a penalty under this paragraph.".

(2) This Resolution shall come into force on 1st May 2002.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

65. RELIEF FROM TAX (INCIDENTAL AND CONSEQUENTIAL CHARGES)

Resolved,

That it is expedient to authorise any incidental or consequential charges to any duty or tax (including charges having retrospective effect) that may arise from provisions designed in general to afford relief from taxation.

PROCEDURE (AMOUNTS DEDUCTED FROM PAYMENTS TO SUB-CONTRACTORS)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters that may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may include provision authorising sums deducted and paid to the Commissioners of Inland Revenue under section 559 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 to be treated as paid in respect of, or on account of, liabilities of the sub-contractor other than liabilities in respect of income tax or corporation tax.

PROCEDURE (R&D TAX CREDITS)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters that may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may contain provision relating to R&D tax credits.

PROCEDURE (TAX CREDIT FOR VACCINE AND MEDICINE RESEARCH)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters that may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may contain provision for allowing tax credits to be paid to companies in respect of research and development expenditure relating to vaccines or medicines.

PROCEDURE (RECOVERY OF TAXES ETC DUE IN OTHER MEMBER STATES)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters that may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may include provision to give effect—

(a) to Council Directive 76/308/EEC, as amended by Council Directive 2001/44/EC (the "Mutual Assistance Recovery Directive");

(b) to any Commission Directive laying down detailed rules for implementing the Mutual Assistance Recovery Directive;

(c) to any future amendments of the Mutual Assistance Recovery Directive.

PROCEDURE (FUTURE TAXATION)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters that may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may contain the following provisions taking effect in a future year—

(a) provision about income tax personal allowances for the year 2003-04;

(b) provision for corporation tax to be charged for the financial year 2003;

(c) provision amending section 158 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988;

(d) provision amending the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 and section 72 of the Finance Act 1991 with respect to claims to set trading losses against chargeable gains;

(e) provision amending the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 with respect to cases where chargeable gains are treated as accruing to a person under section 77 or 86 (read, where appropriate, with section 10A) of that Act;

(f) provision for gifts made on or after 6th April 2003 to be treated for the purposes of section 25 of the Finance Act 1990 as made in the year of assessment prior to that in which they are in fact made;

(g) provision about lorry road-user charge.

FINANCE *[Money]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act of the present Session relating to finance ("the Act"), it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of sums payable by the Secretary of State by virtue of any provisions of the Act relating to vehicle excise and registration;

(b) any increase, attributable to any provisions of the Act relating to Schedule 20 to the Finance Act 2000, in the sums deducted from the gross revenues of the department of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue for the purpose of the payment of R&D tax credits;

(c) the deduction of sums from those gross revenues for the purpose of the payment of tax credits in respect of research and development expenditure relating to vaccines or medicines;

(d) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses of a relevant Minister within the meaning of section 6 of the European Communities Act 1972 resulting from any provisions of the Act relating to the recovery of amounts due in respect of agricultural levies of the European Community;

(e) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of sums required by a Minister of the Crown or government department for preparing for the introduction of lorry road-user charge;

(f) the payment out of the National Loans Fund with recourse to the Consolidated Fund of any expenses of the Treasury attributable to any provision of the Act relating to the administration of Government securities;

(g) any increase in the sums paid out of the National Loans Fund or the Consolidated Fund in accordance with section 16(9) of the National Loans Act 1968.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Mr. Secretary Darling, Mr. Secretary Byers, Mr. Secretary Milburn, Ms Secretary Hewitt, Mr. Andrew Smith, Dawn Primarolo, Ruth Kelly and Mr. Paul Boateng do prepare and bring it in.

FINANCE BILL

Mr. Paul Boateng accordingly presented a Bill to grant certain duties, to alter other duties, and to amend the law relating to the National Debt and the Public Revenue, and to make further provision in connection with Finance: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 125]

DEREGULATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 18(1)(a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

That the draft Deregulation (Correction of Birth and Death Entries in Registers or Other Records) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 11th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

VETERINARY SURGEONS

That the draft Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (Schedule 3 Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 21st March, be approved.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Northern Ireland Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 2002, which was laid before this House on 10th April, be approved.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 2nd May, do adjourn till Tuesday 7th May.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Gulf War Illness

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

11.18 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of Gulf war illness. I am grateful to the Minister of State for Defence for joining me at this late hour in place of his colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), who has ministerial responsibility for veterans' affairs; I understand that the Under-Secretary cannot be with us this evening. I am also grateful for the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who has had a sustained expertise and involvement in these matters.

The Minister of State will doubtless know from the correspondence that I have recently had with the Minister for veterans' affairs why I am raising Gulf war illness today. He will be aware that Petty Officer Nigel Thompson, a constituent of mine, died from motor neurone disease in January this year after a long period in which he played a leading role in the campaign to draw attention to Gulf war illness. He conducted a lengthy campaign for a full independent public inquiry to get to the bottom of an issue that has affected many people who served in the Gulf and could well affect service men in future if we do not deal with some of the underlying problems. After Nigel Thompson sadly died in January, I spoke to his widow, Sam Thompson, who lives in my Yeovil constituency. She confirmed that, despite the tragedy of her husband's death, she is keen to pursue the campaign that he helped to lead for many years to obtain a clear outcome and a full public independent inquiry to establish the facts.

I appreciate very much the role that the Government have played since 1997 in seeking to identify the causes of Gulf war illness, a condition now recognised by the Ministry of Defence, even though its causes are still unclear. Nevertheless, 11 years after the end of the Gulf war, we have failed to find answers to many of the key questions. I therefore want to use today's debate not only to press for a full inquiry but to put further pressure on the Government to advance their agenda of medical and other work to make sure that we get to the bottom of what happened in the Gulf in 1990 and 1991, which affected many thousands of our service men as well as many thousands of service men from the United States of America.

There are four main reasons why it is vital to get to the bottom of the matter. First, it is in the medical interest of individuals who served in the Gulf and are still alive. Secondly, we all want to know what happened in the Gulf, particularly friends and relatives of individuals who died as a consequence of a Gulf war illness of one kind or another. Thirdly, and most importantly, we need to ensure the safety of our armed forces who, as we speak, are being deployed in places such as Afghanistan, where they may come face to face with some of the possible causes of Gulf war illness, on the medical evidence for which we do not have clear agreement. Finally, although this is not my constituent's priority, many individuals who have experienced Gulf war illness remain concerned about

[Mr. David Laws]

appropriate compensation for their medical problems. All those issues depend on a clear outcome to the investigation that has been going on for many years.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is essential that there should be no suspicion whatever that there has been a cover-up for the delay in finding out the cause of Gulf war illness?

Mr. Laws: I agree entirely. Although I said earlier that the Government since 1997 appear to have pursued the problem energetically, there are certainly doubts not only about the length of time that they are taking to resolve it but about the performance of the Ministry of Defence, especially prior to 1997. Although I do not particularly want to rake over those matters, they are relevant to the continuing calls for a full independent public inquiry. I refer hon. Members to the report prepared by the Select Committee on Defence in April 2000, in which the Committee draws attention to its earlier report of 1995 into Gulf war syndrome. That previous report stated:

"In responding to allegations of a Gulf War Syndrome MoD has been quick to deny but slow to investigate. . . MoD's response has been reactive rather than proactive and characterised throughout by scepticism, defensiveness and general torpor."

That referred to the period prior to 1995.

In the Defence Committee's 1997 report, concern about the way in which the MOD was pursuing the matter was reinforced when the Committee stated:

"we do not feel that the Ministry of Defence has been dogged in pursuit of the facts."

In April 1999, even after the present Government came to power and pursued a more determined approach to the issue, the Minister for the Armed Forces told the Select Committee in evidence:

"I think there is a worry among the Gulf veterans that not very much is happening."

When we turn to the report that the Defence Committee prepared in April 2000 and read its recommendations and conclusions, we see on page 17 at paragraph 39 that the Committee concluded:

"Although the MoD may have acted correctly from the scientific viewpoint in this respect"—

in relation particularly to the evidence about depleted uranium—

"the way that it has dealt with veterans' concerns has not been impressive. The MoD took action on DU testing only when it became unavoidable. It failed to explain to veterans precisely what the tests organised by the MAP"—

that is, the medical assessment programme—

"involved and some veterans now believe that they have been misled."

There has, then, been concern for some time about the way in which the MOD has taken forward these matters. Although the situation has improved considerably since 1997, that has not taken away the basic argument for an independent public inquiry. There are a number of reasons why there should be an independent public inquiry. The first is that that is the only way of ensuring that the scrutiny of the matter is truly independent.

The second reason is so that we can be sure that there is the determination to see the matter through and to investigate every aspect of the work that has been done and of the medical evidence, rather than relying on some of the medical evidence from a range of sources, including other countries. The independent public inquiry should be able to commission work of its own, pursue an agenda that should include a thorough examination of why Gulf war syndrome has occurred, and make recommendations to avoid such a problem in future, including dealing with some of the matters that the Select Committee discussed, such as improvements to medical records.

There are two reasons why confidence is crucial in this area and why the present approach must be questioned. First, there is the record in this regard, to which I have referred. I appreciate that much of that somewhat dubious record, including evidence given to the Select Committee prior to 1997 which proved not to be accurate, pre-dates the Government, but it has created in many people's minds, and in the minds of Gulf veterans, serious doubt whether the Ministry of Defence can be relied upon to take a sufficiently independent and proactive line in the case.

Eleven years have passed since the Gulf war and since people returned from it. Without being emotive, I remind all hon. Members that during that time many of those who were affected by Gulf war illness have died. That will inevitably lessen the momentum to resolve the matter, and we must not allow that to happen.

On the second issue, I speak with all due deference to the professionalism of staff who work at the Ministry of Defence, and I am fully aware that one issue that has given rise to concern about the cause of Gulf war illness is vaccination and inoculation against chemical weapons that might have been used by those whom we were fighting in the Gulf war. People will inevitably be sceptical of the MOD's ability to assess its own performance, in that the possible causes of Gulf war illness included not just the action that may have been taken by our enemies, but the actions that we may have taken through the use of munitions such as depleted uranium, our inoculation programme, particularly the multiple inoculations, and the use of organophosphates, about which I hope my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) will comment if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When compensation would have to fall on a contingency reserve or directly on the MOD budget, there must be scepticism about whether that will influence the ability of the Department as a whole, even if not of Ministers, to see the matter through properly to an end. If the veterans have such a perception, that alone is a major reason to conduct a fully independent public inquiry now. The Government have yet to rule out such an inquiry. They say that they are waiting, but I do not believe that we can afford to wait much longer to resolve this matter.

I hope that the Minister will comment on the prospects for such an inquiry and respond to my points. I hope also that he can update us on the research that his Department is commissioning and backing on vaccines, organophosphates and depleted uranium. Perhaps he can tell us when we can expect those reports to be published and give us an interim update.

I am proud to have the opportunity to raise this important matter on behalf of a constituent who was himself particularly active in shedding light on it. I am determined, as many other hon. Members clearly are, to see it through to a conclusion in the interests not only of

those who served this country in the Gulf, but of all members of the armed forces who serve us now or will do so in future.

11.31 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws). I am grateful to him for allowing me briefly to contribute and to the Minister for consenting.

My interest is that I have been for many years a member of the Gulf war group organised by the Royal British Legion, which has taken the lead in trying to assist veterans in a very difficult situation. I do not wish to deal with the particular issues on which my hon. Friend concentrated, but I entirely endorse the general thrust of his remarks.

We sent service personnel to the Gulf in circumstances that turned out to be entirely unexpected from the point of view both of those individuals and of the Ministry of Defence. We do not know precisely why the illness that is the subject of the debate, which has been a matter of controversy over the years, has arisen. All we know is that it has done so, and that such work as has been undertaken in this country shows that it is not identical to the syndrome that has been found after previous hostilities. It is different in degree and character, and as chairman of the all-party group on organophosphates, I am especially concerned with the mysterious role of that type of pesticide and insecticide.

We are disappointed that the Minister's colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, cannot be with us, as he has taken a personal interest in this matter over the years before and since he became Minister for veterans' affairs. I have had various exchanges with him in the House and by correspondence.

The answers that the Ministry of Defence has been able to provide on the role that organophosphates may have had in this mystery have been inadequate. That inadequacy stretches back to the previous Government's term in office, when a Minister was misled—it was not his fault—into giving me an answer saying that OPs had not been used extensively in the Gulf. Subsequently, he had to apologise to the House and showed that they had been used extensively in UK forces. Significantly, OPs were not used by our French allies, who did not seem to have anything like the same problems after hostilities ceased.

Let me turn to my particular concern and the reason why I wanted to contribute. The United States Government are undertaking a very extensive research programme and congressional hearings are taking place in Washington. In addition, no less a personality than Ross Perot is funding a research programme into some of the specific aspects that I mentioned. That is occurring because that country is so concerned to see that justice is done by the service personnel who served it and us well.

Although my hon. Friend is right that more attention and care has been given to the subject since 1997, my concern is that our Ministry of Defence and Government seem not to be taking full account of the international research programme, which should be relevant to our inquiries. Hence the need for an independent public inquiry.

I ask that the Minister express to the Under-Secretary my continuing concern, shared by the Royal British Legion, that we have yet to take full advantage of international studies—particularly on the role of organophosphates—in this deplorable episode.

11.35 pm

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) for initiating tonight's debate on Gulf veterans' illnesses, and to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) for his contribution. The hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) also deserves my gratitude, although I must confess to hesitation in remembering his constituency. That shows how quickly one's past life as a Northern Ireland Minister can be forgotten.

I apologise for the absence, due to illness, of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who has direct responsibility for this subject within the Department. I shall ensure that any points of detail that are not answered in the debate will be dealt with by him on his return.

As the hon. Member for Yeovil has pointed out, this topic is of considerable interest to a wide community—primarily, of course, to those veterans of the 1990–91 Gulf conflict who are unfortunately ill. Let me make it clear from the outset that issues relating to Gulf veterans' illnesses remain a high priority for this Government. We have demonstrated our commitment to addressing Gulf veterans' concerns openly, honestly and seriously, and I can assure the House that we will continue to do so. I am grateful to the hon. Members for Yeovil and for North Cornwall for recognising that the matter is being dealt with in a substantially different way since this Government took office.

We accept that some of the 53,000-odd UK Gulf veterans have become ill, and that some have died. Many believe that such ill health and mortality is unusual, and is related to the Gulf conflict; indeed, that is the contention and core argument of the hon. Member for Yeovil. However, although there is evidence that Gulf veterans report more ill health than other comparable groups, no medical or scientific consensus exists as to why. Because of this unknown factor, important research continues. We are monitoring mortality and publishing the data every six months. Our most recent data—published on 31 December last year—showed that the total number of deaths among Gulf veterans was almost identical to that among a matched group of service personnel who were members of the armed forces on 1 January 1991 but who did not deploy to the Gulf.

It may be helpful if I set out how the Government are approaching this complex issue. We have adopted three principles to underpin our response to concerns about Gulf veterans' illnesses. First, all Gulf veterans will have prompt access to medical advice from the Ministry of Defence's Gulf veterans' medical assessment programme. Secondly, appropriate research will be undertaken into veterans' illnesses and factors that might have a bearing. Thirdly, the MOD will make available to the public any information that it possesses that is of potential relevance to this issue. I want to say a little more about those three topics before dealing with some of the specific points that were raised.

The Gulf veterans' medical assessment programme has been running since 1993. Since then, it has been subject to audit by the Royal College of Physicians and the King's

[Mr. Adam Ingram]

Fund health quality service. In addition, the Royal College of Pathologists has provided advice on the range of clinical investigations undertaken. Since 1993, more than 3,300 patients have been seen by physicians participating in the programme, and the annual underlying trend in referrals is declining. I am pleased to say that an analysis of satisfaction questionnaires showed that 96 per cent. of patients who responded were satisfied with their consultation. The physicians at the Gulf veterans' medical assessment programme, who have complete clinical independence from the MOD, find that about 80 per cent. of those they see are well. Of the 20 per cent. who are unwell, about 85 per cent. are found to have psychiatric disorders. That shows the importance of the psychiatric referral network that has been established. I should like to take this opportunity to encourage all Gulf veterans who are worried about their health to seek a referral to the Gulf veterans' medical assessment programme through their doctors.

I know that the hon. Member for Yeovil and other hon. Members who have involved themselves in this subject accept that scientific and medical research is vital to the issue of Gulf veterans' illnesses, as that is the only way we will find out why some veterans are ill. So far, the Ministry of Defence has spent approximately £6.7 million on studies in this field, and another £1.8 million will be required to complete the current programme of work. That level of expenditure underlines our commitment to scientific research.

The results from one important research study commissioned by the Ministry of Defence through the Medical Research Council were published last year. The study was based on self-reporting, which can be unreliable, but the team from the university of Manchester found a link between skin and muscle problems and the number of vaccinations given to Gulf veterans. However, the study team found no reason to explain such a link between vaccinations and these problems. Further work is currently under way in this area. The MOD's vaccines interactions research programme is studying whether the combination of vaccines used to protect personnel during the Gulf conflict can give rise to adverse health effects. That important research will be completed by the end of 2003. However, we hope that further interim results will be made public later this year.

Another Government-funded study, at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, is examining the reproductive health of Gulf veterans and their partners and the health of their children. Results from the study are expected to be published this year.

Lady Hermon (North Down): I appreciate the Minister giving way, and the patience of other Members at this late hour. Given the uncertainty about the immunisation programme for the soldiers who fought in the Gulf campaign, what lessons have been learned and implemented for troops who have recently been sent to Afghanistan?

Mr. Ingram: I am sure that the hon. Lady will appreciate that my hon. Friend the Minister for veterans affairs has a detailed knowledge of this issue, so I shall ensure that she is given a full response in writing to that question. Lessons are always learned, but rather than me trying to explain the specific lessons, it would be better if she were given that information in more detail.

The provision of information and dialogue is the third principle of our approach. Last year, my Department sent an updated information pack about Gulf veterans' illnesses to all GPs in the United Kingdom as well as to other interested health professionals, including those in the defence medical services. More than 48,000 copies have now been despatched.

The MOD's internet website is frequently updated, and is an increasingly valuable way of making information public 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, worldwide. *Gulf Update*, the newsletter produced by the MOD's Gulf veterans' illnesses unit, is published every six months and sent to several hundred veterans, to Members of both Houses and to other interested parties. The next issue will be published in the summer.

Veterans and others continue to contact the MOD via our freephone helplines and to receive appropriate assistance. In addition, my Department deals with a considerable amount of correspondence from veterans and their representatives.

As the hon. Member for Yeovil said, the whole issue is scrutinised by Parliament, both here and in the other place. Less than a year ago, my hon. Friend the Minister for veterans' affairs gave evidence on Gulf veterans' illnesses and on depleted uranium to the House of Commons Select Committee on Defence, from which the hon. Gentleman quoted.

I should like to deal with some of the particular points raised during the debate. The Government's position on a public inquiry into Gulf veterans' illnesses issues is clear. A public inquiry could not help to answer the question why some Gulf veterans are ill; only continuing scientific and medical research can do that. Furthermore, the Government's record is already subject to close public scrutiny and we believe that our current policy, our track record on delivering what we have promised and our continued openness allow for a proper assessment of what is being done. I have set out at length the three principles underlying that.

Mr. Laws: Does the Minister understand that a public inquiry would fully restore veterans' confidence that the matter is being considered independently and speedily? The Gulf war took place 11 years ago. I recently received a letter dated 8 April from the Minister for veterans' affairs, which says:

"the Prime Minister does not believe that an independent public inquiry is appropriate at this time."

Is the Minister's reading of that comment that an independent public inquiry is still possible at some time?

Mr. Ingram: On the hon. Gentleman's point about satisfying people's concerns, we have sought to address the issue in a range of ways, which should, I hope, convince reasonable-minded people that we are operating independently and that an assessment is taking place. All the medical research is independent of the MOD, although we may commission it. It is carried out rigorously and independently.

We do not interfere with the conclusions, and the research is all subject to peer review, which is why there is sometimes such a delay in publishing findings. Those

are correctly subject to peer review, because that provides rigorous examination. I hope that those who take a close interest in the matter take back the message that an extensive research programme has been undertaken. All of it is independent, but certainly funded by the MOD—that is, by the public purse.

On the letter that the hon. Gentleman received and the view of the Prime Minister and the Government, of course we would never write off that possible eventuality, but I have pointed out that the best way to deal with the matter is to get to the core problem.

Mr. Laws *rose—*

Mr. Ingram: No, no, hold on. The research gives us the base knowledge for that. It is finding the answer to the problems, because it is easy to set running the hare that there is some great conspiracy or some great secrecy here. I have set out the principles for our approach, which is open, extensive and discursive. Our approach is to consider what more could be brought to the debate in terms of what we are doing.

Mr. Laws: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way on that point. I note that he does not rule out completely an independent public inquiry, but, given his background comments, in what circumstances would it be appropriate to hold such an inquiry into the matter?

Mr. Ingram: If circumstances were to change, a public inquiry may become the appropriate mechanism. The hon. Gentleman asks me to look into the future and make a prediction, but he has not given any example to support his argument that a public inquiry is desirable because concerns exist—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twelve minutes to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 24 April 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second reading read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 1 May.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State was asked—

National Child Care Strategy

1. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): If he will make a statement on his Department's role in relation to the cross-cutting review of the national child care strategy. [49343]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I am a member of the interdepartmental review of child care, which is developing a 10-year strategy for quality, affordable and accessible child care. My noble Friend Baroness Ashton is leading the review, and it is being managed by the performance and innovation unit.

Caroline Flint: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I was pleased last week to lead the applause from these Benches for the child care measures in the Budget, especially the provision for those who need child care in their home, such as shift workers, to have access to our very generous child care tax credits. However, given that the review looks ahead 10 years, we need to see where to plug the gaps and better direct the mechanism's delivery on the ground. Will there be a debate in the House on the findings of the cross-cutting review, will there be a report and when will it be published?

Mrs. Roche: We certainly hope that Parliament will have the opportunity to discuss the conclusions of the review when it considers the 2002 spending review. I know of my hon. Friend's work and expertise in this field; she is right that we need to look at the gaps. Affordable high quality child care is extremely important for children and for working parents, particularly women, and we want to encourage women's progression in the labour market. My hon. Friend is also right to refer to the Chancellor's Budget and the welcome that it has received. The tax credits in particular will provide an additional £2.7 billion to support families with children and low-income households.

Government Services (Electronic Delivery)

2. **Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Government's targets for the electronic delivery of Government services. [49344]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): More than half of the Government services that can be delivered electronically have been, and I expect around three quarters to be e-enabled by the end of this year. We are well on the way to meeting our 100 per cent. target by 2005.

Mr. Tredinnick: Given the enormous improvements that broadband can bring to the distribution of Government services, what actions are the Government taking to speed up that service? What is the Minister doing to make sure that the service is available in the east midlands? Has he received correspondence from the boat builders Savage Marine Lighting in my constituency, which complains that its attempts to export worldwide are severely threatened by the lack of broadband facilities?

Mr. Leslie: It is true that we need to ensure that we are on the cutting edge of broadband availability. I will raise the hon. Gentleman's points with the Department of Trade and Industry, which takes the lead on e-commerce issues. Broadband is a much faster internet service which offers a lot, not only for commercial purposes but for the way in which we deliver services to the public. I will certainly look at the correspondence that he mentions.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I congratulate the Minister on the Government's achievements in delivering according to the targets set out. Is he confident that sufficient security measures are in place to ensure that there cannot be external interference in the delivery of electronic Government services?

Mr. Leslie: As technology and public services develop, the Government need to ensure that the public can have trust and confidence in new electronic means of delivery and interface. The office of the e-envoy is very concerned about those matters and is looking into them. We need to build up confidence so that security issues can be overcome and people can transact Government business in the same way as they transact commercial business.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although we have made progress on the number of websites offering services, the key issue is one of take-up. Low-income groups, in particular, need internet access in libraries. The take-up issue applies to transactions as well as information. People use the internet to get passports, pay their income tax and get grants, so we are making progress in those areas.

Mr. Leslie: That is right. Not everyone owns a computer so we must ensure that there is wider access, particularly for lower income groups. The UK online

programme has been working in that regard, looking at libraries and community centres and making sure that there is free internet access for all those who want it.

There has been a great deal of success so far. My hon. Friend mentioned passports and I can tell him that, to date, more than 16,000 people have applied online for passports, and NHS Direct online has 1 million hits a week. Many services are becoming mainstream with the public's use of the internet.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does the Minister still think that the Government are online for their target of 2005 for the provision of all internet services? More to the point, is he aware that some forms are hard to complete in the old-fashioned writing way, such as care allowance forms, which are especially difficult for older people? Will he be able to tell other Departments to simplify their existing forms so that the online forms are also simpler to complete?

Mr. Leslie: The Government calculate that about 521 public services can be enhanced through electronic delivery; that has already been done for 264. We recognise the virtue in releasing much of the regulatory burden—by simplifying many of the forms and so on—but we must make sure that there is access for people who may also have to deal with services face to face. We cannot neglect that. We use technology only where it brings extra added value.

Departmental Accessibility

3. **Mr. Tom Clarke** (Coatbridge and Chryston): If he will make a statement on the progress made in making offices in his Department accessible to people with disabilities. [49345]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The Cabinet Office has undertaken accessibility audits of its estate. Works arising from those audits have, where possible, been undertaken.

The Cabinet Office also continues to take significant measures to ensure that its buildings comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Will she share with the House any plans that she and her colleagues have in mind for future improvements in access for people with disabilities? That would influence both the public and private sectors, and—crucially—other Departments as well.

Mrs. Roche: As the House will know, my right hon. Friend is an expert in these matters so he is aware that there is much good practice throughout government and also in the private sector. For example, the Government buildings at 67 Tufton street, 35 Great Smith street and the Cabinet Office all have ramps and lifts to assist access for physically disabled people, as well as induction loops in meeting rooms and reception areas. In other buildings it may be possible to put braille signs in lifts. That is extremely important. Looking beyond that, colour coding can also be helpful in ensuring visibility. It is important to use good practice and we are committed to doing so.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I congratulate the Minister on what she said about the commitment of her Department. I further congratulate the Government on the creation of the Disability Rights Commission, which is a genuinely constructive way forward.

In the Minister's capacity as a member of a Department with a co-ordinating role across Whitehall, will she have a word with her colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to see what she can do to increase the access of disabled people to polling stations in all areas—rural and urban? The local government elections will take place next week, so it is important that, however people choose to vote, they should be able to go into a polling station and cast their vote—if that is what they want to do.

Mrs. Roche: Of course, the hon. Gentleman is right. I join him in his tribute to the Disability Rights Commission.

The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. Whichever party people support, it is right that proper access is provided. I shall certainly ensure that his comments are passed on. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman—who is a fair sort of chap—would agree that the Government have done a great deal on this issue. Obviously, the wider use of postal votes is helpful and some of the pilot schemes for alternative voting arrangements have also been helpful. I shall ensure that his remarks are taken into account.

Regional Co-ordination

4. **Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): If he will make a statement on the future co-ordination between his Department and the devolved institutions of the UK and the English regions. [49346]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): Relationships between the Government and the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are governed by the principles set out in the memorandum of understanding, signed in October 1999. I have the lead ministerial responsibility for the memorandum of understanding within the Government and am happy to say that all parties think that the arrangements are working well and that they provide a useful mechanism for handling difficult relations between the Administrations.

Mike Gapes: I am grateful for that reply. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one way of bringing about even greater co-operation between the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the English counties and regions would be for them each to send representatives to a reformed second Chamber? That could bring together all parts of the country, thereby acting as the cement that holds the United Kingdom together.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: That is an interesting question. The House has

many views on the reform of the House of Lords, and I certainly do not belong to the school of thought that believes that the majority of its Members should be elected. However, that will be debated in the House. I note that the consultation document—the consultations have now finished—and the White Paper included ideas on regional representation in the House. That is an interesting idea and we hope to publish a White Paper on regional governance shortly, but as for the reorganisation of the House of Lords, we shall see what we see.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is the Deputy Prime Minister now confident that, subject to a yes vote in a referendum, at least one English regional assembly will be functioning by the next general election? Assuming that that happens, would it not be appropriate for his Department to relate to all the Assemblies and Parliaments of the United Kingdom, instead of to a series of expensive Scotland Offices, Wales Offices and whatever else might emerge from the process?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The devolution proposals are quite clear. Indeed, we shall make it clear in the White Paper on regional governance that there will be regional government offices, as that is right for administration. There will be a need to ensure co-ordination across Departments. I have told the House that I, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, will produce that White Paper when it is ready. I can now say that it will be ready shortly. To that extent, we shall explain some of those issues in the White Paper.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): May I put it to my right hon. Friend that, although the Government have introduced a very bold and ambitious programme of constitutional reform, they have not yet quite established the implications on the way that we organise Departments? The best way to achieve better co-ordination across Government would be to make one Department responsible for local government, regional government, the devolved institutions and constitutional affairs. Would that not solve all the co-ordination problems that keep cropping up at the moment?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: That is an interesting point, but I do not think that it would be the solution. Co-ordination would remain an issue, whether inside Departments or between Departments.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Does the Deputy Prime Minister stand by his remarks that the Government should "bite the bullet" and revise the Barnett formula to finance regional government in England? Can he tell us what his proposals to replace that formula will be and whether Wales and Scotland will be worse off or better off as a result?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The quote to which the hon. Gentleman refers was entirely about local government finance and nothing to do with the Barnett formula. Indeed, there are as many concerns about local government finance as about the Barnett formula, and we have clearly made the decision that we have no intention to change it. To that extent, those matters will be reviewed by the Treasury from time to time, as with all public expenditure.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I welcome the fact that the White Paper on regional governance is due to be published shortly and recognise my right hon. Friend's long-standing, unswerving commitment to regional devolution, which is very much appreciated in regions such as mine. I hope that he will agree that it will be important to have wide consultations and discussions on the White Paper throughout the regions, but may I urge him—if he were tempted to do so—to ignore any advice from Conservative spokesmen who opposed the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, regional development agencies, regional chambers and, in fact, all measures to promote democracy and economic success in our regions?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I well understand what my right hon. Friend says, but she could also have mentioned the Greater London Authority, which the Conservatives opposed and then changed their mind. In all such areas, we just carry on with the programme of decentralisation, of which regional governance will be one of the last changes to be made, because it is essential to give the English regions the opportunities, equipment and resources to get on with developing their regions. We strongly believe in that and, very shortly, we shall produce the White Paper to show it.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): May I press the Deputy Prime Minister on the timing? He says that the regional government White Paper will be published shortly—I think that that was the word he used. Can we assume that it will be published before the House rises for the summer recess? Can we anticipate that the legislation may be forthcoming as early this autumn so that the referendums—if they are to take place—will be held no later than next year?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The hon. Gentleman can assume that it will be shortly. I will say no more than that. We want a referendum to take place in any area that wishes to pursue both that and the principles laid out in the White Paper. We hope that that will be possible before the next general election, bearing in mind the timetable in the White Paper.

Sustainable Development

5. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): What role he is playing in preparation for the world summit on sustainable development. [49347]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): I chair a ministerial group that brings together Ministers across the Government who are working on preparations for the Johannesburg world summit on sustainable development, which is to take place in September.

I have had many meetings over the past six months to discuss the summit with Presidents, Prime Ministers and Ministers from around the world at the request of the Prime Minister, which are in addition to those held by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Foreign and

Commonwealth Affairs, for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for Trade and Industry and for International Development and the Chancellor.

I am sure that the House recognises the leading role that the United Kingdom has played in the Kyoto protocol and other international agreements, and that it supports our efforts to make the Johannesburg world summit on sustainable development a success.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful for that reply. Will my right hon. Friend set out the Government's priorities for that summit and confirm in particular whether the take-up of renewable energy options will be on our agenda? In addition, given some of the recent trivial coverage whipped up by the Conservatives about my right hon. Friend's meetings with world leaders in advance of the summit, will he take the opportunity to remind the House of the importance of engaging with other Governments if we are to put together a coalition to sort out climate change?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: As my hon. Friend says, it is unfortunate that the report on our efforts to secure agreement on the world summit on sustainable development, which have involved a great deal of plane travel, should be treated in such a trivial way by *The Sunday Times*. So what's new?

Nevertheless, it is the Government's clear objective to make globalisation work for sustainable development, especially for the poorest. Some 1 billion people earn less than $1 a day, more than 1 billion are denied access to clean water and a child dies every 10 seconds from water-related diseases. That is why our policy is to secure a commitment to improve, among other things, access to clean water and energy services, including renewable energies.

Leadership on global issues requires travel by plane because the Starship Enterprise "Beam me up, Scottie" vehicle has not yet arrived.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Given that open markets are a key to sustainable development, what advice would the Deputy Prime Minister give to the United States on its steel and other trade barriers?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Both the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Prime Minister have made it clear at the Dispatch Box that the United States' actions are unacceptable. Achieving sustainable agreements means finding global agreements. The hon. Gentleman refers to a trade agreement; we are referring to an agreement on the environment and sustainability. Global agreements require good will. That did not seem to be apparent in recent American actions.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I take the opportunity to thank my right hon. Friend for putting the record straight on questions that I asked his Department about the sustainable timber, or otherwise, used in the Cabinet Office refurbishment? It is much appreciated and I accept the apology. May I say how important it is that he and our Government take a leading role at the world summit in Johannesburg, South Africa? It is crucial that in terms of domestic and procurement policies, the Government take all the advantages and opportunities offered by the biodiversity conference in The Hague last week and ensure that we get things right at home so that we can play a leading role in the world summit.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: That is precisely what the Government intend to do. May I add my apologies to my hon. Friend for the wrong information? It was given in good faith, and we acknowledged to the House as quickly as we could that it was wrong. We are carrying out a further report on that, which will be made public and available to the House. However, on the certification of wood, we are taking up the weakness issues with the United Nations, at the conference on sustainable development and with the United Nations Environment Programme.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): When we take a leading role at the summit, will we tell other nations about our record on dealing with the 400 million tonnes of waste that we produce each year in this country? Will we tell them of our patchy record on re-use, recycling and composting, or will we acknowledge that we are slip-sliding towards incineration and excessive dependency on landfill that threatens the quality of life in so many communities, including Blackfordby in my constituency which is close to a new tip that is due to open shortly?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The problems of waste management are very considerable, not only for this country, but for many others. Landfill, incineration and recycling all play a part. As my hon. Friend will know, the issue of landfill has rightly been closed off, and we have to strike a balance between recycling and incineration. The Government have increased the proportion of waste that is dealt with by recycling. Ultimately, we must strike a balance between the options available. That causes controversy, but we intend to deal effectively with the matter. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, I ask the House to come to order.

Special Advisers

6. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): What changes he plans for the process of appointment of special advisers. [49348]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): Special advisers are appointed by Ministers in accordance with the ministerial code and in line with the model contract of employment published by this Administration. Appointment issues are likely to be addressed in future consultation on civil service legislation.

Mr. Carmichael: The Minister will be aware that the number of special advisers in post has risen from 34 in 1994, at a cost of £1.5 million, to 81 in the present year, at a cost of £4.4 million. Does he not agree that that

demonstrates a clear need for a change in the appointment process to ensure that the number and cost of special advisers is brought back under control?

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman should investigate the matter in a bit more detail and get it into perspective. There are 81 special advisers, but there are more than 3,000 members of the senior civil service, and that is hardly overwhelming the civil service. The Government have absolutely nothing to apologise for. We have always said that we want strong advice, a strong centre and strong leadership, and that is what we are delivering.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): Does my hon. Friend agree that transparency and accountability are equally important in the appointment of special advisers paid for by Short money, from which the Opposition parties get £5 million a year? Will he consider introducing equal terms of accountability so that they have to publish the details of how they spend that money and my constituents know whether they are getting good value for money, which I suspect that they are not?

Mr. Leslie: What a very interesting proposition. About £3 million is all that is propping up Conservative central office at the moment, and we should not forget that £1 million of Short money goes to the Liberal Democrats as well. I am growing increasingly curious about whether the Opposition's special advisers have standard codes of conduct or proper contracts of employment. Perhaps we should look into that a little further.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): While considering the appointment and conditions of special advisers, will the Minister confirm the report in this morning's *Financial Times* that Mr. Ian MacKenzie, the special adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister, is trying to encourage all special advisers across Whitehall to join a trade union? He is doing that because, according to one special adviser:

"There's a feeling that we do a job defending people and nobody stands up for us".

Does the Minister's heart bleed over that as much as mine does? Does he not agree that the job of the civil service trade unions should not be to defend special advisers, but to carry on defending civil servants against special advisers?

Mr. Leslie: I really think that the hon. Gentleman should always declare an interest before he speaks about this matter. As a former special adviser himself, he should be a little more careful. I am aware of his views on trade union membership. Perhaps if half the members of the shadow Cabinet, who are also former special advisers, were members of trade unions, they would not be at risk of getting the sack.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my hon. Friend think that it is remarkable that the Tories have not told us what they have done with the millions of pounds of taxpayers' money that they have received through Short money in the course of the past four years? What is more, they have never disclosed the special advice that they received from Le Pen's deputy in 1995, when the current leader of the Tory party not only met the deputy leader of Le Pen's army, but they finished up as boozing pals.

Mr. Leslie: I am not familiar with the particular points raised by my hon. Friend, but perhaps more research needs to be done on the matter. Certainly, a lot of questionable advice is being given to the Conservative party these days.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [49373] **Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 24 April.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

Mr. Greenway: Does the Prime Minister recall that Labour's strategy for sport at the 1997 general election promised to tackle the decline in school sport by ending the sale of playing fields? Does he therefore share my surprise that a written parliamentary answer that I received yesterday shows that, far from slowing, the rate of such sales is accelerating under his Government, to the extent that proceeds of more than £140 million were received in the past three years—more than ever before? Does it remain his policy to protect playing fields, or is this just another hollow promise, like the one on tax?

The Prime Minister: Well it does, of course, remain our policy, but I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that, under the Conservatives, some 1,400 playing fields were sold off, and that figure is down to three a month under this Government. In addition, there is £1 billion of extra investment going into sport, and for the first time pupils will be able to do at least a few hours' sport a week, something denied them in 18 years of Conservative Government.

Q2. [49374] **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, at the end of February, I raised with him the need for more investment in maternity services and, in particular, a bid just submitted for a £12 million investment programme to modernise maternity services at Northwick Park hospital, which serves my constituency? Is not it the case that, since the end of February, what has changed is that our right hon. Friend the Chancellor has released the moneys for comprehensive reform of the NHS, and that the Conservative party's now not-so-secret agenda to attack the NHS has been revealed to all? When will front-line services be able to get access to the extra cash that has been released, and will my right hon. Friend apply some

extra pressure on the relevant NHS officials so that we can get on with the job of modernising maternity services in Harrow?

The Prime Minister: I gather that the business plan for £12 million of investment in Northwick Park maternity hospital was agreed in March. My hon. Friend is right to point out that, as a result of last week's Budget, we will be able to sustain that investment right across the NHS so that in years to come there will be investment and reform throughout. We continue to believe that a rebuilt NHS is the best insurance policy and the best security that people in this country can have.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Prime Minister once described child curfew orders as "eminently sensible". Can he tell us exactly when the last one was issued?

The Prime Minister: No, I cannot, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that, because of the representations made by local authorities, we have now dropped the age for curfew orders. Along with antisocial behaviour orders, which certainly have been used and are now being used more widely, they are a very important part of the armoury that the police and local authorities can use in future. I hope very much that they will be supported by the Conservative party, rather than opposed.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister may well have dropped the age for child curfew orders, but he has not issued a single one in the last two years. He mentioned antisocial behaviour orders. He promised that 5,000 of them would be issued every year; to date, a total of only 500 has been issued. Parenting orders, another one of Labour's ideas, have been announced by the Home Secretary five times in the past four weeks, and there have been 50 stunts and initiatives since the Home Secretary took office. If stunts and initiatives stop crime, can the Prime Minister tell us how many muggings there are in London?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly say that street crime in London has gone up, although it is important to realise that overall crime has gone down, and burglary and car crime have fallen significantly. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that we need more measures to deal with crime. That is why the Government are now making greater provision for restrictions on bail, making sure that persistent juvenile offenders are brought to court more quickly, making sure that we have specialist courts that deal with street robbery, and getting more police on the beat.

Finally, we are introducing community safety officers to act alongside the police. I think that community safety officers will have an important impact in the fight against crime in London and elsewhere, but the Conservative party in the House of Lords apparently opposes them. If the right hon. Gentleman really supports the drive against street crime, is he prepared to change that position and support the legislation?

Mr. Duncan Smith: With a shortfall of 500 police across England, the reality facing the Government is that we need more police on the beat, not people acting as police.

The Prime Minister did not answer my question about London. Muggings and violent crime have increased: there are now 192 muggings a day, which is 50 more than at this time last year—one for every initiative that the Home Secretary has introduced since taking office. Street crime in the capital has increased by 40 per cent. and the clear-up rate has halved since 1997. It is no good the Home Secretary sneering—figures for his constituency show that robbery has increased by 50 per cent. Is it not true that because of Labour's failure to tackle and reduce street crime and violent crime, criminals now do not need to run from the scene of a crime, they only need to walk?

The Prime Minister: First, let me remind the right hon. Gentleman that overall crime doubled under the last Conservative Government, whereas it has fallen under the Labour Government. Secondly, on the number of police officers, in the years before we took office police numbers were falling, not rising, whereas now this country has record numbers of police officers. Thirdly, on street crime, I am sorry that he thinks that nothing is being done; in fact, in the past few weeks, as a result of the Metropolitan police's safer streets initiative, street crime has fallen, not risen. As a result of the additional measures being taken, we are confident that by the end of September we will have brought that problem under control, although it will of course be difficult.

When the right hon. Gentleman mentioned community safety officers, his hon. Friends shouted that the police opposed them, but at our meeting today, the police made it clear that they are in favour of community safety officers. We are increasing the number of police officers, but it is important also to have people in support roles to help them. I urge him again to allow the legislation through the House of Lords, so that we can get on with taking measures that I believe will be widely supported across the country.

Q3. [49375] **Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): France has brought many good things to the world, including the skills of the football world champions. Does the Prime Minister share my confidence that the country of Thierry Henry, Frederic Kanoute, Gerard Houllier and Zinedine Zidane will remain a vibrant, multiracial European Union democracy? Does he agree that the best message of solidarity that we in this country can send to the people of France is to reject the vile, racist, xenophobic politics of the anti-Semitic Islamophobes of the British Nazis, the British National party, on 2 May?

The Prime Minister: France is a strong and a decent country and I have no doubt that its people will reject the form of extremism represented by Mr. Le Pen. I find those policies repellent and I believe that many people throughout the world do too. There is no future in that type of narrow-minded racism and nationalism, and most people understand that not only are such policies wrong, but they offer no real solution to the challenges that face the world's developed countries. I sincerely hope and believe that they will be rejected not only by people in France, but by people throughout Europe and the wider world.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Without doubt, the Prime Minister's last sentiment will be widely echoed, as it is shared by all the mainstream parties in domestic politics.

Will the right hon. Gentleman justify his latest decision, which is to prevent 7,000 armed forces pensioners from being able in future to collect their armed forces pension via the post office?

The Prime Minister: We are of course in discussion with those groups and other groups to make sure that we can allow them to collect their pensions in the proper way, but there have been certain difficulties of which the right hon. Gentleman is aware and which it is important that we sort out.

Mr. Kennedy: But the Ministry of Defence has already said that as far as it is concerned it is proper to prevent armed forces pensioners from collecting their armed forces pensions via the local post office because it is "more cost-effective". Is that not just the thin end of the wedge? Which deserving group in society will be next?

The Prime Minister: First, in relation to the issue, I repeat to the right hon. Gentleman what I said a moment or two ago. In relation to things being cost-effective, however, I do not think that it is wrong for the Ministry of Defence or any other Department to take into account the effect of cost on policy. As I said to him a moment ago, we shall look carefully at the issue with that particular group of pensioners, but on cost-effective policies generally, I remind the Liberal Democrats that it is not wrong for the Government to take into account the effect of cost on policy.

Last week, incidentally, I told people about the spending pledges of the Liberal Democrats. In the past week, they have called for over £1 billion more on social services; more money for affordable housing; money to fund research into a bovine tuberculosis vaccine; cuts in fuel duty; more money for transport; more NHS facilities in rural areas; £750 million more for small businesses; and more money for amateur sports clubs. I am sorry, but in the end, even the Liberal Democrats must realise that cost can sometimes be an issue.

Q4. [49376] **Mr. Jim Murphy** (Eastwood): The Prime Minister will be aware that hardly a family in the United Kingdom is unaffected by cancer, but is he aware that the problem in Scotland is particularly acute? One in three men contract the illness and there have been decades of underinvestment in the Beatson cancer centre. Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be a widespread welcome for the new investment announced in the Budget if it makes a meaningful difference to the Beatson and Scotland's cancer patients? However, is he also aware that there will be widespread anger at the uncaring, heartless and extreme decision by the Tories to vote against every penny of new investment for the NHS and the cancer sufferers of this country?

The Prime Minister: First, I believe that my hon. Friend is right in saying that there will be a broad welcome for the additional investment in the health service. I know that the Scottish Executive have planned some £60 million of additional cancer spending in Scotland, which will improve diagnosis and treatment for cancer patients. I simply say in relation to the Conservatives that they have the test; if they really are the party that says that it can represent the vulnerable, what greater proof of that could there be than supporting the national health service which helps vulnerable people up and down the country?

Q5. [49377] **Bob Spink** (Castle Point): Street crime in Castle Point and across Britain is making people's lives a misery. Why has street crime rocketed to record levels under Labour?

The Prime Minister: First, in the hon. Gentleman's own area and areas across the country, crime is down overall under this Government; it doubled under the Conservatives. There has, however, been a real problem in relation to street crime, which is precisely why we are introducing the additional measures that I described earlier.

I hope very much therefore that the hon. Gentleman will support the additional measures on street crime such as refusing bail to persistent offenders, and more secure accommodation and prison places. But, as I understand it, the Conservative party is opposing investment in those issues too. I hope that neither he nor his hon. Friends tell us that we should provide more prison places and more secure accommodation for offenders when they oppose the money needed to deliver them.

Q6. [49378] **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): When will the Prime Minister do something about state subsidy junkies? Is he aware that one organisation has received a massive 300 per cent. increase in handouts from the taxpayer since 1997 with no improvement whatsoever in its performance? Does he agree that that shows that pouring money into unreformed institutions is a waste of time? *[Interruption.]* Yes, you've got it. The answer of course is Short money paid by the taxpayer to the Conservative party

The Prime Minister: The Government gave that additional money and voted for it as an act of generosity towards the Conservative party. I am afraid, however, that Conservative Members have not really repaid the money that we put in with any greater sense of reform or change within the party. I regret to tell my hon. Friend that I think that that will remain the position.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): By the time of the next general election, when health spending in Britain has reached the European average, will we have European standards of health care?

The Prime Minister: I believe that we will have huge improvements in our standards of health care, and that in many areas they will be as good, if not better. However, I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that it was a 10-year plan that we set out in 2000. It will take us time to get there, but already we can see substantial improvement from the investment that has gone into the health service. Of course, we believe in putting that money in. The Conservative party is voting against that money and investment going in.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Another one of those 10-year plans that we never get to the end of. Four months ago—

[Interruption.] The Deputy Prime Minister would not know anything at all about the Budget; he was busy visiting beaches somewhere else across the world. Let us be clear. The Prime Minister said four months ago that our standards of health care would certainly have reached European standards. Now he seems to be drifting away from that, so let us find out what those standards are and see whether he is prepared to pledge them.

In Germany, there are no waiting lists. In Denmark, patients have a legal right to treatment within four weeks of seeing their GP. In France, people are twice as likely to survive liver cancer as people in Britain. Those are the sort of standards that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister say they will achieve by the next election. Will the Prime Minister pledge today to achieve those standards by the next election?

The Prime Minister: We have set out in the health service plan and afterwards the precise targets that we will reach in 2005—for example, that the maximum waiting time is taken down to six months in 2005 and to three months in 2008, and that waiting times as well as waiting lists come down. However, what Germany, France and Denmark all have in common is substantial extra investment in the health service. We are pledged to put that investment in. Is the right hon. Gentleman pledged to support it?

Mr. Duncan Smith: Those countries have substantial extra investment, and better systems that run health care better. The Government are not changing a thing in the health service to improve health care. For example, the Prime Minister is on record as saying that there would be 2,000 more GPs. We discovered that last year there were only 18 more. He said that he would reduce waiting times, but 35,000 more people are waiting for up to a year for their operations. With a record like that, no one will ever believe the Prime Minister again. The only way to convince the voters of this country is for him to say at the Dispatch Box that he pledges to achieve European standards of health care for European levels of money. Nothing less will do.

The Prime Minister: The targets that we have set out are the targets to which we shall adhere. Indeed, we have already been meeting them. In contrast to what happened in the Conservative years, when health service waiting lists went up 400,000, they are more than 100,000 down under this Government. Also, there is no one waiting more than 15 months. There are, for example, 25 per cent. more heart operations, 40 per cent. more cardiologists and cancer waiting times are falling. The targets that we set out are the ones that we will keep to.

I return to the central question. The only way that we will meet our targets or get anywhere near European levels is if we put the extra money in. A moment or two ago, the right hon. Gentleman said that he agreed that more money should come in. Either it comes in through general taxation, to which he is opposed, or it comes in through charges or social insurance or private medical insurance.

The right hon. Gentleman has had time to go and study all those other systems. Let him now tell us where he will get the extra money for the health service. If he is not prepared to say, we know from the words of his health spokesman that the Conservatives' strategy is to run down the health service so as to denigrate it and reduce public support, and we will know that that is the strategy that he is following. We have said that we will put the money in, and we have said where it will come from. Now let the Leader of the Opposition say where his money will come from and how much it will be.

Mr. David Lammy (Tottenham): Does the Prime Minister agree that Europe must be a place of racial tolerance, equality and freedom, alongside economic stability? In condemning Jean-Marie Le Pen and his extremist views, will the Prime Minister take further steps to ensure that article 13 of the treaty of Amsterdam—a manifestly important article opposed by the Conservative party—is implemented by our European partners?

The Prime Minister: It is important that we translate article 13 into law and that is supported by the Government. Those anti-discriminatory provisions will send the clearest possible signal not just about British values but about European values. I believe that the vast majority of people, not just in France but elsewhere, will reject the politics of Le Pen and agree with my hon. Friend that to live in a decent multiracial, multicultural community is the right way for the modern world. The truth is that many problems exploited by people such as Le Pen are challenges not just in Britain or Europe, but right across the modern world, and the way to deal with them is through respect and tolerance, not through division and racism.

Q7. [49379] **Mr. Andrew MacKay** (Bracknell): Has the Prime Minister read the independent analysis in the *Financial Times* which shows that 50,000 care home beds have been lost under his Government? Surely that is why there is a bed blocking crisis in our hospitals.

The Prime Minister: I think that the net figure is 19,000, but that is enough. It is a lot, that is true. We are doing two things about that. First, we are trying to put more money into support for people in their own homes, since people would obviously like that if possible. Secondly, the principal problem faced by many of the care homes is the low level of fees, which the real-terms increase in social services spending of 6 per cent. will hugely help. I cannot for the life of me see how the right hon. Gentleman or any other Conservative Member can complain about care homes and the amount of money that they have and then oppose the very method of putting money into them that is necessary to improve the situation.

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West): Will the Prime Minister join me in condemning Israel's refusal to allow the UN investigating team into Jenin? What does it have to hide and what will the British Government do about it?

The Prime Minister: We have made it clear that we believe that the UN mission should go into Jenin. It is important that the UN mission does go in, not just for the middle east peace process and the people who have suffered so much, but for Israel's reputation. Discussions are taking place about the form and composition of that mission and I am confident that they will yield the

right result. As I say, that the mission should go in is very much in the interests not just of the Palestinians and the wider world but of Israel.

On the broader issue, I again say that it is important that we recognise the suffering and the bloodshed of the innocent Palestinians who have died, but also the suffering and the bloodshed of the innocent Israeli civilians who have died. In the end, the only way through this is to re-engage with the political process. We can all take different positions on Israel and the Palestinians, but in the end the only thing that will work is to revive the political process and put that in place of the military and security measures that will never be an answer on their own.

Q8. [49380] **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): Given that at least 5,000 NHS beds are blocked on any one day, when it comes to the new system of fining councils, what estimate has the Prime Minister made regarding the cost that local government will have to bear and the effect of that on council tax?

The Prime Minister: Of course, the very reason for putting a large additional settlement into social services was precisely so that they can deal with such problems. Since we came to office, bed blocking is down by a quarter, and one reason for that is the additional £300 million that the Chancellor found before Christmas which has had a big effect on delayed discharges. Again, that was opposed by the Conservative party. As I understand it, the Conservative party is not merely opposed to the additional money going into social care, but to the reform. That reform is important because if we are putting in the additional money we must ensure that councils bear some responsibility for dealing with the issue. We now have the situation where we are committed to the money and the reform and the Conservative party is apparently committed to neither.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Has Kuwait indicated support for further military action against Iraq?

The Prime Minister: We have not got to the stage of military action against Iraq, so this issue has not arisen. Of course, Kuwait is a country that has as much cause to be fearful of Saddam Hussein as any other. After all, it was Saddam Hussein's attempt to annex Kuwait that led to the first Gulf war. I say to my hon. Friend what I have said to many hon. Friends and other hon. Members: we are not at the stage of military action. When and if that issue arises, I have no doubt that we can answer all those questions.

Q9. [49381] **Angus Robertson** (Moray): Does the Prime Minister agree that one of the greatest threats posed by xenophobic and extremist parties such as the Austrian Freedom party or the Alleanza Nazionale is their inclusion in government? Does he not agree that completely the wrong signal is sent out by building up special alliances with Governments that include neo-fascists, such as that in Italy?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not think that it is wrong to have a proper relationship with the Italian Government. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that if he ends up confusing the current Italian Government with the policies of Le Pen, he will do a disservice not only to Italy, but to the cause of anti-racism.

Q10. [49382] **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): Following on from the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh), has the Prime Minister seen the internet pictures that we have been sent from Jenin of the mutilated bodies of women and children, some of whose heads were blown off? If he has seen the photographs—I hope that his advisers have shown them to him—does he not think that they give the lie to Israel's claim that the people killed in Jenin were

"hardline Palestinian militants who elected to fight to the death"?

Is it not time that we stopped pretending that this is a balanced conflict, when one side is armed and capable of fighting while the leader of the Palestinian Authority is trapped in Ramallah without communications and the state of Israel is using force well beyond justifiable measure to impose its will upon people in its occupied territory? It is time to get back on the side of the innocents, and to treat the state of Israel as it is at this time—a pariah.

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that I do not agree with that last remark, but I will come to it in a moment. In relation to what has happened in Jenin, the call of the international community is for a mission to go in there. It would be rather odd if I were to state a concluded view before that happened. It is better that the mission goes in there, does its work and comes to its conclusions. We can then all have the debate informed by that.

It is a question not of balance, but of understanding. There has been misery and bloodshed on both sides in this dispute. I honestly say to my hon. Friend that the single biggest risk of any such dispute is that one side forgets the other side's innocent dead and murdered. The fact is that there have also been Israeli citizens who have been blown up in cafés and restaurants and at religious ceremonies.

It is so important to get the political process going because we can stand here for ever and debate who is to blame for this situation, why it has happened and what the consequences are, but we know what the consequences are—misery and suffering for all the people concerned. Of course, it is utterly tragic that those young Palestinians and women and children have died, but the point that I am making is that we can wring our hands about that bloodshed, but we will not get an end until we get a political process started. That is where we are putting our efforts, and we are doing so in the best way possible: we are not out there shouting at both sides, but acting behind the scenes to try to do everything we can to pull them together and get them back into a political process.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): When the Prime Minister said before the last general election that he would not put up taxes on income, what precisely did he mean?

The Prime Minister: What was in the manifesto.

Q11. [49383] **Anne Picking** (East Lothian): Does the Prime Minister share my sadness at the closure of the very last deep coal mine in Scotland in Longannet? Will he also commend some of my constituents who did their best to try to save the pit, including Brian Davie, who was up to his neck for hours in water with a rope tied around his waist to try to save it? Does he also agree that the Tories have eventually succeeded in shutting down a great mining industry? They started that agenda and I think that they should be downright ashamed of themselves for it.

The Prime Minister: I know that the workers at Longannet, my hon. Friend's constituents and the Department of Trade and Industry did everything that they could to save the mine, but, because of the difficulties involved, it has had to close. The Minister for Industry and Energy is in discussion with my hon. Friend and other local Members, and I can assure her that we will do everything that we can to expedite the redundancy payments and other payments, and to work with those who have been made redundant to ensure that they have the possibility of further work.

Patents Act 1977 (Amendment) (No. 2)

3.30 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Patents Act 1977 to enable a court to award additional damages in an action for infringement of patent.

I invite the House to support my Bill. It is very short—it contains only 67 words—but, in legislation, size is not everything. The idea is simple. My Bill is designed to protect investors and inventors from a hugely expensive international crime: the daylight robbery of patent theft. This has nothing to do with party politics, and everything to do with looking after the people on whom our nation's prosperity may well depend. The brains—the inventors—are the men and women who come up with original ideas and get them patented, only to discover that someone has stolen their brainchild.

I want to correct a small legal anomaly. The Patents Act came into force in 1977. Eleven years later, the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 was enacted, but there is a tiny difference between them. The latter Act gives judges the discretion to award exemplary damages; the Patents Act does not. All of us in the House have patent holders in our constituencies who need our protection. I realise that the House is waiting for the Humble Address, and I therefore commend my little Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger, Mr. Keith Simpson, Mr. Oliver Letwin, Hugh Robertson, Mr. Michael Jack, Mr. Mark Prisk, Mr. David Heath, Mr. Jonathan Djanogly, Dr. Andrew Murrison, Mr. Paul Goodman, Mr. Hugo Swire and Mr. Andrew Turner.

PATENTS ACT 1977 (AMENDMENT) (NO. 2)

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Patents Act 1977 to enable a court to award additional damages in an action for infringement of patent: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 10 May, and to be printed [Bill 126].

Address to Her Majesty (Golden Jubilee)

3.33 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Her Accession to the Throne.

That the said Address be presented to Her Majesty by the whole House.

I am sure that the whole House will once more accord to you, Mr. Speaker, the traditional right which has been claimed by Speakers-in-Office to express the sentiments of this House to Her Majesty in your own words. As I believe hon. Members know—informally, if not formally—Her Majesty, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, has graciously agreed to come to Westminster Hall on Tuesday 30 April to receive Addresses from both Houses of Parliament.

Typically, Her Majesty has said that the golden jubilee is an occasion for her and Prince Philip to acknowledge with gratitude the loyalty and support which they have received from so many people since her accession. But it also allows us, the people of this country and those in the Commonwealth, to celebrate 50 years of dedicated service by Her Majesty and Prince Philip.

The start of this jubilee year was overshadowed by the deaths of Princess Margaret and Her Majesty the Queen Mother. When the nation came together in sadness at the death, and gratitude for the life, of Her Majesty the Queen Mother, we demonstrated not just the honour that we felt for someone who had inspired us for over a century. We also saw the respect and loyalty which the monarchy retains in the heart of our nation. I know that, throughout the jubilee celebrations, we shall see the same public support and commitment to Her Majesty and Prince Philip. The weekend of national celebrations from 1 to 4 June will culminate with a national thanksgiving service in St. Paul's cathedral, after a ceremonial procession from Buckingham Palace.

On a tour of Africa when she was 21, Princess Elizabeth, as she then was, vowed:

"I declare before you all, that my whole life, whether it be long or short shall be dedicated to your service . . . But I shall not have the strength to carry out this resolution unless you join in it with me, as I now invite you to do".

That vow she has kept. During the past 50 years, Her Majesty's commitment and public service has been tireless. She has carried out an outstanding range of duties, been involved as a patron of more than 600 organisations, met more people than any other monarch and undertaken 251 official visits to 128 countries. Throughout all her work she has been guided by deep-seated values, which she spelt out clearly in her Christmas address in 1999:

"Fairness and compassion, justice and tolerance; these are the landmarks from the past which can guide us through the years ahead."

We all have our personal memories of the Queen's reign over the last 50 years. I was just three weeks old at the time of her coronation and as a schoolboy in Durham during the 1960s, I remember seeing the Queen for the first time. It is a privilege now to serve her as her 10th Prime Minister—her first, as she reminded me in May 1997, was Winston Churchill, who was her Prime Minister before I was born. In the many meetings that I have had with Her Majesty since 1997, I have, time and

[The Prime Minister]

again, as have my predecessors, had reason to be grateful to her for her wisdom, good sense and experience, which she always brings to the issues of the day.

Nationally, and internationally, the world has, of course, changed more than anyone could have imagined since that day 50 years ago when a young Queen took on the awesome responsibility of the monarchy following the tragic death of her father. Yet, through all the change, and through all the insecurities and uncertainties that change brings, which all countries have experienced in the last half century, our country has had the inestimable benefit of that symbol of principled unity and continuity so perfectly embodied in Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. With a matchless sense of duty, she has served her country. With pride, we celebrate her jubilee.

3.37 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I second the Prime Minister and associate myself and my party completely with what he has just said?

The Prime Minister was right to say that, on the evening of her 21st birthday, the then Princess Elizabeth broadcast a vow to the nation, and he was right to say that she stuck to it.

The most remarkable thing about the past 50 years is the way in which Her Majesty the Queen has literally stuck to every single word that she said in that broadcast—perhaps a real lesson in constancy and dedication to all of us of the next generation. Our admiration for her outstanding service to our country has never been higher. During 50 years in which Britain has changed so completely from the country that Her Majesty addressed as a Princess, she has symbolised the strength, stability and unity of the United Kingdom and the superiority of evolution over revolution in our national life.

At all times, Her Majesty has interpreted and executed her constitutional role with unerring judgment. The Queen has been in every sense a model constitutional monarch. Indeed, our democracy owes much to her instinctive understanding of her role and her deep love of her country.

We therefore celebrate with gratitude 50 years of service to the people of Britain and to the wider Commonwealth. Over 50 years, the Queen has touched millions of lives through her visits, through her recognition of people of achievement and courage and through the hard work that she has carried out on behalf of the many charities and other organisations of which she is patron.

As a former soldier, I know how devoted the Queen is to her regiments and the unique way in which they and the other armed services respond. All of our armed forces share an enormous sense of pride that they serve the Queen.

As the Prime Minister said, that warmth is felt all around the world because, through the Commonwealth, the Queen has made an enduring contribution to the lives of millions. To the Queen, the Commonwealth has never been just another duty, but a deep and abiding personal interest.

Throughout her reign the Queen has often had to live in a goldfish bowl of press interest. Yet, at all times, Her Majesty has conducted herself with dignity, decency and honour. Never has that been more evident than this year, with the particularly painful loss of her mother and sister. However, even when confronted with personal sadness, the Queen has never flinched from her public duty and has put her country and her people first. We pay tribute also to the Queen's husband, the Duke of Edinburgh. As the Prime Minister said, he has been a steadfast companion and his constant support has been invaluable to her.

Earlier this year, some critics and, I believe, some closet republicans predicted that there would be no public interest in the golden jubilee and that it would be a flop. I happily predict today that they will be utterly confounded by the outpouring of loyalty and affection for the monarch from people throughout the United Kingdom. Speaking on Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, one of our predecessors said that she

"has been an example to every Sovereign, she has shared our anxieties and shared our triumphs, she has been throughout animated and inspired by our national ideals".

I believe that those same words ring true of Her Majesty today. We thank her for her service, her devotion to her country and the dignity and decency with which she has conducted herself over the past half century. We also look forward to many, many more years of her reign.

3.41 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): On behalf of my hon. and right hon. Friends, it is a pleasure and a privilege to speak in support of the motion moved by the Prime Minister. This is certainly an issue on which the entire House and, indeed, the vast majority of the country are united. We pay tribute to the remarkable 50 years of national and international devotion, which are the hallmark of the Queen's reign.

All of us in the House, in all parties, know politicians from countries outside our own borders and boundaries—Commonwealth politicians in particular—who will attest to Her Majesty's extraordinarily broad and deep knowledge and her commitment over the past 50 years, which have been the hallmark of her approach not just to her duties to the citizens of this country, but to her wider and, at times, difficult Commonwealth duties.

Despite all the Commonwealth's problems and vicissitudes over the years and the changes that have occurred across the globe, it remains a source of dialogue and, therefore, understanding, and accordingly hope. Her Majesty's pivotal presence, which has been the one constant at the centre, has to have been fundamental to maintaining the Commonwealth and to maintaining that dialogue and understanding for the force of good in the world generally. That is very much the hallmark of Her Majesty.

Like the Prime Minister and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), we put on record our sadness at the two untimely and distressing deaths in the royal family this year, but in some ways that sadness has made people realise all the more what a debt of gratitude exists and what remains to be commemorated later this year.

Like others who have identified the Duke of Edinburgh as a pivotal presence in the life of the Queen in particular and the monarchy in general, I express best wishes for the

rest of the year and for the future. On a purely personal constituency level, we on the Isle of Skye look forward to welcoming Her Majesty in a few weeks' time.

3.43 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): It is indeed a privilege to express my party's support for the motion moved by the Prime Minister on presenting a Humble Address. As he and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) have said, in the past 50 years, Her Majesty has fulfilled her promise to the nation.

I can endorse from my own experience the words of the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy). Her Majesty does not fulfil her functions routinely or casually; she pays very close attention, and is extremely well informed on a wide range of subjects. From personal experience gained on many occasions, I can testify to her knowledge of and interest in the issues. That is true not only of her, but of the Duke of Edinburgh and other members of the royal family.

The Prime Minister also referred to the important role that the monarchy plays in the nation as a whole. Not many institutions in our United Kingdom are common to the entire kingdom, but the monarchy is one, and the most important. I make that reflection particularly coming from Northern Ireland, where we occasionally feel forgotten by some of the other institutions of our state, but not the monarchy.

I know that I am speaking not just for my party colleagues, adherents and supporters, but for a wide range of people in Northern Ireland who will also want to associate themselves with this Humble Address as a fitting way to mark Her Majesty's jubilee.

3.45 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): On behalf of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, may I add our congratulations to Queen Elizabeth on her golden jubilee? Clearly, we are not overwhelmingly convinced of the virtue of the monarchical principle, but it is right that we should acknowledge the achievements of the golden jubilee. Queen Elizabeth has outlasted a succession of Prime Ministers. To borrow a phrase from Sir Robin Day, she has outlasted many a "here today, gone tomorrow" Prime Minister, and for that matter many a "here today, gone tomorrow" Leader of the Opposition. That is no mean achievement.

It would be remiss of me as the hon. Member for Caernarfon not to note the connection that the town has had with the monarchy—with the Welsh monarchy, and in its most recent incarnation. Indeed, many Caernarfon citizens, especially from the older generation, would wish me to convey their congratulations to the Queen, and I am happy to do so today.

3.46 pm

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): May I briefly associate my hon. Friends with the terms of the motion proposed by the Prime Minister? In congratulating Her Majesty on the achievement of her golden jubilee, may I, on behalf of her subjects in Northern Ireland, join with the other right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken in expressing our heartfelt gratitude to Her Majesty for her 50 years of devoted service to all the people and to all parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, nemine contradicente,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Her Accession to the Throne.

That the said Address be presented to Her Majesty by the whole House.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Resolved,

That on Tuesday 30th April the House do meet at Ten o'clock, no standing committees shall sit earlier than half-past Three o'clock, and there shall be no sitting in Westminster Hall.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement to make about the arrangements for Tuesday 30 April. The House will meet for prayers at 10 o'clock. I will then suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm. Members attending the ceremony in Westminster Hall should be in their seats in the Hall by 10.30 am. The Speaker's procession with the Mace will enter Westminster Hall shortly before the arrival of Her Majesty the Queen. After the ceremony, the Mace will be returned to this Chamber, so the Chamber will be closed to visitors until the sitting is resumed at 2.30 pm.

Orders of the Day

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill

[Relevant documents: The First Report from the Home Affairs Committee, Session 2000–01, on Border Controls, HC 163.]

Order for Second Reading read.

3.48 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I had looked forward to complete unanimity on the Bill, but I read in this morning's papers that it is likely to be questioned, in that some of the measures have been misinterpreted by colleagues and opponents alike.

First, I want to put on record the considerable help that was given in drafting the original White Paper on 7 February and the Bill—help given by organisations including pressure groups with a long-standing interest in these issues, and by parliamentary colleagues as well as my office and officials in the Department and Nick Pearce, my special adviser. I say that because, building on the White Paper proposals that received almost unanimous support, it is important that we get the legislation right. From the beginning to the end of the process, we must offer to potential refugees from oppression, economic migrants or other visitors a warm welcome to a country in which the systems can be trusted to operate fairly, competently and robustly.

Today's Second Reading builds directly on the measures in the White Paper, many of which do not require legislation but which require greater competence in the carrying out of our immigration and asylum procedures than has been demonstrated in recent years. I said that on 7 February and I repeat it today, because if we do not get the process right—if the measures put in place are not carried out properly, competently and speedily—it will not matter how we legislate, and we will have to return to the House to seek legislative means of redress.

We need a balanced approach, and I believe that Members on both sides of the House are committed to achieving that. Managed migration allows those throughout the world who have a contribution to make, and who are seeking a better life for themselves, to enter this country through a system of economic migration that is properly organised and trusted by the British people.

The doubling of the number of work permits issued this year must be accompanied by measures to ensure that new forms of economic migration can meet the needs of the service economy and of those who have high skills, so that they can take advantage of the new programmes that were put in place in January. In enabling people to come to this country for a short or a long stay, and to contribute their diversity and strengths to the well-being of our country, we must also strengthen the welcome for those who seek asylum from death and persecution. The new gateways for economic migration and the gateway that we are establishing with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will enable those who face persecution to apply for, and to be granted, such status from outside the country. Those gateways will be crucial in ensuring that we avoid scenes—such as those witnessed last summer and since—of clandestine attempts, often at great personal risk, to enter the country through the channel tunnel and via ferries.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Is my right hon. Friend saying that, through the UNHCR, people who are suffering oppression and seeking refuge outwith their own country will have access to the new work permits and can enter the work force directly? In other words, can they proceed through the UNHCR door and enter the country through the work permit system, or will they be excluded and have to choose between one door or another?

Mr. Blunkett: I am pleased to be able to clarify any misunderstandings. I am proposing that those who currently enter the country clandestinely, with inappropriate papers, or by applying for refugee status "in country" will be able to enter on a managed basis through the UNHCR without needing to put their lives at risk or to present fraudulent papers. In that way, as we gradually build up the process, we can ensure that people can approach this country honestly if they are at risk. Separately, we are expanding the work permit system dramatically—as I shall spell out later, to do so more rapidly we will need to charge employers—so that more people can apply for permits outside the country, as well as within it, when they are seeking a longer stay.

I use the phrase "outside the country" because, at the moment, the work permit system operates when employers seek people who can become skilled and valued workers. However, as I said on 7 February, with a degree of care we can develop in some sectors of the economy and regions of the country a system of entry for reasons of economic migration that would not rely on a person having a job with a specific employer beforehand. Such a system would rely on the ability of employers and trade unions to meet needs on a managed basis in a particular sector. We talked about expanding the agricultural workers scheme, and about the way in which young workers could enter the country on an expanded Commonwealth scheme.

With my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, I am exploring how that approach could apply to people with lesser skills or no skills at all. The service economy, especially in London and the south-east, relies on clandestine and illegal working. That is unacceptable, and it undermines the wages and conditions of work of those involved and of other workers. It also leads to bad employers undercutting good ones because they do not pay tax or national insurance. There are therefore two ways we can operate that gateway.

In addition, we need to secure trust and confidence in the system for people who have applied for asylum. In the White Paper, I spelled out an end-to-end revision of the process. In the future, the new reception and induction process will allow us to assess the needs of applicants very quickly, to determine their likelihood of success, and to refer and register them. As a result, applicants going through the process will receive the support that they need. They will also be monitored and tracked, as we need to know where they are when we want to call them for interview. That information will also tell us what resources they are entitled to, and what they are receiving.

Earlier this year, we introduced the new smart card to make that monitoring possible and ensure security. We also set in train an end-to-end review of the audit of the system to ensure that we can eliminate unnecessary expenditure, including fraud.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): In addition to resettlement programmes under the United Nations, does the Secretary of State envisage working continually with his European colleagues to try to make sure that asylum seekers do not have to try to smuggle themselves aboard trains crossing under the channel? At present, such people have to get here illegally before they can make their case. Will they be able to make asylum applications from other countries across Europe, on the basis of shared responsibility?

In that context, Home Office figures show that over the past decade about 45 per cent. of applicants were accepted, either as refugees or as people granted exceptional leave to remain. Will the Home Secretary confirm, however, that that proportion has fallen to just under a third in the past year? Does he agree that the figures show that there has always been a significant number of people whose cases have been accepted as valid, and that we have a duty to resolve their cases in the most humane and efficient way possible?

Mr. Blunkett: I certainly have a clear commitment to meeting those people's needs in the most humane and efficient way possible.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we in the Justice and Home Affairs Council are engaged in a debate about how we can move forward rapidly the agenda set out at Tampere in Finland three years ago. That agenda set out a Europewide approach to a problem that is international.

Australia's Immigration Minister visited London earlier this week, and he made it clear that this is a global issue. Countries across the world are having to deal with it as worldwide movements of refugees and people seeking a better life place a strain on mechanisms put in place in a very different era. Unfortunately, it is difficult to iron out the disagreements between 15 member states about how that should be done. In future, of course, that number will be much larger as countries accede to the EU. However, I am hopeful that the improvement in overall border controls will become evident soon, as that is crucial for all EU members.

Secondly, I hope that the more managed, more sensible and more balanced approach to dealing with, assessing and being able to support asylum seekers in Europe will take effect soon. Thirdly, I hope that we will be able to establish a sensible system that ensures that asylum shopping and benefit shopping do not take place. I shall speak about both those activities later in my contribution.

I heard the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) on "The World at One". The figures that I gave this morning were correct for those who are eventually agreed to be refugees. He is right about those who receive agreement on the right to stay in our country, many of whom receive exceptional or indefinite leave to remain. That applies to countries where we have been unable to return people even when we do not accept that they are refugees under the 1951 convention—I choose my words carefully—and which are at the top of the league in terms of those who come to Britain. I refer to Iraq and Afghanistan. Iraq has the largest inflow, followed by Afghanistan—they seem to change places—and both pose a major problem, even if no individual case is being made through the appeals process, in returning individuals to the region. So there is an issue on which we agree and the statistics add up.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): Before we leave applications from other safe countries, does the Home Secretary agree that as we move towards the second Dublin convention, the aim should be to make it impossible for people to apply for asylum here if they are resident in another safe country?

Mr. Blunkett: I do not think there has been a principled disagreement about the importance of people simply passing through other countries and, as I said a moment ago, asylum shopping. The issue is how we reach agreement on those matters. With the House's indulgence, I shall spend a moment dealing with the substantive issue. We debated it on an Opposition day a couple of months ago, and I thought that we had a rational and intelligent debate, led by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). I respond in kind today.

After the elections in France, we will need to reach agreement with the new French Administration, whichever party is in office—obviously, I hope that the Administration will be led by the Socialist party—on a sensible system of dealing with those who need to be returned because they should have sought asylum in France, or a country they had passed through prior to reaching France, rather than the United Kingdom. We have an agreement that predates the implementation of the Dublin convention, signed at the beginning of the 1990s but not implemented until 1997. The agreement in 1995 reached by the then Home Secretary was a gentleman's agreement that related to those who are returned but have not, at the point of return, claimed asylum. The agreement is still in place and, as I spelled out two months ago, about 6,000 people have been returned under it in the past year.

The agreement also covers people who claim asylum in the United Kingdom, having come from France where we believe—rightly, in my view—that they should not have been a tolerated illegal presence, as the term is there, but should have sought asylum or been returned to the country from which they were in transit. However, the opening paragraph of the gentleman's agreement said:

> "With respect to asylum cases, it shall be superseded by the relevant provisions of the Dublin Convention once that convention has entered into force".

I am grateful to my Department for finding that quote this afternoon; we were not able to lay our hands on it when we had the debate two months ago. We make slow progress, but at least it is progress.

Simon Hughes: An honest motto.

Mr. Blunkett: I am always honest about these matters, if nothing else.

We are all agreed that we need to renew that original commitment so that we can have a bilateral agreement with France. I shall take every possible reasonable step to achieve it. At the time, I explained that pending the presidential and Assembly elections, it was a delicate matter, although even I—who had realised that there were

[Mr. Blunkett]

problems in Europe—did not realise just how delicate. Regrettably, the events of last Sunday show how dangerous the issue is for the French, but there will be danger for us all if we do not get it right. With the agreement of the House, therefore, I shall turn to part 2 of the Bill before dealing with part 1.

I want to address an issue that has come up during the past 48 hours in relation to the proposals that I set out in the White Paper two months ago. They have been debated since then; indeed, questions were taken about them on the day that they were announced. They relate to the way we deal with people who claim asylum once they have come through the reception and induction process.

Mr. Connarty: My right hon. Friend was talking generally about the relationship between other European countries and the UK. Does he agree that there should be some change to the current regrettable position whereby our approach to immigration law differs from that adopted in other parts of the European Union, and we experience immigration and asylum shopping? The Foreign Office has expressed a wish for change. Does my right hon. Friend anticipate that a change will occur and will it assist his aims in the Bill?

Mr. Blunkett: There are discussions on agreeing common standards and reasonable benchmarks on common procedures. I do not want to be tied into a definitive set of conditions and procedures so that every country in Europe follows exactly the same process—I am sure that hon. Members would not want that—but to have a benchmark and a foundation for the way that countries deal with and support asylum seekers and enhance their well-being, so that people would not be able to undercut between countries. To that extent, my hon. Friend is right.

However, the majority of countries in Europe say that asylum seekers take the view that the United Kingdom is the most attractive place for them. I am trying to deal with that point through some of the processes that will be enhanced by the Bill. Asylum seekers come to this country for a variety of reasons, which we have debated on several occasions, including the use of the English language and the fact that we do not have identity cards. There is communication from host communities in Britain, which offer sanctuary and a welcome to those from the same parts of the world. All those factors contribute to the collage of reasons why people are likely to seek asylum status in this country.

We are trying to achieve the right balance to ensure that people receive sanctuary and a warm welcome, and that they have the confidence to integrate and to provide the diversity that we welcome. In addition, we want to be confident that the system is working, that it is robust and achieves what we say it should achieve and that we thus provide the reassurance that is crucial for good race and community relations, social cohesion and the reinforcement of the overwhelming commitment of the British people to providing sanctuary.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) and then to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott).

Mr. Lansley: The Home Secretary will recall that in the White Paper he emphasised the key part played by the Oakington immigration reception centre in the scrutiny of asylum applications and in ensuring that an initial decision is taken within seven days. Can he say anything more about what is to happen to the centre? Can he confirm that the intention is to close it in the latter part of 2004? If a similar facility is to be opened elsewhere, can he tell us when we might know where that would be and how that might affect the staff at Oakington, many of whom are my constituents?

Mr. Blunkett: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I have to repeat what I said when he rightly questioned me about that issue on 7 February: we are awaiting the court judgment on the further challenge. We are therefore being circumspect about what we say in relation to Oakington, other than to say that the site is in doubt, not the facility.

The site will need to be replaced, but we will need to do that in a way that is commensurate with securing the well-being not only of those who go through Oakington, but of those who work there. I pay tribute to the exemplary job that they do. Everyone agrees that it is an exemplary facility in terms of what it provides and the way that it works. I assure the hon. Gentleman, as I have other hon. Members of all political persuasions, that I will engage him in the process when we know the time scale and the benchmarks for making those changes. That would be a fair thing to do.

Before I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington, I want to make some further comments so that we know what we are about to debate. I want to reinforce the fact that I have either done or set in train the things that I said on 7 February that I would do. I said that we would replace vouchers with cash and that we hoped to do so by the autumn. We did so on 8 April. It is amazing how easily and silently even those things that people have been pressing us to do for a very long time slip into being, but there we go—so be it.

Simon Hughes: The Liberal Democrats welcome the abolition of vouchers.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall use the opportunity of the hon. Gentleman's sedentary intervention to say that I do not expect any accolade for anything in this connection, but I am pleased that the Liberal Democrats welcome that change. That is very good, and it has cheered me up enormously this afternoon.

On 7 February, following the way I spelled out the new induction registration reporting process, I said that we would run a trial of accommodation centres because we

were seeking a seamless process from induction, through registration, to accommodating asylum seekers, thus speeding the process of integrating those who were welcomed as refugees and using removal centres where appropriate for those who had to leave the country.

Incidentally, we shall use this measure to facilitate proper resettlement on return—I shall touch on that later—so that we can use resources legally to enhance people's ability to resettle in the country from which they came, in a more seemly and acceptable fashion than is obviously now the case. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, has made representations to me on that point, and I am pleased to be able to respond positively to him.

We also said that although we were creating a more efficient and robust system of reporting and tracking where people were, we recognised in the report that I published alongside the White Paper that the dispersal system had received, to say the least, considerable questioning. In fact, last August and early September, not a single day went by when national newspapers or BBC and ITV television news broadcasts did not cover the dispersal problem in one form or another, tragically, because of a murder and some attacks that took place on asylum seekers in communities.

There was a substantial debate, and demands were made that I should do something radical about dispersal. I responded to those demands in the autumn on 29 October, when I made the statement about the future revisions of the system. I said that I would enhance the dispersal system and learn from other European countries and elsewhere to do so. Having dealt with the dispersal report published alongside the statement, I turned my attention to the White Paper. Dispersal will continue to be necessary for the foreseeable future and I said that we will improve the system, although we have a long way to go. I also said that I would trial accommodation centres. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor was good enough to allocate resources for that. We are in the process of setting up those centres, which are dealt with in part 2.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): My right hon. Friend will be aware that without dispersal, the situation in Dover would have been insufferable and impossible to manage. We appreciate the practical remedy that that provided for us. Is he aware that Dover already has an induction centre, a removal centre and accommodation for many hundreds of unaccompanied minors? Is it sensible and appropriate that so many facilities of that nature should be concentrated in such a small town? Does he think that that is fair to my constituents? Does he agree with the Prime Minister who, long before the additional facilities were provided, said that Dover had suffered an unfair burden?

Mr. Blunkett: The people and the services in and around Dover have carried a considerable burden. I pay credit again to my hon. Friend for the stand that he took in the period leading up to the general election last year when the atmosphere was not the same as it is today. We did not have the unanimity that now exists across and within parties. It was difficult to hold the line and he deserves credit for the rational and exemplary way he dealt with the situation.

There is nothing that I can do at this juncture about the geographical position of Dover, although I have mentioned the agreements on the number of people arriving clandestinely. We all understand that. What we can do is consider how to use the induction process to speed up the movement of people through the system of dispersal and proper registration elsewhere. We must ensure that people are not put in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, as they are at the moment, because that is the wrong way to disperse them quickly into the immediate area. I want to work with my hon. Friend on achieving that solution.

We must ensure that the speeded up and more efficient process deals with minors. Young people arriving unaccompanied is a major problem for Kent county council and the area around my hon. Friend's constituency. We are spending £111 million a year on unaccompanied young people under the age of 18. When we debated this matter before, I said that it was highly questionable whether they are unaccompanied all the way across Europe, but that is a problem of trafficking. The Bill increases the penalty for trafficking to 14 years because it is a dirty, nasty and illegal trade that needs rooting out.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I will give way to my hon. Friend, but I promised, with bated breath and trepidation, to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington.

Ms Abbott: My right hon. Friend will appreciate that whatever might have been said in the House, tens of thousands of asylum seekers, especially women and mothers, are grateful that vouchers have been abolished. People had to endure the humiliation of using them in supermarkets, often walking miles to find the nearest one that would take them. They note what has happened and are glad.

Mr. Blunkett: I am deeply grateful to my hon. Friend for that comment. I hope that we can progress in that spirit now that I am about to deal with accommodation centres, and I shall try to respond in a like-minded way.

Mr. Dawson: On unaccompanied young people who seek asylum, surely the problem is eminently soluble. Why cannot we require every social services authority in the land to have some responsibility for those extremely vulnerable young people? Why cannot we ensure that they get the effective and thorough assessment of their needs and experiences when they are dispersed? They need to be set on a good course, whether in this country or elsewhere. Surely we have the means to provide for unaccompanied children in section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and do not need to use bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend is right to say that we should not have to use bed and breakfast, but, as with everything to do with nationality, immigration and asylum, there are complications. Over the years, the need to find a place where those young people will be accommodated in circumstances where their language and other needs are met has led to attempts to find a geographic placement that is near enough to a host community that can provide support. That has meant not

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only that Kent has faced an undue task as regards dealing with the immediate needs of those young people, but that other authorities that already host large numbers of people from a community from a certain region of the world have had to be prepared to help and to work with them.

My hon. Friend was right about the ideal, which, with the help of the Local Government Association, we shall try to work towards in a much more coherent fashion than has been possible in the past.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Does my right hon. Friend realise that some unaccompanied minors, who may have undertaken college courses and subsequently established themselves in their new community, are dispersed to areas where they do not have such links when they reach adulthood and are ready to make a contribution to that community? That practice has created problems for many such youngsters. I know that my right hon. Friend has exercised his discretion in relation to particular cases on which I have made representations to him, but will he ensure that those youngsters are given more security in future?

Mr. Blunkett: I am in danger of dealing with just about every problem on the immigration and asylum front as part of the Second Reading debate, so I must move on shortly.

My hon. Friend makes a fair point, and we need to deal with it. I entirely accept that there is an anomaly. Getting the young person's placement right when they enter is crucial to ensuring that we do not end up with the unacceptable practice of further dispersal after adulthood is reached.

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I must make more progress on the Bill so that hon. Members have the opportunity to debate it and to question me on its more controversial elements.

On accommodation centres, I want to explain what we are doing so that there is no misunderstanding. From the dispersal report, we learned of the difficulties that arise where large numbers of people awaiting clearance through the appeals process are clustered together because of the nature of the dispersal centre. Hon. Members who have such a centre in their constituency, as I do, will be aware of the problem that it is effectively an accommodation centre, but without the forward planning and provision that enables the community adequately to support and work with the individuals concerned.

We are trialling the system because we know that we need to get it right and that we may not have all the answers, and because we need a comparator between the best and the worst of dispersal and accommodation centres to determine what is appropriate. We may require accommodation centres that are not closed and secure, but open; that provide facilities on site that are needed for families, as well as for individuals; and that are designed to fast-track people through the system, not to hold them for long periods. We are happy to concede that where there is a danger of people being held in accommodation centres for long periods—I mean for more than six months—we should consider whether they should be moved out.

The whole objective is to avoid the unacceptable position at the moment in which people wait an inordinate length of time to be dealt with administratively through the appeals process, or their legal and other advisers counsel them such that the process is dragged out, as we know, for months and sometimes years.

The accommodation centre trial is designed to give people the support that they need and to give them full education, health and language provision on the premises. The humanitarian requirements under the 1951 convention will be met at the same standard or, in some cases, at an even higher standard because centres will be able to take account of people's very specific language requirements. We can cluster services in such centres and provide extra interpretation and support services based on those language needs.

The trial is designed to find out whether, if we can do that, we can ease the challenge posed to schools and GP practices in areas through which large numbers of transient people pass. The number of places available in schools determines where children are placed, and challenged schools often have more places. For the same reason, centres, including accommodation centres, with available places are often in the most difficult and disadvantaged areas, which reinforces the difficulties.

I shall read to the House what a GP practice said to me, referring to the need, as the GPs saw it, for massive extra resources to deal with asylum seekers. I ought to stress that they are not griping about doing the job or complaining about asylum seekers coming to this country; they are merely pointing out the enormous task that they have and its knock-on effect on their work. They said:

> "Last week, we conducted an audit of all consultations and found that 32 per cent. required an interpreter. Conducting a consultation through an interpreter takes about twice as long. Due to the continuing rapid rate of increase of patient numbers and in particular the increasing proportion of patients requiring an interpreter for consultation, we find the quality of service we are offering is falling and staff are under intolerable strain."

That is what I meant when I used the word "swamped" this morning. I could have used an equivalent word, "overburdened", but I think that people would have objected to the idea of a burden. I could have used the word "overwhelmed", and I will now, because overwhelmed is how GPs feel, as do some schools—I stress that it is only some—that are having to deal with language requirements that accommodation centres will be able to fulfil.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I hope that the Home Secretary accepts that there is probably not a single Member of the House who does not wish to be reasonable and supportive of him in what is clearly a shared responsibility for us all.

I hope that the Home Secretary is aware of the Refugee Council's suggestion that accommodation centres should not have more than 100 bed spaces and should not be in remote rural areas. I accept that we can all make value judgments about what is remote and what is rural, but I hope that he is willing to consider suggestions about limiting the size of accommodation centres. He has just used words such as "swamped" and "overwhelmed". An accommodation centre for 750 people proposed for my

constituency will be the size of the nearest two villages. I hope that he will understand if the people in those villages feel that such a centre would be somewhat overwhelming for them. If he wants the trials to work, may I suggest that the size—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is far too long an intervention.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall not respond in the usual knockabout debating terms. It has been put to us, in particular by the Refugee Council, that we might consider a different configuration in one of four trial centres. I have agreed that it might be sensible to do that, provided we do not fall into the trap of having a centre that is so small that it is not possible adequately to provide the services that I have just described, not possible to provide language and interpreting support, and not possible, because of economies of scale, to provide the sort of facilities, including leisure facilities, that make it possible for people to stay comfortably in an accommodation centre. We are considering that now.

Wherever we put a trial accommodation centre, there will be people who are worried or who complain. I pay tribute to hon. Members whose areas have been considered for an accommodation centre, run either by the immigration service or a private operator, and who have taken on those who have issued scurrilous leaflets and sought to whip up hate and prejudice. We need to take on that sort of thing wherever it arises, whether from large-scale dispersal under the existing system or from the prospective siting of accommodation centres.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. David Lammy (Tottenham): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Abbott: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I will give way to all three of my hon. Friends, provided they are quick. It is important to get this right. If we can get the process and the accommodation right, we can overcome people's fears.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the Home Secretary bothered to think that people might be disadvantaged by the shortage of interpreters in certain languages? If he is, which languages is he bothered about? I do not want to lead him down a line that he does not want to take, but it is an important matter.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I am bothered. That is why being able to pull together those with a particular language requirement and provide the necessary interpreting skills on site is the most common-sense approach. At lunchtime, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants said that it did not like what I had said, but that it was perfectly prepared to accept that, for example, a medical centre that offered interpreting services might have to be established to serve an area. The disagreement between the council and me appears to be that it does not want such a facility on the site of an accommodation centre, but it is happy to have one off site. I understand that in the context of having an argument, but not intellectually.

Mr. Lammy: I am grateful for much that my right hon. Friend has said, because my Tottenham constituency bears much of the brunt of the existing problems: with more than 5,000 homeless families and as many as 20,000 asylum-seeker refugees, there is great pressure on local services such as schools and GP surgeries. Is my right hon. Friend suggesting that children in accommodation centres will receive an education that is not only equivalent to the education that they might receive in schools, but rather better, because they will have specialist teachers who understand the needs of refugee and asylum-seeking children? That is a specialist area, as we in Tottenham see daily.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, it is. My hon. Friend knows a great deal about the subject because of his constituency experience. I am grateful for his support and help for our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Contrary to the story that appeared in one of our national newspapers this morning, which was put about by someone trying to create mischief, she has welcomed the proposals and worked with us on the preparation, and she will be wholly involved because we have asked her Department to be responsible for implementation. I hope that that lays to rest the myth that has been peddled for the past 48 hours.

Ms Abbott: On the question of schools and education, with all due respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), I have represented the constituency of Hackney, North and Stoke Newington for 14 years, for almost all of which time many of the schools in my area, including my son's, have had to deal with large numbers of transient pupils and pupils speaking a wide range of languages. Of course that is challenging for both the teachers and the children, but surely the answer is to devise ways of providing those schools with the resources and support that they need. I do not buy the doctrine of separate but equal; we know what that is about. It cannot be right to segregate the children of asylum seekers.

Mr. Blunkett: I regret the language of separate but equal, but I also regret the language that my hon. Friend used on Radio 4 at lunchtime. I did not use deliberately emotive language. I am not withdrawing the language that I used because it was part of a very balanced interview which people can tap into by accessing the "Today" programme on the BBC website. I simply wished to indicate that there is a major problem for some schools and some GP practices in limited parts of the country. It is nothing to do with our country's intake of people seeking asylum or wishing to immigrate; we are not swamped in our country, but some schools face real difficulties, as do some GP practices.

All I would say to my hon. Friend is that I know a great deal about Hackney's education provision because I was the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for four difficult years. I know what happens in Hackney and that additional resources are required in some schools. I also know about the distribution of resources in London boroughs like Hackney compared with other parts of

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the country. Migrants who are not asylum seekers are seeking support as they learn English and make up the bulk of the ethnic diversity of Hackney and other central London boroughs. That, of course, is the reason why there was a request from London's representatives in both national and local government for a better dispersal system and why there have been constant approaches from London boroughs, which are asking for additional resources.

I propose to concentrate on providing resources for language skills, education and health care as a temporary measure until people reach the point at which they are either granted asylum or have been refused it. When asylum is granted, it is our job to integrate and support people and welcome their children into the local school. The difficulty sometimes with families whose removal has been attempted is that their youngsters have become part of a school, making it virtually impossible in some circumstances to operate the managed system to which we should all sign up unless we believe in completely open borders, which would be an interesting free enterprise experiment—eventually the system would give and people would not want to come here any more as it would no longer be attractive, which would be crackers and a crazy piece of politics.

Accepting as a given the need for a managed system and to return people, we must undertake those tasks as humanely and carefully as possible. Accommodation centres may—just may—facilitate that, as they do in some of the most liberal countries in the world such as Sweden and Finland. There is therefore nothing draconian about the measure at all.

Simon Hughes: I hope that the Home Secretary is aware that although the issue is sensitive, on the substance of the argument I understand his position and support it. Speaking from personal experience and more generally, if accommodation centres are intended to be used for a limited time, about which the Home Secretary was very clear, there is a benefit in being able to deal with all needs together, provided that he is introducing a trialled species of options—again, I have received confirmation that he is—with dispersal still being used for the majority of asylum seekers.

Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that for the foreseeable future he is willing to consider various options, and that an accommodation centre choice is one reasonable alternative, but that the majority of families will be dispersed and their children integrated into the local schools?

Mr. Blunkett: That is the case, practically and inevitably. It is also right that for the foreseeable future we will need to implement an improved and acceptable dispersal system within the community. That means that the GP practice that I mentioned and the schools that face the challenge need our help in the immediate future. I am not ducking or moving away from that reality.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: Unless my hon. Friend is burning inside, I should like to make some progress, or no one will be able to get in. I want hon. Members to be able to make speeches rather than interventions.

Part 1, for instance—

John McDonnell: On the last point, a simple question—

Mr. Blunkett: I am only giving way, as I must, to those who have sat through the debate so far.

Part 1 deals with the issue, which I hope is not as contentious as people have tried to make it, of those who obtain refugee status and then seek naturalisation and want to be integrated into our community. It gives effect to all the measures that I announced on 7 February relating to the acquisition of the English language, the ability to understand our systems of governance and our social processes, a revised and modernised oath and a ceremony in which people will be welcomed into our country for naturalisation.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. I welcome what he said about inclusivity of citizenship, but there is one aspect of citizenship that is not dealt with in the Bill—the position of British overseas citizens who were able to come to this country under the quota voucher scheme. Will he take action to ensure that British overseas citizens who have no other citizenship will be able to enter and stay in the country of their nationality?

Mr. Blunkett: I know and respect my hon. Friend's interest in the matter and the way in which she has campaigned on it for as long as I can remember. It is important that we get it right. In recognition of the fact that the old special quota scheme had ceased to be used for the purpose for which it was originally designed, we abolished it. I will examine the possibility of an alternative arrangement for British overseas citizens who have no other nationality but who, under the existing complex historical circumstances, cannot enter the country. It would be right for us to do that, as we have a moral obligation to them going back a long way, and it is unfinished business.

That relates to the point that I was making. The people to whom my hon. Friend referred have a deep commitment to this country and a heritage linked with it. Those who seek naturalisation and who want to be part of our community will welcome the measures that I am announcing in part 1.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I thank the Home Secretary for giving way. On the introduction of an oath of loyalty to the United Kingdom, does he not think it strange that a new applicant should be expected to pledge loyalty to the United Kingdom, whereas in similar circumstances the official Opposition in the Scottish Parliament would not be prepared to swear a loyalty oath? What constitutional implications does the Home Secretary believe that has for the United Kingdom?

Mr. Blunkett: None at all. However, we are recognising the Gaelic language—I have pronounced it correctly this time—and ensuring that, where appropriate, people will be able to demonstrate their understanding of and competence in Gaelic. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Lady, who I think was making a rather pyrrhic point. The oath stands for all of us here and it will do so for those seeking naturalisation, which even Scottish nationalists have not denied themselves.

Part 3 deals with the gateways that I described earlier in terms of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, regular reporting and registration procedures. Part 4 substantially deals with proposals for removal centres and the way in which we can use a variety of staff. On the burning down of Yarl's Wood, we discovered that it was not possible, without legal challenge, for those who had worked in and gained expertise in the prison estate to assist us. That is silly, so we are doing something to put that right as quickly as possible.

Clause 58—I draw attention to this because we had an intervention from the shadow Home Secretary, which I hope that I satisfactorily reflected—gives the Secretary of State power to agree bilateral agreements which might not be possible under the existing law and the Dublin convention. We must also take account of the Roth judgment in terms of civil penalties, and we shall table an amendment for a variable penalty for rail and road with a maximum of £4,000 but with a ceiling of £2,000 for any party engaged in the penalty. We will give the county court the power to release vehicles and to appeal to the county court where appropriate in order to comply with the legislation.

Part 5, which involves schedules 3, 4, 5 and 6—so it is a substantive measure—deals with appeals and the dramatic speeding up and rationalisation of the process. The White Paper put forward the idea of making the appeals tribunal a superior court of record. The Lord Chief Justice, the Lord Chancellor and I have had discussions about an alternative and more manageable way of providing a one-stop appeals process following the initial immigration and appeals adjudication system.

At the moment the system is virtually unworkable. People can bring a judicial review during the process of the initial appeal, and when they reach the right to appeal to the tribunal they can judicially review the tribunal for not allowing the appeal to the tribunal. They can then judicially review the tribunal's decision and they can judicially review whether they are entitled to go to the court of appeal following failure at the tribunal. The whole system is riddled with delay, prevarication, and, in some cases, deliberate disruption of the appeals process. Then they can judicially review the decision on removal even when the appeals have been gone through.

It is no wonder that people do not have confidence in the system and I am determined to bring forward proposals. When the draft is available, I shall talk to my colleagues on the Select Committee and to the main Opposition parties about whether they will agree to unanimity on that process. It is a difficult issue because we must maintain people's rights, and ensure that we adhere to convention rights and that the process does not disadvantage people in the way that is always possible in administrative processes. At the same time, we must ensure that people cannot, literally, make a monkey of the process.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. The Home Office press release on the Bill contained some indication that such changes might be made, but can he be any more precise about when we will see the proposals, as they will be very significant? According to the programme motion that we will consider later, the Committee stage will be finished by 16 May, so there is a very short time scale for people to consider what may be very complicated changes.

Mr. Blunkett: I had a meeting on this matter this morning in which I indicated that by the beginning of next week, we must be able to make available the proposals for consideration in Committee and to listen and respond at that stage to those making reasonable suggestions and representations about the process. We all approach the matter with the intention of retaining reasonable and acceptable rights of appeal. Let us also bear it in mind that we are talking substantially about the second appeal, not the first, and a system with greater rights of appeal than are available anywhere else that I know of in the developed world. Getting it right for the appellant and the community as a whole will be crucial to the system working well.

I think that "working well" is the underlying phrase, as it is important that we put aside the notion that addressing real issues somehow plays into the hands of the British National party and the National Front. Scurrilously raising fears and developing insecurity and prejudice plays into their hands, but seeing a problem and dealing with it takes away the meat and drink of those who would capture the agenda for their own dangerous purposes. I say with all the fervour that I can muster that it is not dangerous for the left or liberals to address real issues that concern people, whether in relation to crime or nationality and asylum; it is only dangerous if we do not listen, respond, indicate that we recognise fears and insecurity and then overcome them by introducing balanced, tolerant and reasoned measures.

The next measure that I want to deal with has only recently been drawn to my attention. I am happy to give way to any hon. Member who has spotted the issue over the years, raised it and made proposals to do something about it. I refer to those who come to seek refuge in our community, ask for our hospitality, commit a severe crime and then claim human rights and asylum protection because they want to stay here even when they have committed that crime. I do not think that it is acceptable for an old lady of 78 to be mugged for £60, as happened in my city, and for the three people who mugged her to continue to claim that they require asylum in this country.

I believe that people who are found guilty of committing crimes and are given a custodial sentence of more than two years forfeit their asylum rights, and I think that we should legislate to take them away. As long as people understand that, they will also understand that, as I said on the White Paper's publication, this country is a welcome home and haven in which we celebrate people coming here, as we have done over the centuries, but we are tough when people abuse that hospitality. In that way, we can ensure that people understand the rules and that those who would whip up hatred know that we understand where they are coming from and will deal with them vigorously.

On the back of the changes that I am introducing in the Bill, I should like to take up a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) two months ago and mention the abolition of fees for family visitor appeals, which is necessary because they were not working and because of administrative incompetence. I am laying the order today so that we can abolish those fees as quickly as possible. We want to ensure that the

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immigration procedures of managed migration, which are dealt with in part 6, provide the ability to offer people throughout the world the opportunity to come to this country and work with an even more efficient work permit system. That is the best possible part of the nationality, immigration and asylum function that we currently have.

We are also bringing in new methods of using biometric data to stop fraud. The Operation Hornet system that we are piloting will be able to scan passports to check for forgeries and capture information on closed circuit television, including evidence of those who have made multiple applications for asylum.

All those measures are intended to ensure that the British people can be assured that, with the new spirit and the new measured, tolerant approach across the parties, we can get this matter right. If we can take nationality and asylum out of the political football arena for the main political parties, not by ignoring the subject or by burying our heads in the sand and hoping that it will go away—or by ignoring people's fears or the criticism that comes from the media—but by tackling it head on, everyone of good will who wishes to ensure that we never see what happened in France on Sunday happen in our country will join together to give the British National party, the National Front and their apologists the farewell that they deserve in our country, and the come-uppance that they deserve in the elections on 2 May.

4.56 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I begin by welcoming the tone in which the Home Secretary has addressed the House, which continues the record of rational discussion on this matter that has been the hallmark of our proceedings over the past few months. I wholly concur with him that any analysis of what has happened in France—and, indeed, in other European countries—and is happening in some of our own cities today makes it clear that we have to go on discussing these issues seriously and that we have to tackle them. He is right to say that we cannot escape from them, that we do no service to a liberal democracy if we seek to do so, and that, in tackling them, we have the means to reduce the appeal of those who wish to use these issues for nefarious purposes that neither he nor I wish ever to see prevalent in this country. We are at one on the aim of the Bill, and on the manner of debate.

It is also true to say that the great majority of the measures in the Bill are welcome. That is no surprise, because we welcomed the White Paper, which the Bill faithfully implements in almost all respects. We wholly applaud the naturalisation provisions. In fact, I think that they are long overdue. Neither the Home Secretary's Labour predecessor nor his Conservative predecessors moved as well in this direction as he has sought to do. This will be a bipartisan policy that I hope will last for many years.

I do not suppose that this is by any means the end of trying to create a centre of attraction and loyalty which all of us—of all persuasions, colours, creeds and origins—can share. The Americans have been much more successful in creating that than we have. This country needs to be able to accommodate wholesale diversity with a lack of friction, by having at its centre a set of institutions, understandings and acceptances that all of us share. That is vital to the future of our democracy, and I wholly share the Home Secretary's desire to see that aim furthered in the naturalisation provisions.

It is also unsurprising that we support the idea of introducing accommodation centres, because it strongly echoes the propositions that we made before the last general election.

Tony Baldry: Does my hon. Friend agree that it might be sensible to give careful consideration in Committee to the size of accommodation centres, and, particularly in relation to trial accommodation centres, to give local people, deliverers of local services and local communities the proper opportunity to be heard at a public inquiry?

Mr. Letwin: My answer is yes. I shall dwell on those matters and several others of practical importance in relation to accommodation centres in a moment. My welcome for them is a welcome for the idea and not for all the details in the Bill, which, as I shall explain in a moment, are in some respects deficient. The two points that my hon. Friend mentions are among the most important.

We also welcome some—indeed, most—of the detailed provisions elsewhere in the Bill. In that context, I mention particularly the consolidation and streamlining of the appeals process. There is no doubt that if people are enabled to make several different concurrent or serial appeals, the system will remain in chaos. It is right that the whole appeal system should be consolidated, and the measures that we are considering, the drafting of which we want to inspect in detail, tend in the right direction and will carry our support—not that the Home Secretary requires our support in this House, but, perhaps more importantly, they will carry our support in the other place, too.

We have concerns about a particular class of asylum seeker—those who have not been refused appeal or lost an appeal, but who are in the course of appeal and are detained. If we understand the Bill correctly, they will not have an automatic right of bail at any time—by that I mean even an automatic right to have the proposition of bail considered. We have received representations about that and we share that concern.

Mr. Blunkett: Because of the length of my speech, I was not able to deal with every single item in the Bill, but I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has raised this matter. It is correct that the automatic right—whereby anyone who applies for bail will automatically be granted a hearing—will be ruled out by the Bill, but not the right to put a case for a bail hearing. Those concerned will be dealt with on the same basis as other people who applied in similar circumstances. At the moment, there is an automatic right, irrespective of what case is put, for that bail hearing to be heard in circumstances that might allow people to go for bail the day before they are flying out of the country. That is ridiculous. It has therefore been used as a method of ensuring that people could avoid being held temporarily while their removal from the country was being organised.

Mr. Letwin: The House will not forgive the Home Secretary or me if we continue this detailed discussion,

which is clearly more suitable for Committee. I merely signal that we will want to raise this issue in Committee and tease out the extent to which the position for that particular class of asylum seeker is reasonable.

Mr. Gerrard: On the question of the automatic bail hearing, was not that one part of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 that was never implemented? People do not have an automatic bail hearing at present. The concern is that, although an application can be made for bail, it has proved extremely difficult in the past for people to get it.

Mr. Letwin: That is correct. Part III of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 was never brought into force, which is why that provision is not yet implemented. That is one of the reasons why I raise this issue. We shall debate the matter in Committee, and perhaps the Opposition and the hon. Gentleman will be ad idem on it.

Simon Hughes: May I press the hon. Gentleman on his and his colleagues' view on this issue? Is it his view, as it is ours, that, until the end of the process, or just before it, the presumption should be that asylum seekers are not detained and are at liberty—that the loss of liberty should come only at the end, or just before the end, of the process of applications?

Mr. Letwin: Subject to the requirement for judicial oversight and to there being particular cases in which it is judged that there is a serious risk, my answer is yes.

Mr. Blunkett: To be even more helpful, may I clarify a point so that there is no misunderstanding? Habeas corpus still applies. People are entitled to that, and the real problem is those who are held inappropriately before they reach the point at which removal is required.

Mr. Letwin: That is exactly my view.

Having said that all those things are welcome and having congratulated the Home Secretary on the manner in which he is pursuing this whole endeavour, I must add that good intentions and an appropriate means of debate are not enough. To produce the results that he and I desire—namely, to create harmony where there is discord and to deny the extremists the purchase that they have or might have on the minds of some voters—we must not merely try hard and in the right spirit, but succeed.

We must take a system that the Home Secretary has correctly described as chaotic—it was not in perfect working order in 1997, but it has got substantially worse—and turn it into an orderly system that achieves the two results that he and I share the desire to achieve. Those are the rapid, effective admission of refugees fleeing dreadful persecution and the equally rapid and effective removal of those seeking to use this as opposed to other, legitimate means to enter the country, getting round rather than facing the immigration rules.

Those are joint aims, and we must succeed in delivering them to the British public—not 20 years from now, but very soon—if we are to achieve the effects on our democracy that the Home Secretary and I want to achieve. Therefore, it is important to consider whether the practical aspects of what is proposed will rapidly achieve those results. There, we have significant concerns, and those relate, in the first place, to two aspects of the accommodation centres.

I make no apology for repeating certain points, because I still believe them to be true. They did not enter the White Paper and they have not entered the Bill. Now, as the Bill progresses, we have an opportunity to include them in legislation and administrative practice. Everything that I shall say about the accommodation centres springs from a difference of view between the Home Secretary and me about what they ought to be in their first incarnation.

As I understand it, the Home Secretary envisages about 3,000 places in four accommodation centres of 750 inhabitants each, which, on average, will take about six months to process the applications of their inhabitants. Therefore, they will constitute no more than what he accurately described as a trial, leaving the overwhelming bulk of applications to be processed on the same basis as at present and with the dispersal systems as at present. Although his welcome changes on vouchers and the appeals process are exceptions, he is, on the whole, making no significant alterations.

Three years from now, the accommodation centres that the Home Secretary envisages will, I guess, probably only just have been constructed and established, given the planning constraints—I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) that those must be fairly intense—and the consultative procedures involved. Even then, they will process only some 6,000 applicants out of 60,000, 70,000, 80,000 or 90,000 a year. So, they constitute not a major shift from chaos to order, but, as the Home Secretary envisages them, an experiment on what might later be a means of doing so. The Home Secretary understates the urgency of the problem.

The difficulty with the six-month period arises essentially because the Home Secretary or his officials have not thought of these accommodation centres seriously as one-stop shops. I want to spell out what we mean by a one-stop shop.

We believe that a large part of the chaos of the present system is engendered by the paper chase and the people chase around the United Kingdom, as appeals move people and paper from place to place. What has gone wrong at the initial stages of applications arises from two causes. First, there is an insufficiency of appropriate legal advice—I stress the word "appropriate". I share the Home Secretary's doubts about the behaviour of some of the lawyers. Secondly, there is an insufficiency of reliable, accepted and judicially accepted country risk assessments.

We will not have an effective system for processing applications until we gather together in one place the relevant legal expertise that the Bill envisages—that is the intention, but we will tease out in Committee how far that is true—the relevant medical expertise and the relevant interpretive expertise, both of which are also signalled in the Bill, the caseworkers who make the initial decisions and the adjudicators. We will not eliminate the paper chase and make the whole process last weeks rather than months unless present on that site is the whole array of expertise required to reach the end of the consolidated appeals process. That is perfectly doable. No doubt there would be expenses, but vast savings would also be made.

We will not make the process work merely by having a one-stop shop if the decision makers, the lawyers and the adjudicators—in effect, the judges—do not believe the

[Mr. Letwin]

country risk assessments. The Home Secretary, the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) and I had an interesting encounter not long ago on the Zimbabwe risk assessment, since when we have reviewed a number of others. The Home Secretary knows as well as I do that the Zimbabwe assessment was ludicrous. That is not his fault, but it is the fault of the current system. The assessment had probably not been ludicrous at some previous date, but it had become ludicrous.

Many other risk assessments are not so evidently ludicrous, but are nevertheless questionable. I have been dealing at some length with cases relating to Congo Brazzaville, which is a country that I happen to know well. From what I gather, I have a rather closer acquaintance with developments in that country than those responsible for the risk assessment have. My view is that the risk assessment is not very well assessed, and I suspect that that is the view the courts would take of it.

We will not solve this problem until an independent body, which has the highest possible qualifications for the job and is unchallengeable by the bureaucracy, is responsible for risk assessments. That is mainly because an independent risk assessment would not be influenced by a desire to achieve a particular result in appeals. Paradoxically or ironically, such a body would thereby more frequently achieve a result consistent with the initial decision, which would save time, money and misery.

We believe that one-stop shops should include everyone from the decision makers through to the adjudicators, with all the expertise required, and against the background of proper, independent risk assessments. If that were to happen, and if the energy that the Home Secretary displays in conducting the political battle against us and others were displayed by the people responsible for winning the job of running those centres, those individuals could bring about the miracle of processing claims not in months but in weeks. Much would then alter.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): The hon. Gentleman makes some interesting points about the current dispersal system. On the creation of reception centres, he seems to think that the changes do not go far enough. Is he proposing the creation of more reception centres, or the contradictory approach of widening the dispersal areas, which currently take in largely urban areas? Is he suggesting that the spa towns that surround certain urban areas be included?

Mr. Letwin: I shall discuss the size of the centres in a moment. I am not advocating that they house more than 3,000 inhabitants in the first instance, but I am advocating that, by the means that I have described, we institute a system that stands a chance of processing applications in, say, an average of five weeks. According to the Home Secretary's officials, at the moment some 3,000 people are taken through the system twice a year, but under my proposal, the same amount would be processed 10 times a year. In other words, some 30,000 applicants would be processed each year, instead of 6,000. Rather than making an approximately 10 per cent. difference to the current level of applications and dispersals, a vastly greater difference—30, 40 or 50 per cent.—would be made.

In short, I want an experiment to be conducted on a far greater scale, so that much more can be done to relieve the pressure on the dispersal system. I shall describe later how we hope that the remaining pressure on the system might be taken care of, so that it virtually disappears by the end of this Parliament. That must be our aim.

Mr. Dawson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the phrase "one-stop shop" is perhaps a slight misnomer for the type of institution that he describes? In referring to a process in which all needs are met, all assessments are completed and all judgments are made, he is describing something more akin to a total institution. That is somewhat foreign to the liberal democracy to which the Bill seeks to welcome people, and which it recommends as the way forward.

Mr. Letwin: No, I simply do not agree. I accept entirely the Home Secretary's point that people will be able to come and go from accommodation centres, but I see no reason why the addition of adjudicators and better legal services on site would make such entities less attractive from a democratic point of view. If we resolve the chaos in the system, we will succeed vastly more quickly in allowing the victims of persecution to enter this country. That would be a triumph for tolerance and democracy.

Fiona Mactaggart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Letwin: I will in a moment, but I want to deal with the question of size, which is very relevant.

Much of the problem alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury is caused by the proposed size of the operations. As I said, a total of 3,000 inhabitants is a reasonable aim if the other adjustments that I described are made, but four vast centres, each housing 750 inhabitants, is not a sensible way forward. I was pleased to hear the Home Secretary mention the possibility that at least some centres will be significantly smaller, and I take his point that a minimum scale is sensible. We should not seek to lay down particular sizes for ever, because the economies of scale will doubtless differ over time and across languages, for example. It would be sensible to try to create centres that specialise in particular kinds of asylum applicant from particular places, so that, for example, specific translation facilities and expertise can be developed.

In short, economies of scale are determined not merely by the numbers of people being processed, but by the aptness of institutions to the particular character of the people whose cases they are processing. I do not want to offend the Home Secretary's hard-working officials, but I sense that the establishment of four centres each holding 750 people is an example of the Home Office's characteristic desire that such projects should be neat, large and systematic. What we really need is a set of centres that are effective because they are tailored to the characteristics of the human beings with whom they are dealing.

Smaller units would make it much easier for my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury and the other hon. Members who are affected—and, more importantly, their constituents—to accept accommodation centres in

their back yards. Smaller units could also be constructed more quickly. The Home Office may be suffering from the old illusion that the fewer there are of such units, the more quickly they can be prepared, as there will not be so many concurrent processes to go through.

All my experience—which I suspect that the Home Secretary shares—of watching Governments at work suggests that they take a very long time to put large projects in place. That is because we in this country increasingly, and rightly, respect local rights whenever a large project is about to be dumped on a local population. There is no getting around the fact that the local populations involved will feel that they have been dumped on, even though the construction of these units is very much in the national interest. For all sorts of reasons, therefore, it would be very helpful if the Home Secretary were to reconsider the centres.

The combination of one-stop shops, the reduction of scale that I have outlined, the introduction of independent assessments, the speeding up of the proposals for establishing accommodation centres and quicker processing of applications in those centres once they have been established will, I believe, vastly alleviate the problems to do with education described by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), among others. It seems to me to be perfectly tolerable that specialised education should be available on site if people are staying in the centres only for a matter of weeks. Her complaint seems to arise from the fact that the Home Secretary is envisaging that people will stay for a pretty long time, in separate educational establishments. The approach that I have set out might not solve the problems to which the hon. Lady has referred, but I believe that it would vastly alleviate them.

Ms Abbott: If I seriously thought that people would be staying only a few days or weeks, I would not take such a strong line. However, this is the fifth Bill on immigration and asylum during my time in the House. When Ministers say that people will stay in such centres for a maximum of six months, I know that one should think in terms of a year.

Mr. Letwin: The Opposition have made the same assessment In our more pessimistic moments, we believe that people could stay even longer. I am delighted that the hon. Lady has said what I speculated that she would—that the problems to do with education might not arise if people stayed only a short time in such centres.

The Opposition's proposals would be better for the country, and for the Home Secretary. They would allow him a more peaceful time with his Back Benchers. What could be better? In fact, I can think of many things, but there we are.

My final point about the scale of the accommodation centres trumps all the others that I have made. The memory of the ghastly episode at Yarl's Wood is seared on the Home Secretary's mind more than it is on anyone else's because he has had to deal with the aftermath, even though he was not responsible for its origins. No living individual created that problem. I am sure that the report, when it appears, will show that there is no villain of this piece, and that no individual performed a series of evil acts that led to the problems at Yarl's Wood. No doubt, the report will show that a series of unfortunate elements came together.

I am sure that lessons will be learned, but I am persuaded—I admit that I have no empirical evidence on this matter, just a human instinct that I suspect that the Home Secretary might share—that the chances of such disruption happening are vastly reduced when human institutions are relatively small and on a human scale, when they deal with people from roughly the same part of the world and have translation facilities in good working order, and when there is a sense that human beings are being dealt with as human beings. These huge centres, for 750 men, women and children, stand far too great a risk of creating, or recreating, the friction which, if they do not lead to the events that we saw at Yarl's Wood—and I hope that they never do—may generate other problems. That is the biggest single reason for making the centres smaller, although there are many others.

Let me turn to matters that are not in the Bill. Some of them cannot be because they are not matters of legislation, but we continue to believe that they are critical. I was encouraged by the Home Secretary's attitude to these matters earlier this afternoon. I wholly concur that he was right, when we last debated this issue, to draw the House's attention to the need to await the results of the French election before proceeding to renegotiate the bilateral agreement. I believe, however, that the only way to solve the problem of our current system is by combining the tactics that I have described which might, if they worked appropriately and took just a few weeks in each case, accommodate about 30,000 applicants. I believe that we will solve the problem only if we can reduce the number of applicants by many thousands more by reinstituting the bilateral agreement. That is the second part of my answer to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey. I hope that we can see the withering of the dispersal system by accommodating about 30,000 applicants in the accommodation centres and that the number of applicants will, over time, be reduced by another 30,000 or so after reinstituting the bilateral agreement. I do not think that there is any other way of getting to where we need to be.

I am delighted that the Home Secretary seems to be moving towards a negotiation with the French after their election. I profoundly hope that it will deliver Mr. Chirac—in which hope I guess the right hon. Gentleman and I are joined—and a conservative rather than a socialist Government, but certainly not one composed of evil persons. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will appeal to his colleague, the former Home Secretary—now Foreign Secretary and responsible for our diplomats—to exercise some ingenuity in achieving that result. Indeed, I hope that he will do more and achieve a renegotiation of the Dublin convention in Dublin. That convention should be systematically altered so that it reflects what is possible and practical rather than what is imaginary and theoretical.

It is imaginary and theoretical to suppose that one can trace the first port of entry to a safe country. It would be practical and useful to have a general agreement across Europe that when asylum applicants come from a safe country to another safe country, they should return to the safe country from which they started their travels to have their application processed there. If we could achieve that on a Europe-wide basis, our desire to see the dispersal system wither, the whole process take weeks and the system return to a state of order would be deliverable.

[Mr. Letwin]

In short, we hope to see the Bill not so much change as evolve. We hope that it will be improved as it proceeds through its stages, and we shall support it tonight. We hope that the French election will be won by the right candidate and that the Home Secretary will, through the agency of his colleagues, achieve the renegotiation of which I spoke. If we can do all those things, the Home Secretary will be able to enter the next election not just with a chain of well-intentioned moves or a reputation for having maintained a robust but rational discussion of these matters but with a reputation for resolving them. As a matter of political expediency, that would be a disaster for me, because I would have to go into the next election conceding that he had succeeded. However, as an Englishman, I would welcome it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I remind the House that the Speaker has placed a 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

5.29 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I shall not pursue the arguments of the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), but he may not object if I tell him that I found his contribution a radical change from those that we have heard from his predecessors on the Tory Front Bench. Speaking as an individual supporter of the Government, I certainly welcome his general tone and his argument for rational discussion. That can do nothing but improve our future debates on the general questions of nationality, immigration and asylum. He adopted a most moderate attitude and tone and he should be complimented on that.

At the end of the hon. Gentleman's speech, he said that he and perhaps other Tory Opposition Members would support the Government in the Lobby if there is a vote. I can only say that previously that would have driven me into the other Lobby, but on this occasion it is not likely to have that effect.

The Home Secretary reminds me greatly of his predecessor, now the Foreign Secretary, in the way that he introduces and responds to debate. His technique—like that of his predecessor—appears to be to take the venom out of every punch that is delivered to him. He offers himself as a punch-bag, so that at the end of an hour, when he has absorbed so much punishment and all his opponents on his own Benches are so exhausted by presenting their points and having them refuted, we go away feeling not only that he is an honourable gentleman—we know that—but that he is also one of intellectual stature who, despite apparent differences of opinion, agrees with us all anyway. His approach certainly appears to work.

The House will probably have gathered that while I cautiously welcome the Bill, I am not an ardent supporter. For the first time in 40 years, however, we have a measure on nationality, immigration and asylum that tries to address the current and future economic and social problems of the United Kingdom rather than being predicated on the need to prevent non-white immigration. That is to be warmly welcomed.

If I may, I shall introduce a discordant note as regards some of the comments made earlier by my right hon. Friend. I heard his explanation for the use of the word "swamping". He claimed that he could have used other words, such as "overwhelmed" or "overburdened". Although I understand his need to address the real issues, I think that it is a mistake, in the context of the more rational debate that we are conducting at present, to introduce the word "swamped", which is redolent of remarks made in opposition by a former Tory Prime Minister.

I want to address my remarks to those parts of the Bill that deal primarily with nationality and immigration. I want also to draw attention to factors that should have been included in the Bill and to factors that will, I hope, be addressed in later immigration rules.

I welcome the easing of entry controls for unmarried partners and those in long-term relationships. I also welcome the speeding up of the decision-making process on naturalisation applications and the need, in future, to give reasons for refusal.

I now have no difficulty in accepting citizenship classes if they are intended, as appears to be the case from paragraph 2.2 of the White Paper, to improve civic participation and awareness, not to promote cultural uniformity. I have no problem with those classes if the intention is carried out as outlined in paragraph 2.2.

I wish that I could say the same about the language test, but I cannot, especially given the decision to apply it to the spouses of existing British citizens. I certainly have strong reservations about that. British citizens should be free to marry and choose as their partners whomever they wish and those partners should, after a suitable period, be able to become British citizens without having to show linguistic ability in English. I also believe that there is a need for great sensitivity towards dependent relatives, the disabled and others who may have little enthusiasm or capacity to learn English, especially people who are in their declining years.

One thing that should have been tackled in the Bill but has not been is the position of British overseas citizens. That issue was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart). The Government have made a great mistake—it is certainly an error—in not including future provisions for British overseas citizens. As the House will know, those people have no status apart from their British overseas citizenship, which does not endow the right of abode in the United Kingdom. Although it can be argued that those people are technically British nationals, they are effectively stateless and have no automatic right of entry or abode in any state in the world.

I also believe that the Government made a mistake when they announced the abolition of the special voucher system some weeks ago, but I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement today that he will take a fresh look at that problem. I hope that, in the not too distant future, he will introduce a modified replacement for the special voucher scheme if he cannot offer all British overseas citizens full British citizenship. That will not create future problems for the United Kingdom. We are dealing with a dwindling number of ageing people and if we were to offer all of them British citizenship, and they were to accept it, the effect on net migration into the United Kingdom would be negligible.

I hope that the rules will also cover the probationary period on marriage and that, rather than increasing the period to two years, the Home Secretary will reduce it from 12 to six months, or abolish it altogether. I have always opposed the probationary period on marriage. The argument for it has always been that bogus marriages enable people to gain entry into the United Kingdom. No evidence has ever been adduced to show that bogus marriage provides a large number of people with entry into the United Kingdom. I do not believe that any evidence has been adduced to support the Home Secretary's decision to increase the period from 12 to 24 months.

Those who have come to see me in my constituency to complain about the probationary period share my view that increasing the period to two years will adversely affect all such marriages, especially as all couples will need to show an ability to maintain and accommodate for up to two years. In certain circumstances, an intolerable burden could be imposed on couples if they have to give such a financial commitment for two years. I hope that my right hon. Friend will reconsider that problem.

I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's decision to lay down orders today to abolish the payment of fees on appeals against the refusal of family visiting visas. We have argued for that in the past. I am delighted that he has seen reason and accepted that it is both unfair in principle and acts as a disincentive to those people who want to exercise a right of appeal.

There is one glaring problem that the White Paper and Bill fail to address: the appalling delay in the immigration system, and in particular, the time that it takes to appeal against a refusal to be brought before the Immigration Appellate Authority. The Government have shown, especially in asylum cases, that the process can be speeded up if there is the will to do so. I just hope that the Home Office shows the same regard to people who are waiting in the immigration queue for their appeals to be settled.

5.41 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I welcome the debate. The Home Secretary was generous in giving way and his speech took 68 minutes. His Conservative opposite number took 34 minutes. I cannot promise to take only 17 minutes, but I shall try hard, not least because many hon. Members want to participate in the debate.

Before the last general election, the Liberal Democrats called, and were too often frustrated, for a rational and calm debate about immigration and asylum. It is encouraging that the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary spoke in such measured terms, and we welcome that greatly. I hope that everything I say will be similarly measured. Indeed, that has been my experience since the general election of most exchanges with the Home Secretary and his colleagues, including the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle). We propose to continue in that vein.

In our manifesto last year, my party began its section on asylum and immigration by saying:

"Immigrants are too often labelled as a problem for British society. Britain has benefited hugely from immigration, in the same way that many Britons who have emigrated have benefited from their experience."

That sets out our approach to the debate. We are a country of people who have migrated within Britain and who have emigrated from, and migrated to, Britain over hundreds of years. That has made us the rich, varied and successful country that in many respects we are today.

At the last election, we put some specifics on the agenda in the context of asylum and immigration. We proposed, as we did when we debated the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, the abolition of vouchers and their replacement with a more cash-specific system. We therefore welcomed the announcement that vouchers were going. I am sorry if I was not more profuse in that. Next time, I shall send the Home Secretary my press releases and mark them "personal" so that he is even more aware of my views. We were grateful for that change of policy.

We support the piloting of what the right hon. Gentleman calls accommodation centres. He would be right to rebuke us if we did not because we had proposed the piloting of regional reception centres in our manifesto. We believe that people should be gathered together in one place where all the processes are undertaken. I welcome the programme to run different pilots around the country.

The Home Secretary sensibly responded to the call for a more inclusive and widespread review of immigration policy so that more people can enter the country lawfully to do the jobs that British society and our economy need them to do. I was also encouraged by the Home Secretary's comments about considering with his colleagues in other Departments how to ensure that we get not only enough doctors of philosophy and computer scientists, but enough people to carry out the manual and technically unskilled jobs that many of us also rely on recent immigrants to do. The example that I often give is the people who do the car wash at the Elephant and Castle, who are almost all from Kosovo. They are filling a gap in the market. When I went to the Royal Surrey County hospital some time ago, I was told that they could not get people to clean the floors. There is a huge demand for immigrant labour in south-east England. We rely on it greatly, as do most other European countries.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Does my hon. Friend agree that is odd that the Home Secretary did not echo the sentiments expressed by Lord Rooker, who said that people who have settled in this country collectively contribute more to the public purse, through the taxes that they pay, than they take out of it, so they are net contributors to the national economy?

Simon Hughes: I have not done that calculation, but my hon. Friend makes the point well. I believe that that is accepted by all Home Office Ministers, and that if the Home Secretary did not mention it today, that does not mean that he dissents from it. We all realise the net benefit provided by people who come to Britain to work.

We generally welcomed the Government's proposals when they announced them on 29 October, as we generally welcomed the White Paper on 7 February, and we have been as positive as possible since then. There was then a short consultation period, which ended on 16 March, and the Bill was published on 12 April.

As my first request I therefore ask if, before the start of proceedings in Committee, Ministers will put into the Libraries of both Houses the replies to the consultation, which were still not there when I checked this morning.

[Simon Hughes]

It is important that hon. Members who conduct the detailed scrutiny of the Bill know what people have said, not least because some of the issues are technical and detailed and we would benefit from their advice.

Mr. Blunkett *indicated assent.*

Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the Home Secretary; that will be helpful.

Since the Bill was published however, many people have expressed disappointment that some measures that could and should have been included were left out. The Home Secretary explained the delayed inclusion of proposals for the appeals process. I understand that that is a difficult issue, but such complicated matters require the maximum amount of time for proper scrutiny, and the Bill will be in Committee for only a short time, ending on 16 May. According to the programme motion, the Bill must complete its passage through Committee, Report and Third Reading very quickly. We object to that, as I have made clear to Government Whips over the past few days.

Our overriding concern is that although much of the Bill is acceptable and worthy of support, significant aspects need to be changed. Last night, when I collected together all the documents from agencies and organisations that have sent submissions, I noted the recurrent theme of disappointment that many issues that the Bill could have dealt with are not included. I therefore encourage the Home Secretary and his colleagues to work over the next few weeks with Opposition Members, and others with an interest, to change the parts of the Bill that are wrong.

The Immigration Advisory Service, a good and respected organisation based in my constituency, says at the beginning of its briefing on asylum policy:

"We regret that the Bill continues to base asylum policy on deterrence rather than an understanding of the reasons why asylum seekers come to the UK."

Amnesty, although it welcomes several of the Government's proposals, notes:

"we believe that the progressive elements of the reforms contained in the . . . Bill . . . are outweighed by measures which will undermine the quality of protection afforded by the UK to victims of human rights violations."

The Immigration Law Practitioners Association

"regrets that this Bill makes no proposals for improving the basis of making individual decisions on asylum applications—the foundation of the system, without which other alterations will not work."

A series of further organisations, all entirely respectable, make similar points. The Refugee Legal Centre, which used to be based in my constituency but has now moved north of the river, says:

"Perhaps of most concern is what is not in the Bill",

including the proposals

"restricting the right to judicially review poor decisions",

which

"are still . . . the subject of consultation with senior judiciary."

The Home Secretary has now indicated that those proposals will be made soon.

The Commission for Racial Equality has considerable concerns about the way in which accommodation centres will be managed. The Law Society says that

"an opportunity has been missed to ensure the quality of the determination process in asylum claims."

The Churches Commission for Racial Justice, which has always taken a particular interest, having cautiously welcomed the proposals, says that the tone is

"negative, and shows an intention to deter and prohibit the small numbers seeking refuge in the UK."

I have taken a sentence from each of half a dozen of the submissions that came my way, unsolicited, but perhaps the two that most effectively put the case are those from Justice and the Refugee Council. Justice, from which I have just accepted an invitation to become a council member, so I declare an interest, found it

"unfortunate that the Bill does not make any radical changes to the asylum determination process itself".

We may argue about that, but that is Justice's view. The Refugee Council, having, like everybody, welcomed many of the measures in the Bill, is concerned above all that it concentrates

"on the control and the removal of rejected asylum seekers",

rather than on the real purpose of asylum, which is to protect refugees.

I set out that background to add non-political and non-party political strength to what I am about to say. As the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) pointed out, since she and I have been in this place, we have seen a succession of Bills on this subject. This is the fourth in 10 years. My party voted against the Second and Third Readings of each of the other three Bills—two Conservative and one Labour. In an attempt to be constructive, as I have said we will always be, we will however not vote against the Second Reading tonight. We shall reserve our position today because the Bill contains good news and improvements.

We shall vote against the programme motion because we think that it will be impossible to complete the work in the time allocated, and I hope that the Whips will agree to the request for more time. They have said that they will consider it, and it will depend on how much progress we make. However, I hope that the Government will take a constructive attitude to dealing with the serious objections that I am about to identify, because with major changes in those areas, some of which were touched on by the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the Bill could be significantly better and ensure much better protection of the rights of people coming to this country. As it is, the Bill reduces the rights of some people who are often the most vulnerable and needy in our society.

Mr. Blunkett: I want to reflect on what has been said about the timetable by the shadow Home Secretary and the Liberal Democrat spokesman. During the course of the evening I shall consult with my Whips and with Opposition Whips on the provision of additional days for the Committee stage. If that would assist, we could make much better progress and have a much better spirit in the Committee proceedings, particularly given the additional substantive amendments that I shall introduce on the appeals process and other matters. If we genuinely mean to try to achieve a consensus across a wide range of the

political spectrum, that would be opportune, and I shall see whether we can avoid the necessity of voting on the programme motion.

Simon Hughes: The Home Secretary's intervention is extremely welcome, and it is taken in exactly the spirit in which it was made. My colleagues and I are determined to get this right—much more right than the last three attempts were. It is in nobody's interests that we have another Bill in three years to put right what we get wrong this time.

The Home Secretary will know, but I point it out for the record, that there are many people with a proper interest and expertise in these matters, such as the Immigration Law Practitioners Association, who need time to work alongside us in Committee, to give advice and to respond to initiatives made by the Government. That is why hon. Members, even those as experienced as the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), will need a little time between Committee sittings if we are to be able to do our job properly.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): May I just say how much Conservative Members welcome what the Home Secretary said about the programme motion?

Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

On the substance of the Bill, I shall be brief about part 1, about which the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) understandably went into more detail. These are difficult and sensitive issues, and we need to make sure that we strike the right balance of rights and responsibilities for people who come here to be citizens. The issue of the oath and the pledge goes wider than that of new arrivals to this country, and we need to debate it in that wider context.

Others have proposed that in the medium term we should move to follow the Canadian system, in which such matters are managed independently. I am not being provocative, but the best parallel that has been made is that of exchange rates and the Bank of England, as an example of where the Government are hands-off. There is a strong argument for those matters being outwith party political manipulation, and I encourage that.

I make one linked proposal to the Home Secretary, to which I think he will be sympathetic. If we are to have a process of affirming citizenship, not by tests and exams that make sure that people can do an English comprehension exercise, but by a sensitive method of assimilating them, there is an equal need for that to apply also to young people growing up in this country. My experience is that the need to understand the obligations of adult citizenship is much higher among some of our own young people than among people coming from other countries, who often display much better behaviour and respect for other people than, sadly, do some of the people who were born in this country and who have grown up in our community.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely, which is why, as Secretary of State for Education and Employment, I brought in the compulsory teaching of citizenship and democracy, which starts this September.

Simon Hughes: I know and welcome that. I know also that the Citizenship Foundation has thoughts on the Bill, and I hope that the Home Secretary will be willing to hear and respond to them. However, I am serious—we ought to go further than the Home Secretary did in his previous guise and ensure that adulthood, when one gets the right to vote and other rights, is accompanied by a recognition of responsibility for all British citizens too.

The difficulty with the nationality and immigration parts of the Bill is in clauses 105 to 110, and there is a coalition of concerns about those issues. The CBI, the TUC and others are very concerned that private sector employers should not act as immigration officials. I am keen to ensure that information properly acquired by an employer, a family or a landlord is not passed, without any controls, to others in the private sector, or to other individuals and organisations. The protection of data personal to an individual should be similar whether they are an immigrant or British-born. I am keen that we do not have new and draconian powers to intervene or to break into a person's home or office which are in any way different from those that would apply to a British-born person who was breaking rules on health and safety or employment. I hope that the practice will be non-discriminatory, and we need urgently to look at part 7.

The most controversial subject of the Bill is, however, asylum rather than immigration or nationality, and it remains so in this Bill. The hon. Member for West Dorset was right to say that the crucial issue is getting right the decision making. We need good initial decisions that do not need to be appealed against, and therefore people should be legally represented from the beginning of the process so that everybody has confidence in the system.

I have never understood—Ministers might say that I never will unless I become a Minister in a Department like the Home Office, which is why I am trying so hard to get there—the reason why the targets set are so often not reached. The Home Secretary was very honest when he said that the Home Office makes progress slowly; I think that that is true. Let me give an example from the most recent targets set for the immigration and nationality directorate at Lunar house. The Government set themselves a target of 60 per cent. of asylum claims dealt with within two months; the latest performance figure is 45 per cent. *[Interruption.]* The Minister says it is now 48 per cent. A target of 70 per cent. of claims dealt with within four months was set; the figure for Lunar house posted on 25 March was 61 per cent. I realise that we often fall short of our aspirations, so let us concentrate on making sure that we set and meet realistic targets, and above all on making decisions quickly—and properly, so that there are not lots of appeals.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): We have high aspirations and hope to meet the targets. I agree that we need to improve the standard and quality of initial decisions. The hon. Gentleman says that, if we did, there would not be appeals, but does he recognise that in the context of asylum and immigration, if there is an appeals process, the vast majority of people involved will use it? There will always be appeals: every part of the system that allows appeals will be used because, as the evidence shows, that is how asylum seekers use the rights that they have.

Simon Hughes: I understand that, but that is why I point out to Ministers that quicker recent initial decisions

[Simon Hughes]

have led to more appeals. Although the Home Secretary and I cited different facts, we agree that although people who are granted permission to stay might initially comprise less than 20 per cent. of the total, by the time other factors have been considered and appeals have happened, that figure rises to 30 or 40 per cent. I understand the Under-Secretary of State's point, but we must continue to try to get the process right.

We welcome the pilot of accommodation centres, but there are problems. There must be access to legal advice from the time that people arrive. Although that was mentioned in the White Paper, the Bill does not mention it, and it should. That is a major defect. The Bill also leaves other services listed—for example, transport, education and training—as optional. I hope that they will become requirements.

The Conservative spokesman spoke about the size of the centres. There might be a case for trialling some large accommodation centres, and there is certainly a case for having some smaller ones. It is important that they work in themselves and that they are not isolated from the rest of the world. It is no good having a non-detention centre if there is nowhere outside for its people to go. People have to have some links with the local community.

My colleagues and I are unhappy about the idea of privately run detention and accommodation centres. Whatever the arguments that apply to the Prison Service, the asylum seeker centres should be kept in the public sector, especially while they are being trialled. We hope that that will be possible. We look forward to seeing the regulations as soon as possible, because that is where all the details will be found.

There is a problem with the conditions of residence. Currently, most people are dispersed around the country. In theory, people will have a choice between going to an accommodation centre and remaining with family or friends. There should be no financial penalty if people choose to go to family and friends. I will be grateful for an assurance from the Minister that the Home Office will look again at that matter. I understand that currently between 20 and 40 per cent. of people do not look to the Government to provide accommodation, choosing instead to provide for themselves; clearly, however, they need income to cover food and other necessities of survival.

Earlier, I said that there were arguments in favour of education at the beginning of the process that addresses the interests of refugees, normally non-English-speaking children. However, that depends on there being a six-month upper limit to the time that people spend in accommodation centres.

Mr. Coleman: I will be grateful if the hon. Gentleman clarifies the Liberal Democrats' position on the education of child asylum seekers in accommodation centres. From the remarks that he made just now and when he intervened on the Home Secretary, it appears that the Liberal Democrats support the proposal to withdraw mainstream education from the children of asylum seekers. Is that the official Liberal Democrat position? Before he replies, perhaps I should advise him that last night, when my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) and I were asking people to sign early-day motion 1187 condemning that proposal, I asked 10 Liberal Democrat Members whether they would sign it, and every single one did so with considerable relish.

Simon Hughes: That is a perfectly proper question. I was extremely careful in my intervention on the Home Secretary. There should be no withdrawal of state education or any other state provision from asylum seekers or immigrants. The question is at what stage they enter the mainstream system. I put my question to the Home Secretary to elicit an assurance that there will be a maximum period that people will spend in the transitional arrangements, as he put it, before going on to mainstream schools. I made clear my understanding, and the Home Secretary confirmed it, that Government policy is to have a maximum of 3,000 people in accommodation centres. If the hon. Gentleman has read the figures, he will know that currently about 90,000 applicants enter this country each year. The vast majority will therefore be dispersed around the country and the children will go to local schools in the normal way.

Mr. Coleman: I am well aware of those figures and I understand them. Does the hon. Gentleman and do the Liberal Democrats officially regard it as acceptable to remove mainstream education from hundreds of asylum-seeker children for up to six months? Yes or no?

Simon Hughes: The answer is no. I have never said otherwise.

The proposal in our manifesto was to trial reception centres around the country, with the implication that all the services would be provided in the centres as long as people remained there, but that the people would be moved on to other accommodation as soon as possible. The arrangement is temporary and transitional—a post on people's way, whether or not they are accepted for permanent settlement, to the mainstream system of education, health and so on.

In a Committee debate, the Minister said that she would examine the level of income support available to asylum seekers. The proportion currently available is 70 per cent. of that given to British citizens. I shall be grateful for an assurance that there will be an independent adjudication to determine the right level, and that the Government will reconsider the matter. I hope that we will also get the answers from the dispersal review as soon as possible, because we cannot judge the best system until we have seen the results of the investigation of the process.

The Bill still reflects real confusion about detention and removal. The Government propose to create new removal centres, but under the existing arrangements many of the people in such centres have not completed all the processes—not the initial process, and certainly not the appeals process. According to all independent assessments, more people are detained for longer and with less scrutiny in this country than in any other European country: thousands of people are affected each year in a rolling programme.

I shall be grateful therefore for much greater clarity in the legislation about the fact that detention will be possible only at or just before the time that the final decision is made, and that the rest of the people who come to this country will not be detained. In addition, I want it to be clear that the presumption will always be that there

is an automatic bail application. Having to apply for bail does not work because legal advice is not always available, or because the advice given is wrong or delayed, or because people decide that applying might be of disbenefit to their status. In the light of habeas corpus, the European convention on human rights, the Human Rights Act 1998 and other such provisions, it is important that the presumption at all stages is that persons who are detained have an automatic chance to make a bail application.

In addition, there must be a limit to the time that someone can be detained. Such limits do not appear in the Bill, even though after visiting Campsfield House some time ago, Her Majesty's inspector of prisons recommended that there should be limits.

My final substantive point concerns appeals, on which it is difficult for us to comment yet because we have not seen the Government's final proposals. It is wrong, however, that there is an absolute bar after a certain time on adjournments to cases, which are often called for, not by the applicant or asylum seeker in my experience, but by the Home Office or other parties who want extra time. It cannot be impossible for there to be proper procedures all the way through the process of determining whether somebody can stay here or not.

I hope that I have made clear some of the significant items in the Bill that remain to be improved. We reserve judgment tonight; the Government have said that we may get more time in Committee, which is welcome. We hope that important changes to the Bill can be made in Committee and on Report. Indeed, that must happen if we are to get the Bill right. In the meantime, we must continue to use moderate language if these issues are not to risk in the near future provoking extreme political reactions like those they have provoked across the channel. We all have an interest in making sure that that does not happen here.

6.11 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) was right: the tone of this debate is quite different from that of previous debates on immigration and nationality including, I remember, the first parliamentary debate on the subject in which I spoke 15 years ago.

Our debate is timely because, looking across the channel, we see the success of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the French elections. That awful result gives credence to the anti-immigration policies of that man and that movement. We should note what has happened in France and deal with it in the right way. We need to do several things, including confronting the far right openly and positively. As the Home Secretary said, we should confront and challenge its arguments; that is the only way we can deal with the pain and hate that it creates. We should continue our engagement in European debate; we should not assume that just because that particular man got many votes, he represents the true feelings of the French.

We need to engage in debate and show that the black and Asian population of this country has made and will continue to make an enormous contribution. You yourself know, Madam Deputy Speaker, from your visit with me last Saturday to the temple in Dudley that there was literally dancing in the streets as the procession went through the town centre, which would not have been possible 15 years ago.

We have a particular responsibility as we have the largest settled black and Asian population in Europe, and need to continue our leadership role. Le Pen will argue that immigrants are spongers, so we must show that they are contributors to society and make sure that their contribution is recognised. I speak as someone who came to this country as a first-generation immigrant, aged nine, from the former British colony of Aden and Yemen, where I was born. My parents went from India to Yemen as first-generation immigrants, and about a third of my constituents in Leicester, East are from families who came to Britain as first-generation immigrants from east Africa.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that parts of the British media, particularly the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening Standard*, would do well to take a bit more time and effort to promote the view that asylum seekers and people who migrate to this country come here to contribute and achieve, rather than to sponge? Some headlines in those papers do a great deal to foment race hatred and racism in our society, when the media could do a great deal to promote an inclusive and integrated society that recognises the value of all people.

Mr. Vaz: My hon. Friend is right; the media play an important and powerful role, and I hope that they will heed his words.

There are a number of essential points about the measure that are worth remembering. During the 15 years that I have attended immigration and nationality debates in the House, I have heard Conservative Home Secretaries say at the Dispatch Box that there is a link between tough immigration policies and good race relations. I have never believed that there is: good race relations in this country are based on what individuals feel about one another and Governments' ability to carry people with them. If we keep people out because they are black, Asian or of a different colour or culture, race relations are not improved. I do not believe that that link exists, and I hope that the Government will repeat that they do not believe it does either.

We must be careful about the language that we use. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) mentioned the Home Secretary's comments. I accept what the Home Secretary says, but my hon. Friend is right to be concerned because, for those of us who remember Lady Thatcher speaking about "swamping" in 1978, the use of that word is worrying. However, I know that that is not what the Home Secretary meant, and I am glad that he took the opportunity in our debate to clarify the issue because, as we have seen, the media can pick on a particular word, take it out of context and try to make it more important than it is.

We must respect cultures. The Home Secretary has been quoted as saying that he is against arranged marriages. I hope that the Under-Secretary will confirm that my right hon. Friend's remarks were taken out of context. Many of my constituents have arranged marriages and live happily with their partners.

Angela Eagle: I am grateful for the opportunity to clarify the Home Secretary's words. He did not question the practice of arranged marriages at all, but asked whether, now there are substantial numbers of British-born Asians who embrace the cultural practice of arranged marriage, it might not be more appropriate for

[Angela Eagle]

more arranged marriages to be conducted within the country rather than for people always to go back to the country of origin—*[Interruption.]* That is what he said, but he made no comment, adverse or otherwise, about the cultural practice of arranged marriage. With forced marriage, of course, it is quite different.

Mr. Vaz: The Minister has made it much worse. It is not up to the Home Secretary to decide who people should marry; they must make that decision themselves, and if they choose to marry someone from another country that is a matter for them. I hope that the Minister will reflect on what she has said; perhaps when she replies to the debate she will realise that people should marry whoever they want, not someone whom the Home Secretary and the Government decide they should marry.

I do not have a problem with ceremonies and the need for people to feel more British when they acquire citizenship. People in immigrant communities in Britain want to be part of this country when they get nationality and will welcome the idea of a ceremony. However, we must be careful to acknowledge differences; we cannot make everybody the same. Hon. Members who are old enough to remember the 1960s may recall a song by Blue Mink called "Melting Pot", which described people being put in the melting pot and producing a certain type of individual "by the score". Le Pen and the far right want us to eliminate difference, but we should celebrate it. Of course we want to be British, but we also want to make sure that different cultures and religions can express themselves and enjoy recognition.

As hon. Members have said, many aspects of the Bill will require careful scrutiny. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South about the probationary period, and was concerned about its extension to two years; knowing that there is another lever on them would put applicants' partners under intolerable pressure. However, all the representations that I have received suggest that people think the proposal is a good idea, so I will not object to it. I welcome the streamlining of the immigration process, but the Home Office has the worst departmental record for administrative delay. I do not blame Ministers or civil servants but the system. The delays are intolerable, but we do not need legislation to improve the chaos that is the immigration and nationality directorate.

I shall give the House several brief examples, the first of which concerns a constituent who wants to leave the country. He is in detention and wrote to me saying that because he is not happy to stay here, he wants to be sent back to his country before the end of the month, otherwise he will go on hunger strike. However, the Home Office still has his passport and will not release it.

There is another constituent who wants to stay but is not allowed to do so. After making an application three years ago for indefinite leave, she is still waiting for an answer. There is a real problem of lack of co-ordination between the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office over cases that come from abroad. The appeals section of the Home Office should be renamed room 101. Files just disappear in there and hon. Members spend all their time trying to find out what happened to explanatory statements. If we are in favour of streamlining, we should start by dealing with the IND. We must make sure that something is done.

The private office of the Home Secretary was extremely helpful when I said that I would raise these cases. A lady called Rebecca rang my office and said, "Why is Mr. Vaz upset? All cases are delayed." That is exactly the point. If we want a good system—a streamlined system—and if we want to deal with these cases quickly, we must make it as efficient as possible.

Passing legislation on immigration and nationality is not enough. We can all pass legislation. That is what we do. In the end, we must explain that legislation to the communities and make sure that we carry people with us. In our system, we must treat people fairly, properly and with respect. It is on that basis that we shall judge the Bill.

6.21 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I welcome the contribution from the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). I recall the great contribution that he made when I was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and we jointly worked to help the victims of BCCI—the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. I agree with a great deal of what he said today.

We are discussing important and sensitive issues, made all the more sensitive by the events in France, by the forthcoming local elections in this country and by the disturbing—albeit isolated—successes of the British National party at the last general election when, for the first time in a general election, it got double figure percentage votes in Oldham and neighbouring seats.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary and his colleague on the Front Bench today, my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), on the tone that they have taken in this and preceding debates and on the leadership that they have given on the issue. It is important that we all adopt a similar tone and I shall endeavour to do so.

When we speak about the problem of asylum and immigration, we must recognise what the problem is and is not. The problem is not asylum seekers as individuals. We owe sympathy and have an obligation to offer a safe haven to those who are genuinely fleeing from persecution abroad. We should sympathise even with those who are essentially economic migrants, as they often come from poor, disturbed and distressed countries. We should admire them because they have shown considerable enterprise and endeavour to get here, and we should recognise that they can make a major contribution to this country and often do.

The problem is not individuals. There are as many and as few bad eggs in every group of people, whatever their race or ethnic origin. The problem is simply one of numbers. There is clearly some limit—here I disagree with the hon. Member for Leicester, East—to the number of people we can absorb, the speed with which we can absorb them and the concentration in different parts of the country with which we can cope.

There is a limit and there are perfectly legitimate concerns about those problems and about the impact that large numbers of people can have on the fabric of society, the environment, housing and so on. If there were no such problems resulting from numbers and speed of inflow, there would be no rationale for the Bill, so implicitly we all recognise that those are the intrinsic problems.

The numbers are substantial. About 180,000 net immigrants were received by this country in the past couple of years for which we have figures. Probably less than half were asylum seekers. The other half were—

Mr. Vaz: May I clarify what I said? I did not say that there was no limit. I said that an immigration policy must be firm but fair. I did not say that we could have unlimited immigration to this country.

Mr. Lilley: I am sorry; I misunderstood the hon. Gentleman. I thought that he was against firmness and just in favour of fairness. I am glad that his remarks did not have the implications that I thought they had.

There is a large net inflow of immigrants into this country, perhaps half of whom are asylum seekers. The others are from the rest of the European Community and the rest of the world. After declining for many decades, in little more than the past decade, the population of London has increased dramatically by 600,000 people net—more than the entire population of Frankfurt. Many of those people are, of course, bankers from Germany, oil magnates from America, Greek shipping magnates from Athens or whatever, and contribute enormously to the wealth and prosperity of London—the point that I made last night at the Mansion House.

Mr. Dhanda: The right hon. Gentleman is making a rather misleading point, in the first instance by speaking of the net number of immigrants, and then by speaking about population. Population is not on the increase nationally. He cites the example of London. Population may be increasing in London, but there are various reasons for that. It is not all down to immigration.

Mr. Lilley: The population of London has increased by more than 600,000 in little more than a decade and is expected to go on increasing at that rate. We must recognise that there are strains and stresses arising from an increase in population, and we must accept that there can be legitimate concerns about that that must be taken on board.

We can learn some lessons from the French experience. I have a house over there and was there just before the elections. I was surprised by the outcome, but I should not have been. Every extended conversation that I have had with people at every level of society in recent years has inevitably got on to the subject of immigration and crime. The French are obsessed by it; they positively bore me with it.

I should have realised that although immigration dominates private discussion, it is largely excluded from public debate. As a result of that, and because the moderates have been silenced by accusations of racism whenever they raise those issues, the voters have been driven into the arms of the thugs and people like Le Pen—extremists of that ilk. We must make sure that the same thing does not happen in Britain. I entirely agree with the Home Secretary when he says that it is very important to discuss these issues and to articulate the concerns.

For all but two years of the past three decades I have lived in areas of London surrounded almost entirely by neighbours living in social housing. I have listened to them, and their conversations tend to be dominated by issues which most politicians are reluctant to discuss. That can have dangers. It is important that we undertake the delicate task of articulating concerns without inflaming fears or arousing hatred.

It is odious for anyone to try to play the race card, but there is a balance to be struck. It is equally odious for anyone to play the racism card and try to silence those who express the concerns of their constituents by labelling them as racism, or to try to stir up the fears of a minority against an element of the majority, as has been done before elections in this country.

Just before I came into the Chamber today, I was goaded by an interviewer on a television programme to attack the Home Secretary for using the word "swamped" and to accuse him of racism. I would not use that word myself, but it is ludicrous to accuse the Home Secretary of racism—as ludicrous as it was to accuse my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) of racism or to accuse, as one of the speakers did, the noble Lady, Baroness Thatcher, of racism. We must distinguish between moderate, sensible politicians discussing important issues, and attempts to silence our political opponents by playing the racism card.

Dual standards also provoke resentment. We rightly condemn and should continue to condemn anyone or any party, such as the BNP, that appeals to the concerns of, or claims to speak for, the white majority, yet we seem to patronise people who claim to speak for ethnic and racial minorities.

Many years ago when I was a candidate for Tottenham, a House of Commons Select Committee that was considering immigration was carrying out a study of the West Indian community. It came to Tottenham and, with great publicity, met the leaders of various insignificant black power groups—self-appointed, self-proclaimed leaders of the West Indian community. I was incensed by that and afterwards telephoned the Chairman to ask why the Committee had met people who were unelected who claimed to represent a racial group, yet did not meet me who represented the Conservative West Indians, of whom there were a considerable number. He said, "I am terribly sorry, Mr. Lilley. I didn't realise you were black." There is often the view in the race relations industry that only black people can represent black people.

I am happy that although I fought Tottenham and Tottenham fought back, the present representative of the people of Tottenham is there manifestly on his extremely considerable abilities and his willingness to represent all the people of Tottenham. That is the attitude that all of us must try to reflect in the House. We represent everybody, of all the ethnic groups in our constituencies, not just those who share our own colour.

There are genuine concerns about numbers and I want to be sure that the Home Secretary thinks that the Bill, which I largely support, will deal with the problems sufficiently effectively. In particular, I want to raise one issue that came to my attention when I was Secretary of State for Social Security, and that is the difference in the treatment of those who were subject to removal proceedings and those who were subject to deportation proceedings.

Those who come to Britain and declare at the point of entry that they are here to seek asylum are technically subsequently, if they are found not to have a valid claim, liable only to removal proceedings, which are much easier for the authorities and subject to fewer appeal processes.

[Mr. Lilley]

If they enter Britain saying that they are here for some other purpose and once in the country claim asylum, they can subsequently be removed only by deportation processes, which are infinitely more complex and can be dragged out almost indefinitely.

Has the Home Secretary considered whether that duality is right or sensible and whether the procedures that those who are knowledgeable enough to delay a claim for asylum until they are in the country can then take advantage of are sensible and wise? If he thinks that efforts are needed to change that, I hope that he will amend the Bill correspondingly.

Whatever one's views, the most important factor, to achieve both sensible limitation on numbers and the most humane outcome for those who are subject to the asylum procedures, is expedition. Anything that can speed up the process must be in the interests of genuine asylum seekers as much as it is of the indigenous population and those already settled here.

6.33 pm

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): I supported the Immigration and Asylum Bill in 1999, warts and all, because it provided much needed relief for places such as Dover and the south-east, which were having to deal with, accommodate and provide health care for thousands of asylum seekers and educate their children—all proper provisions of a tolerant society. However, we had little help and support at that time from the Government. Neither did we have the powers to direct people to more appropriate areas in other parts of the country.

Before that Bill was enacted, Dover and the south-east towns were blighted by BNP marches, National Front demonstrations and the mass distribution of obscene and fascist literature—all inspired from outside the constituency. That legislation certainly eased the pressures, but it fell short of solving all the problems. Serious problems remain and the present Bill, which I support in general, still fails to address them.

I welcome the provision of induction, accommodation and removal centres. They offer structure and services to asylum seekers and they allow asylum seekers a measure of support and the National Asylum Support Service a certain measure of control—but great care needs to be taken in deciding the location of those centres.

I make no apology for using my constituency as an example of bad decision making. It has been seen fit to site an induction centre, a removal centre and an accommodation centre for unaccompanied asylum seekers in Dover. We understand the obvious necessity of housing the induction centre there. That is only to be expected as it is a major port of entry, with 20 million passengers every year, and we have the migrant help line and the infrastructure. However, there is no need for other centres to be there. If people were rational about such decisions, they would accept that there is no need for the removal centre to be in Dover and no reason for unaccompanied minors to be housed in the same street as the induction centre. That adds difficulties to our present problems.

Nothing undermines people's support and acceptance of the important principles of asylum more than the perception that the system is not working, the process being abused and our borders not being properly controlled. If people feel that their hospitality is being abused, they will want to withdraw that hospitality and, sadly, through their everyday experiences, many people in Dover perceive all those failings nearly all the time.

If Dover is a test bed of people's tolerance towards asylum seekers, I regret to report that we are close to failing that test. For five years I have listened to the people's concerns, worries and anxieties about the asylum process and its weaknesses, and I have told and re-told them all about the awful history of the 20th century and the horrors of the holocaust. But many of my constituents find difficulty in making a connection between the flight for life of people fleeing from the Nazis and the flow of fit young men illegally entering Kent through the channel tunnel from France.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary referred to the scenes of disorder and the near riotous behaviour of people trying to gain illegal entry to Britain through the channel tunnel. Most people become aware of that disorder only when the numbers become great or when they hit the headlines, but my constituents experience it every day. They work on the ferries and in the channel tunnel and they are part of the border controls working as immigration, customs and police officers.

The residents who do not work in those areas see it every day because they see large groups of asylum seekers on the motorway verges. They even see asylum seekers waving from the backs of lorries and signalling from the backs of trains as they come into Kent. So it is not altogether surprising that they will look with some scepticism at the niceties contained in the latest Act of Parliament on securing border controls.

I was encouraged by my right hon. Friend's repeated statement today that he would seek to persuade his opposite number in the French Government to reinstate the bilateral agreement that would allow us immediately to return illegal immigrants to France. I know from first-hand experience that that system worked well. I was a seagoing officer with Sealink when the arrangement was in place. On most occasions clandestines were interviewed on board and returned on the return trip to Calais. We talk a lot in debates such as this about reducing Britain's so-called pull factors which encourage asylum seekers or asylum shoppers to risk life and limb night after night to gain entry from the safety of France. Nothing would deter that traffic more than the prospect of immediate return to France.

I come now to unaccompanied children seeking asylum who are accommodated by social services under the Children Act 1989. The Bill provides little practical help to alleviate the problems associated with accommodating and caring for these young people. Ostensibly, they are all under 18, but many are much older in reality and make false claims to be considered as minors. Of course, such classification is an advantage to them, but it brings problems for us. Locally, Dover has experience of housing more than 150 such young people. They were all in the same hotel, which was situated in the same street as the induction centre. That is not sensible management and it needs sorting out. The presence of the centre is stirring up all sorts of new tensions in the community. We have seen such tensions in the past and they have spilled over into the streets of Dover and caused violence. We do not want that to happen again.

Countrywide, Kent has the biggest casebook by far with regard to unaccompanied minors. More than 50 per cent. of the total number of children who are currently in care in Kent are asylum seekers. Kent is now accommodating 1,400 asylum-seeker children and the numbers are growing. Some 100 to 150 of them come into the port of Dover every month, and only last week 25 young people entered in just one night. Serious pressures and problems are building up in my constituency. I have asked my right hon. Friend urgently to meet me to discuss these matters. Unless discussions can start early and solutions can be found, we will stoke up problems for the future and find ourselves heading into a crisis.

I support the general thrust of the Bill, but I believe that it will be successful only if due care is taken by those making the decisions on locating the accommodation centres. They must take into account recent histories and sensitivities, which are important if they are to make the right decisions and ensure proper, firm and sensible border controls.

6.41 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser), who spoke knowledgeably about circumstances in his constituency. I, too, wish to concentrate on detention and removal issues, principally in the light of my experience as the Member of Parliament representing the Yarl's Wood area.

First, I want to make one or two general remarks. I welcome this further attempt to ensure the practicability and acceptability of legislation on immigration and asylum matters. Like all other hon. Members who have spoken, I believe that it is important to have this debate and for it to be conducted in the tone that has now firmly been set, especially by Front Benchers on both sides of the House. That consensus of tone is welcome, but it is important that in proceeding with that consensus, we do not gloss over any difficulties that may lie under the surface. Failure to conduct our examination rigorously and with great scrutiny would be an error with regard to the Bill, just as it would be in any other aspect of this matter.

I welcome the attempts to deal with nationality and citizenship. If a nation is to be anything more than a collection of its parts, it is essential that we find those things that are common to us so that we can group around them and create some form of identity. Britain has a great deal to be proud of in its values and history, but it is important to recognise that what is happening now is just as important as what happened in the past, and that as a nation we have enough values to use them in looking forward. For youngsters, 2045 is just as important as 1945, but all too often we look back rather than forward. I see this debate as a way of looking forward, and it is important that we should seek to do so.

I want to raise one delicate matter in the same tone in which we have spoken about other issues, and ask the Government about their view on the greater use of national emblems—especially the Union flag and the cross of St. George. I raise the matter for two particular reasons. First, I resent deeply, as I suspect most hon. Members do, the attempts made for at least a couple of decades and probably more to appropriate the Union flag and the cross of St. George exclusively for parties of the far right. We have all been much too relaxed about the matter and have found ourselves in very sensitive areas with regard to it. If I may say so, it has been especially difficult for Labour and Liberal Members to speak out and be bold on it because of its associations with the far right.

Secondly, I raise the subject now as we have never had a better opportunity to deal with it, because of two events this year. With a bit of luck, we will be swamped in the jubilee celebrations with red, white and blue for all the best reasons. The World cup is another such opportunity, with regard to which I am thinking especially of the English aspect of the Union. These events give us all a great opportunity to take back the Union flag and the cross of St. George and make widespread use of them.

Do not the Government believe that if we encourage greater use of flags in our schools, town halls and courts, and even in MPs' offices, we might start to make a dent in this aspect of life? Our relaxed attitude to the flag has allowed people with whose views we have no truck to gain an advantage that they should not have. If we can use the opportunity that we have this year—we will have to be in it together, so no party will seek any advantage—we will strike a positive and powerful blow against people whose views we reject but who understand the value of a national symbol. It should be ours and not theirs.

I welcome very much the increased penalties suggested for traffickers and pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) in that regard. I served with him in the then Department of Social Security when these problems first became apparent. He was required to take some very difficult steps at that time, when general understanding of the trafficking of human beings through Europe was perhaps not as good as it is now. He took some of the first steps along the road. If there had been as great an understanding then as exists now, we might not be in quite the same difficulties.

As a final general remark, I also welcome very much the attempts to restore the bilateral agreement between this country and France. In terms of public opinion, one of the things that the public least understand is how people can come from an apparently safe country and go through all the processes here rather than on the other side of the channel. If something could be done about that issue, we would all feel much more comfortable.

I should now like to concentrate on the impact of the Yarl's Wood incident on policy in general. In doing so, I want to raise three particular issues: the detention process, practicality and transparency. I remember saying at the time of the incident that its impact was far greater than what happened to the buildings themselves. Two months on, I am still convinced that I was correct. The duty of any Members of Parliament in whose constituencies any form of detention or accommodation centre is planned or situated is obviously for the safety and security of those whom they represent, so we have a duty to the people who work at the centres and live close to them. We also have a duty in respect of the welfare, safety and security of any people who are detained in the United Kingdom for any reason whatever.

On the night of 14 February 2002, those assurances on safety and security were broken for all those whom I represent. In order to restore trust in the process, it is essential that all the lessons are learned. Indeed, they have a direct bearing on our discussions, and I should like to pay tribute to people in my constituency who experienced

[Alistair Burt]

the events at Yarl's Wood because they worked at the centre, lived close by or were caught up as innocents in the fire, as well as the local county councillors who have been working hard with the public services ever since the incident to put things right. I shall speak about the police in a moment.

On the detention process, soon after Yarl's Wood began to receive its first detainees, I was called to the centre on account of a hunger strike there. That was the start of a regular series of contacts from detainees. During the next couple of months, I built up an idea from them and the people who represented them of the sort of glitches and difficulties that were arising. I think that those problems led to the frustrations that were part of the reason for the Yarl's Wood incident, so they need fully to be taken into account.

The hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) and I had arranged a meeting with Lord Rooker, the Minister for Asylum and Immigration, on 14 February, quite by coincidence, to discuss some of the things that we had found out. That very evening, things were on the move at Yarl's Wood. Some of the points that we put to him are still entirely relevant. First, I found that I lacked an independent source of advice on the welfare of detainees at Yarl's Wood. Typically, I would get a contact alleging something. Naturally, my only source of information was the Home Office. I trust the Home Office in such circumstances, but it is understandable that a detainee who comes from a different culture might not find it quite so easy to do so. To have an independent source of reference at the centre to assure the detainee that practices were correct and that their welfare was being properly looked after would assist both the Member of Parliament and the Home Office. I hope that that can be taken into account.

Secondly, it is vital that access to legal advice means access to good legal advice. The charlatans and those who have sought to make money out of innocent detainees and asylum seekers must be identified, and should be deprived of that work. Too many people have been let down by them. Thirdly, it is essential that the Home Office should be completely frank about who is coming to each of the centres, in terms of the policy behind those decisions and other criteria. We know from remarks that the Home Secretary has been gracious enough to concede that there were some problems in relation to those who eventually ended up in Yarl's Wood, as opposed to those who were originally to have gone there. That helped to build up the tension in the place and led to some of the problems in February.

If local police forces, such as the Bedfordshire police, offer to carry out background checks into the circumstances of detainees who have been in the community, those offers should be accepted, not rejected, as they were in the case of Yarl's Wood, by the immigration services. Those who are looking after people in a confined area need to know everything there is to know about them, and we need to get to the bottom of why inappropriate placements were made at Yarl's Wood.

On my second point about the implications of the events at Yarl's Wood, we need to be certain that the practicalities are dealt with in the new system described by the Home Secretary today. Local authorities need to be more involved in planning procedure than they were at Yarl's Wood. In terms of security and safety, we need to know whether fire drills take place, what planning exists to deal with major incidents affecting safety, and how that would impact on security. It is clear that none of that took place at Yarl's Wood as the numbers there were building up, which helped to cause some of the problems that night in February.

Practicalities such as how to raise the alarm in the area around a centre if people have escaped from it need to be dealt with. Residents near Yarl's Wood say that they found people sleeping in outbuildings on their properties the morning after the events there. There were no incidents relating to those detainees, but there could have been, so it is essential to take note of those issues. I also urge the Home Secretary to take note of the caution that has been expressed over the size of detention centres.

On transparency, because of the circumstances at Yarl's Wood, it is important that the inquiry asks the questions that need to be asked as soon as possible—not least the questions on why the police were prevented from gaining access to the site quickly, and on the extraordinary insurance aftermath. Bedfordshire police are being presented with a bill for £96 million by the insurers. That is the amount being demanded of the police force in Bedfordshire and, potentially, the council tax payers of my constituency. It is nonsense that insurance matters were not immediately apparent to those putting the centre together, and that is one of the practicalities that now has to be dealt with.

A whole series of things, alas, went wrong at Yarl's Wood. It would be helpful for those looking after detainees if they had a timetable for when Yarl's Wood will come back into service, and information on the scale on which it will operate when it does so. I would be grateful if the Minister could tell the House anything about that. Some of my constituents were placed at extraordinary risk at the time of the incident, and many people performed heroically that night—particularly the police force, the fire brigade and other public services. It is important that lessons should be learned if the integrity of the system is to be preserved for the detainees who are passing through, those who advise them and those who live in the areas concerned. Transparency—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up. I call Mr. Neil Gerrard.

6.54 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow):

"The Bill sets out a comprehensive range of provisions to deliver an efficient and robust immigration system."

"The Bill will achieve a better system for making prompt and fair decisions when we receive applications to settle in this country."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1992; Vol. 213, c. 22.]

"The Bill will provide the United Kingdom with a modern, flexible and streamlined system capable of dealing with the ever-growing pressures and demands placed upon it."—[*Official Report*, 22 February 1999; Vol. 326, c. 50.]

"Our race relations are as good as—if not better than—those of any other country in Europe. Firm but fair immigration control is a necessary condition for such a society. That is the context in which this Bill should be seen."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 699.]

Before some of my hon. Friends think that I have taken leave of my senses, let me explain that those are all quotes. One is from a press release for this Bill which was put out by the Home Office—I did not have a copy of the

Home Secretary's speech from which to quote—and the others were quotes from the speeches of former Home Secretaries on Second Reading of what were to become the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 and the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. I shall give a prize to anyone who can tell me exactly which one was which without looking them up.

The point that I am making is that this is the fourth piece of legislation on these issues in 10 years. Every one of them has been introduced by a Home Secretary saying that it will solve all the problems. Hearing that for the fourth time in 10 years tends to make one a bit cynical. I think that I am the only Member of the House who served on the Standing Committees that considered all three of those Acts. I am also one of a handful of Members who voted against Third Reading of all three, and it is tempting for me to say, "I told you so." In fact, I think I will say, "I told you so; I told you those Bills would not work."

In one sense, it almost does not matter what we do in terms of legislation, if the Home Office does not get its act together to make decisions within a reasonable time scale. That applies to immigration decisions as well as to those on asylum. It does not matter what legislation we have if decisions are not made in reasonable time, if they are not acted on, or if people whose passports have been lost, or who have waited two years for a decision when they want to go to visit a sick relative, are treated with complete indifference to what is happening in their lives. Someone might turn up at my advice surgery, four or five years after their asylum claim has been turned down, and when I ask them what has happened in the meantime, the answer is, "Well, nothing." The system will fail when such things happen, no matter what legislation is in place.

It is critical that efforts be made to address these problems, because there is still systematic failure in the Home Office's administrative systems. My staff and I are sick and tired of spending time in my constituency office having to deal with call after call about these problems. People get fed up with us because we are not getting answers from the Home Office.

Ms Abbott: May I confirm what my hon. Friend has just said? I have been a Member of the House for 14 years, and I know that, while the text of any legislation is one thing, the systemic administrative failures in the Home Office are the cause of more misery and unhappiness to my constituents than anything else.

Mr. Gerrard: I agree with my hon. Friend.

A further point in relation to the legislation of the past 10 years is that we ought to have learned that, if we try to put in place systems that are cumbersome, expensive to set up and fundamentally unfair, we will fail. That was the problem with each of the last three Acts. This Bill is very different in some ways. It is the first Bill of its kind for 10 years that contains measures that I can say that I positively welcome. Parts of the Bill, however, may still present problems, and we might risk falling into exactly the same traps as we fell into before.

I welcome the fact that this is the first time in many years that we have had a sensible debate—in relation not only to the Bill but to the White Paper—in the House and in the country about immigration policy, about providing economic routes for migration, and about nationality. There are some welcome changes in the Bill that follow on from that debate. The White Paper also identified a great deal that needs to be done that does not need legislation. For the first time, it has been suggested that there should be mechanisms by which people could make asylum claims from overseas. That is very welcome.

I recognise that some of the proposals in the Bill to deal with trafficking are only stopgap measures, and that we shall need to come back and do more on that in terms of criminal justice legislation. Those provisions are, none the less, very welcome. There is a lot in the Bill that everyone in the House will support. I have a few areas of concern, however, and I hope that I will be forgiven if I concentrate on those for the rest of the time available to me.

The section on nationality and citizenship is, in the main, positive, but I have a few problems with it. The one major issue that concerns me is whether we really need to have compulsory language testing. What is that going to achieve? That is a question that I have not seen answered. I know one thing that it will achieve: discrimination against certain types of people—against elderly people, against women in certain communities and against people who, for instance, have learning difficulties. That is what will happen. Why do we need to include that in what is otherwise a positive package?

I agree with the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) and for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) about doing something about British overseas citizens—people who are often, effectively, stateless. We could have used the opportunity presented by a piece of nationality legislation to do something about that.

On accommodation centres, I am convinced that if we go down the road of setting up four large accommodation centres with 750 or so people in each of them, it will not work. It will turn into a disaster. Some of the problems flow from the size. Because of their size, they will be located outside the main urban areas, which draws us into the question of withdrawing children from mainstream education. That flows directly from the decision about size and location, because local schools in such areas would be overwhelmed if children were allowed into mainstream education. I do not see how we can justify saying to any child in this country that they will be out of mainstream education for months on end. How does that sit alongside the proposals in the White Paper and in other parts of the Bill about integration? It is completely contradictory.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not only an issue of quality of education but of the personal and social development of the child? That is why it is so important that children should be in mainstream education and not educated separately.

Mr. Gerrard: Absolutely. Of course, not all the people in these centres will be children, and the majority of asylum seekers do not have children. What is the likely impact of having 750 people, mainly young men, who have very little to do in some of the areas that are being suggested? If they do not have much to do, and they are there for months on end, that will be a recipe for disaster.

[Mr. Gerrard]

We ought to consider what has been working in the present system of dispersal. Some projects have worked and some good work has been done. There are already places that are almost accommodation centres—the hostels and hotels that are being used—and I have no problem with the idea of groups of people living together; it is happening now. Why do we not put effort into making those places work, and into examining what they need in terms of support, medical help and legal advice? We have such groupings now, and the majority of people will remain in the dispersal system. We are in great danger of spending a lot of time, energy and effort on something that will cost a fortune, that will probably be delayed much longer than it is supposed to be, and that, in the end, will not work. Instead, we could concentrate on dealing with problems in the dispersal system, and we could use some of the ideas about accommodation centres to develop existing places.

On support, one clause of the Bill gives the Government the power to remove the option for people to have support only—not vouchers any more, which we very much welcome, but cash. What is the justification for that? I would like to hear it. Given that 40 per cent. of applicants choose that option, what do we expect them to do and where do we expect them to go? Are we going to say, "If you do not go into an accommodation centre, you will be cut off from all support"? That is my suspicion about why that power is included in the Bill—to be used against people who say that they will not go into an accommodation centre.

On detention, will the Government say, once and for all, that they are not going to detain children? Children and families are still being detained and all the signs are that the numbers will increase over the next few years if there is a move to increase the rate of removal. Why are figures no longer available on what has happened to people who are in detention? Until four or five years ago, it was possible to find out whether people who were in detention had had a decision made on their case, were still waiting for a decision or were still waiting to appeal. When I ask those questions now, I am told that the information is too expensive to obtain and is not held centrally. It used to be available, and I want to know why it is not any more. If we are expected to accept that detention centres become removal centres, and that that is their purpose, we ought to be able to establish clearly that the people in those centres are waiting for removal, not for an initial decision on their claims.

The resettlement programme and the UNHCR gateway constitute a positive move, which I very much welcome. We need to get that right, because I do not want a view to develop that people who come in by that route are legitimate, whereas people who claim asylum by any other route are not. That is one of the dangers of which we must beware.

We all want a system that works. We can make the system work—although the Bill contains deficiencies, which I hope will be dealt with in Committee—but, this time, please let us have a system that delivers.

7.6 pm

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I add my voice to those who have praised the largely constructive and consensual tone of this debate. That is particularly important as the very ugly head of racism is raised just a short way across the channel. The way in which the House and this political process addresses sensibly, positively and constructively the real issues thrown up by asylum and immigration is in stark contrast to what has happened in France. We all deserve some credit for the way in which our political process is handling those issues in a responsible way.

I come to this debate with much less experience and expertise than many other Members, who have been here for much longer than I have. Nevertheless, I have some knowledge from my constituency of the asylum process, of the problems that asylum seekers face once they have arrived in Britain, and of the problems of the communities in which they are housed. Although we do not have the large asylum population of the neighbouring seaside resort of Hastings, there are asylum seekers based in my constituency, particularly in Bexhill.

In January, two young lads who had sought asylum from Afghanistan came to see me at my advice surgery. That brought home to me the failure of the asylum system. These two young lads had been smuggled into this country in a lorry, and the grandfather of one of them had paid £10,000. They had come into the country in November 1999. One of them, after he had been to my surgery, told our local paper:

> "In 1993 the Mujahaddin killed my father because he was a midwife. They believed it was not for man to do that job. One day they came to our house and they really hit my brother badly and broke his leg. My mother got sick of the situation. That is when my grandfather decided to send me out of the country. He found someone to arrange for me to be taken to another country. I came to Dover first. The police sent me to a camp in Kent. After one night they sent me here, to Bexhill. Now it has been two years without a decision on if I can stay."

He came to my advice surgery in a state of desperation; he had yet to have an interview. Although I believe that there has now been some progress, he has still not had an interview. His colleague is also in that position. For years, he has lived with the sword of Damocles hanging over his head, not knowing whether he had a future in this country, but, at the same, being a real burden on the taxpayer and the community in which he lived—unable to work, unable to study properly and unable to plan a future.

I welcome the clear distinction in the Bill between asylum seekers fleeing persecution and economic migrants. Receiving asylum seekers is the hallmark of a civilised society, and Britain has a long and proud tradition of doing so. We have also received economic migrants. We cannot blame those who come from other parts of the world that are far less wealthy and successful than our own and often plagued by oppression for trying to make a better life. Who of us, were we in the same position as many of those young lads, would not take that opportunity?

There is, however, a fundamental difference in the position of those people. Whether they are fleeing persecution or coming here to try to make a better life, the key point is that they deserve to be dealt with civilly, promptly and efficiently, but as the Home Secretary acknowledged in the House today and at the last Labour party conference, the current system is a mess.

Arrangements for dispersing asylum seekers are in chaos and the National Asylum Support Service bureaucracy has

become something of a legend. I note a recent press report about a standard NASS letter to asylum seekers, the bottom of which bears the statement:

"If you have not yet received this letter you should contact NASS immediately on the number above."

Such inept handling of the number of asylum seekers entering Britain has impacted badly on all concerned.

The system put in place by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 has failed to address the high number of people seeking asylum and the necessary provision of services to those claiming refuge here. The list of problems, which is endless, has been alluded to by other Members—overwhelmed GPs, inadequate legal support and long journeys to and from Croydon for interviews, often without travel warrants or sufficient money—but it is worth remembering that the current system was put in place only two years ago.

The Prime Minister claimed that the 1999 legislation would sort out

"the problem with the asylum system".—[*Official Report*, 19 April 2000; Vol. 348, c. 974.]

In fact, a record number of asylum seekers have entered Britain—more than 80,000 in 2000. Keith Best, chief executive of the Immigration Advisory Service, said:

"We welcome legislation if it will provide stability for a long time. We have all had to live with a major new Act of Parliament every three years . . . The whole system is in turmoil as a result."

I am glad that the Bill attempts to sort out the current chaotic system, but I have clear reservations, which I look forward to clarifying in Committee, about how it will do that. How long will people be held in the accommodation centres? That is a key question, as it underpins the provision of suitable services in centres and their effectiveness in taking more than a tiny proportion of those who enter Britain claiming asylum.

I, too, share the concerns about the size of the centres, perhaps because, as a Conservative, I innately distrust large-scale projects imposed by central Government. Intuitively, I prefer smaller, human-sized projects that are in step with their local communities. What risk assessment have the Government made in setting capacity at 750 people? The House needs no reminding of Yarl's Wood, as my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) has described the tragic consequences that followed at that centre.

What provision is there for legal advice to be made available to residents of the centres? On-site legal services are essential for asylum applicants and for processing cases quickly and efficiently. What provision has been made for appeals? A quick, one-site system risks becoming nonsensical if appeals are not held at the centre. Will the proposals have a significant impact on the poor removal rate? Will the Home Secretary give a new indication of how many failed asylum seekers will leave Britain after the reforms are fully implemented?

The Bill, despite its many virtues, fails to address the crux of the issue—namely, the constant flow of asylum seekers across the channel and into this country. Asylum shopping is a genuine problem in the European Union, and as other Members have pointed out, the Dublin convention is little help in addressing it. I am in good company in being baffled by its uselessness.

In 2001, the Home Secretary's predecessor himself told the Home Affairs Committee:

"You are in very good company if you do not fully understand the operation of the Dublin Convention."

It is complex, bureaucratic and burdensome, and those who attempt to operate it would concur with that description. However, in one sense, people understand it perfectly. All those resident at the Sangatte camp understand it. They understand that they can enter Britain and, de facto, not be returned to France. That is making a mockery of the system. Until 1997, a bilateral agreement ensured that asylum seekers could be returned to France within 24 hours. Now, we have problems returning any of them at all.

Reform of the asylum system must be accompanied by reform of the underpinning agreements, which govern our admission of asylum seekers. If an asylum seeker has genuinely suffered oppression, it is right and important for our country to be able to offer refuge. If asylum seekers come here with an ability to contribute to our economy, it is right that we welcome them. However, without the ability to remove asylum seekers back to France, the system simply will not work. The Government must act now to reinvoke the bilateral agreement and put our asylum system on a manageable footing.

In all our interests, everyone—asylum seekers, economic migrants or just plain, old-fashioned immigrants—must be shown tolerance and understanding, but perhaps most importantly, they must be dealt with efficiently and promptly. I hope that the Bill takes good strides towards that goal.

7.17 pm

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): It was particularly pleasing to hear the Home Secretary's words on fees for visitor visa appeals, as I asked a question about them during the February statement. It followed a campaign to have the fees removed that, frankly, went on far too long, especially as they should never have been imposed in the first place. The work done by my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh), for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), and for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and others has been rewarded at last, but we should not have had to wait so long.

The situation with visitor appeals epitomises the problems with the administration of immigration and asylum. About 75 per cent. of oral appeals are successful, which begs a question about the quality of the decisions made in the first place. Even more worryingly, about 35 per cent. of appeals decided on the papers alone are successful. They involve an adjudicator looking at exactly the same evidence that the entry clearance officer saw when issuing a refusal. No additional information is provided and no representations or sponsor's declarations are made, but 35 per cent. of decisions are overturned. We must call into question the training given to ECOs, and perhaps their motivation in arriving at decisions.

I have made this point many times, but I shall make it again in the hope that it will register: it is nonsensical to give as a reason for refusing a visitor's visa the fact that the person has never travelled before. That argument is self-defeating, but it still appears all too often, especially in my favourite place in the whole world, Islamabad, which must have the worst decision-making record in the entire immigration system. Not to worry; we have a success.

[Mr. Terry Rooney]

One of the great bugbears of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow is the fact that the more we legislate, the more we add to the complexity of the system, the more delays we create and the harder it is to get to the bottom of the problem. However, the Bill is a step forward, not a step back, as we have suffered in the past. It contains many good measures, including some administrative arrangements, such as the abolition of vouchers.

Under the present system, 22 per cent. of appeals against refusal of asylum succeed. In an ideal world, no appeals would succeed. It seems to me that 22 per cent. is a high figure, and it calls into question the decision-making process.

There is a question mark over the length of time that it takes to get to appeal, and the consistency of decisions arrived at by adjudicators. The White Paper foreshadowed a significant increase in the number of Immigration Appellate Authority adjudicators. Where will they come from, how will they be trained and how soon will they be any good? Many adjudicators have been in the system a long time, but are not of the required quality.

One of the first acts of the previous Home Secretary after 1997 was to abolish the primary purpose rule. We had campaigned for that for many years, so it was very welcome. It is not often that I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall), but I am afraid that I think that he is wrong about the probationary period. I have spoken to people from all communities, and its extension to two years has been widely welcomed. That is also my view.

Unfortunately, some spouses come to this country from abroad and the marriage breaks down. British spouses, especially women, come under intense pressure to sign a false declaration that the marriage is subsisting to allow the husband to obtain indefinite leave to remain. If they refuse to do that, and they send information to the Home Office, they immediately become a third party as far as the Home Office is concerned, and are not entitled to any information.

I have a case in which the spouse has provided evidence of domestic violence, including medical and police records, evidence that her husband has remarried and illegally brought his second wife into the country, and evidence of where he is living and working. The Home Office has told me off the record, because it is not allowed to talk to third parties, that the evidence is insufficient to take any action against the husband. This man regularly beat his wife, who had to have hospital treatment. He has previous convictions. It has been proved that he forged her signature on a document to obtain indefinite leave to remain. He has illegally brought another person into this country. He has illegally married that person: the marriage took place in the United Kingdom. However, that is insufficient evidence for the Home Office to take any action. That woman lives in fear of that man coming back and repeating the domestic violence because she is trying to get him removed.

Frankly, people who risk physical attack and intimidation to bring such cases to the Home Office's attention deserve better than a two-line letter saying that they are a third party and it cannot give them any information. We must find a way of ensuring that people get rewarded for being honest citizens, not punished.

I am not very good at reading Bills, because I am not a lawyer. I think that clauses 53 and 55 will allow action to be taken to remove people without the degree of proof required in a criminal case. I should be grateful if the Minister would explain those provisions.

There has been a lot of talk about the need for fairness in the immigration and asylum process, and the need for confidence in the system. Not just the host community, but all communities in this country should be able to have confidence in the system.

I make no apology for referring once again to the position of people who are now classed as over-age applicants. In the 1980s, children were refused admission because it was said that they were not the children of their parents. Subsequently, they proved their parentage by DNA, but they were then told that, as they were 18, they were too old and could not come into this country. That must be the only part of public policy in which, even if people prove their case, they are still losers.

In 1993, when I first went with a delegation to the Home Office, we were told that such a move would confer rights on 120,000 people. That was a typical Home Office response. By 1998, the figure had dropped to 60,000, but the same reason was given for not putting right that injustice. It was argued that it would open up the possibility of a huge number of people coming into the country, because those 60,000 would by now be married with three or four children, so the figure would be 300,000.

We are actually talking about some 1,000 individuals. Many of those people have settled into a new way of life and do not want to come to this country, but many families, mainly Bangladeshi, have been divided for 20 years because of the brutality of the British legal system and its inability to admit that it was wrong and to correct that wrong. Today would be a good time for the Home Office to agree seriously to consider this issue with compassion. Let us get it sorted, and we can all move on.

There are many concessions and exceptions in our immigration system, and it is about time that they were codified. About three years ago, the previous Home Secretary introduced a concession for overseas spouses who were victims of domestic violence. They were allowed indefinite leave to remain. There is conclusive proof that that concession has not been abused, and it is time that it was codified so that those people can feel safe.

I shall conclude on citizenship and language. My city has many communities, and 64 different languages are spoken in our schools. I think that it is an advantage for children to share a language in which they can all talk to one another. However, I wonder why, in all our pronouncements, such emphasis has been placed on learning English. Since 1981, it has been a requirement for people to have a reasonable command of England before they can get citizenship, so that is nothing new. The only new thing in the Bill is the provision that people may have to go on a course or produce a certificate. I fail to see why we are making that—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time.

7.29 pm

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I am pleased to be called to speak in this debate. Like many who have spoken, I and others in the Scottish National party-Plaid Cymru group

feel that the Bill contains some provisions that we can support, including, of course, the good and important measure to tighten sex trafficking offences. I also add my congratulations on the abolition—albeit belated—of the disgraceful and shameful voucher system. However, many aspects of the Bill are problematic, and certain other elements should have been covered. It is on those points that I want to focus in the time available.

It is worth noting at the outset that this is the fourth Bill on asylum in the past decade. As I understand it—I am a relatively new Member—the legislation that led to the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 was supposed to be the asylum Bill to end all asylum Bills. The then Home Secretary appears not to have got it right, and I wonder whether the current Home Secretary has got it entirely right either.

On the new citizenship pledge, as I said in my intervention on the Home Secretary, new applicants will be required to swear loyalty to the United Kingdom, and to take a "British" test, the parameters of which have yet to be set. As an SNP Westminster MP, I wait with bated breath, because I am not entirely sure that I would pass such a test.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): So far as claiming their salaries is concerned, the hon. Lady's colleagues in the Scottish Parliament have not been unhappy about swearing the oath of allegiance. The Bill contains proposals relating to a sufficient knowledge of life in the UK, but I see nothing remotely like a test of Britishness. Where in the Bill is there such a proposal?

Annabelle Ewing: If one reads the whole Bill, including the initial clauses, it is clear that regulations will elucidate the degree of knowledge required. To that extent, they can loosely be referred to as a British test. As I said, I await with interest—as the hon. Gentleman doubtless does—to discover its parameters.

I have serious concerns about the oath of loyalty to the UK, not the least of which is that it stigmatises, and is potentially an unnecessarily divisive way to address important race relations issues.

Fiona Mactaggart: Is the hon. Lady aware that we already have a loyalty oath that no one has described as divisive? Why does she consider the oath in the Bill divisive?

Annabelle Ewing: I direct the hon. Lady to the terms of schedule 5. At the moment, we have an oath of allegiance to the Queen, which presents no problem whatsoever, but the new oath involves swearing loyalty to the United Kingdom. According to several recent polls, only 13 per cent. of Scots and people in Scotland regard themselves as British. According to polls conducted at the beginning of April, one in three people in Scotland support the SNP as the party of independence for Scotland. Unlike the Home Secretary, I think that the new oath raises potentially serious constitutional issues. He seemed to pooh-pooh that notion, but on reflection he may agree with it.

For example, a substantial number of people in our ethnic communities in Scotland support a group called Scots Asians for Independence. Would a new member of that group be required to swear loyalty to the United Kingdom?

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West) *rose—*

Mr. Connarty *rose—*

Annabelle Ewing: I am sorry, but I have given way quite a bit and I want to make progress.

Under the terms of clause 4, citizens who commit acts that seriously prejudice the vital interests of the United Kingdom can be deprived of citizenship. That raises some very serious issues. As I asked the Home Secretary, will an asylum seeker who seeks residence in Scotland be expected to swear an oath of loyalty to the United Kingdom, given that the official Opposition in the Scots Parliament would not be prepared to swear such an oath? The loyalty oath is a complete non-starter in a 21st-century United Kingdom, and I hope that it will be removed from the Bill.

Mr. Connarty *rose—*

Mr. Singh *rose—*

Annabelle Ewing: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) as he sought to intervene first.

Mr. Singh: Someone who is born in Scotland, Wales, England or Northern Ireland is automatically granted British citizenship, so I do not see what the problem is.

Annabelle Ewing: I was drawing an analogy. The Home Secretary is trying to introduce a new requirement for those who seek to reside in Scotland to pledge an oath of loyalty, yet the official Opposition in the Scots Parliament would not be prepared to do so. That is a very serious issue.

Mr. Connarty *rose—*

Annabelle Ewing: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I shall not give way further as I want to make progress.

On the treatment of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, I am pleased that the voucher system has gone, but I am concerned that the level of support that will be offered in certain circumstances appears to be less than the basic income support. If income support is a basic subsistence level, how can giving people less be justified? Perhaps the Minister can comment on that in the winding-up speech. Surely a temporary green card system, whereby asylum seekers are allowed to work while their cases are being processed, would be a better solution. The vast majority of asylum seekers want to contribute to society; they do not want simply to take. If we allow them to work, we can unleash the talents that many of them possess, which would benefit us all. Initially, most asylum seekers were dispersed to the Sighthill area of Glasgow, which was the focus of the dispersal programme in Scotland. At one time, about 40 per cent. of the asylum

[Annabelle Ewing]

seekers in Sighthill had university degrees. Not allowing them to contribute to the society in which they live is an unpardonable waste of talent.

Much has been said today about accommodation centres. I shall not rehash the arguments, but I am concerned about their scale and the length of time that, in practice, people will stay in them, given the numerous problems relating to the processing of asylum applications. For the reasons that have been stated, I am particularly concerned about the fact that children will be excluded from mainstream education. That will have a very negative impact on their development.

I want to mention clause 33, which will affect Scotland. It seeks in effect to claw back devolved powers from the Scots Parliament in respect of the education of children in trial accommodation centres in Scotland. The Home Secretary will be empowered to disapply Acts of the Scots Parliament to exclude its jurisdiction. That is unacceptable, and I hope that the clause will be removed.

Finally, I turn to the important issue of detention centres, or removal centres, as they will now be known.

Mr. Connarty: I am deeply concerned about the hon. Lady's analysis of clause 33—I hope to speak on it myself—which clearly states that consultation will take place with Scottish Ministers. If Scotland had a different system, in which many asylum seekers were placed in mainstream education, the impact on the people of Scotland would be disproportionate. Does she really believe that Scottish people would commend her for arguing that Scotland should have a system for asylum seekers—a UK matter—that differs from that in the rest of the UK?

Annabelle Ewing: We are talking about the education of children. The premise on which the accommodation centres are founded is a period of no more than six months, but our constituency work shows that the asylum application process is a disgrace. In what magical way the situation is supposed to improve quickly, I do not know.

On resources, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), said in a written answer dated 25 February 2002 that the Home Office would fund health care and educational facilities in the trial accommodation centres. I hope that that covers the matter.

Mr. Connarty: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Annabelle Ewing: No, I have given way to the hon. Gentleman already. I have little time left. I have been very generous. I think that I have taken more interventions than any other Back-Bench Member.

A key problem with the detention centre proposals is the secrecy that surrounds their operation. That may stem from the fact that private-sector companies are in charge. Certainly, that is the case at Dungavel.

Last week, the Scots Parliament's cross-party group on refugees and asylum seekers visited Dungavel. I understand that the report that it produced has been submitted to the Home Office, and I hope that responses to it will be made public. Its key findings were that there was no justification for holding children in detention centres, that the length of time for which people were held was unacceptable, and that there was a lack of clarity about the grounds on which people were being held.

I hope that the Minister will tell the House whether the Home Office's response to the report will be made public. I hope that she will also say whether the Home Office will address the concerns raised about Dungavel, and whether the chief inspector of prisons in Scotland has a role to play in inspecting the facility.

7.41 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (St. Helens, South): The debate has been remarkable for the broad consensus evident on the matters that have been discussed. I suspect that this will not be the last asylum Bill to occupy my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), as there will probably be another four such Bills in the next decade.

I shall concentrate on children, and how they are to be protected. I shall speak too about the apparent disparity between children who are UK citizens, and those seeking asylum.

Hon. Members may have seen last year's excellent report from Save the Children entitled "Cold Comfort". The charity spoke to 125 young people who were either seeking asylum or were refugees. All the young people had been separated from their parents. One of the report's major findings was that

"a significant number of the young separated refugees had chaotic and disturbing experiences on arrival and received little or no support. This pattern of experience continues in their contact with services, including education, health and social services."

The Bill will alleviate those children's chaotic experiences, and that is to be welcomed, especially because the care of young people will be tightened up as a result of the creation of specific offences to deal with the traffic in prostitution.

One of the major difficulties that we face in protecting young asylum seekers and refugees is that there is a lack of co-ordinated information. Last year, the social services in West Sussex—an authority responsible for significant numbers of unaccompanied, asylum-seeking children—did some important and detailed work with regard to the number of children being trafficked through its services.

The authority identified a pattern. It looked at the cases of children from a particular geographical area—in this instance, they were girls from west Africa, and especially from Nigeria—who had entered the UK unaccompanied. It found that girls were passed on to residential care homes, often in the south-east of England, but that they simply disappeared after that. Often, the girls went to other parts of Europe after they had been contacted by a trafficker.

In West Sussex alone, 66 children went missing between 1995 and 2001. They simply disappeared from the authority's care. The authority's investigation revealed that dozens more had been at risk. The authority believes that the vast majority of those who had disappeared were unaccompanied asylum seekers, and that they had disappeared because of the traffic in prostitution.

That is a particular problem in London and the south-east, because most unaccompanied and accompanied children live in the area. Last year's Save the Children report estimated that more than 4,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were being supported by the London boroughs. For the UK as a whole, the figure is two or three times as large.

As a result, clause 113 is very much to be welcomed, as its aim is to outlaw trafficking. For the first time, it establishes the explicit offence of trafficking in people for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The provision follows from the Government report entitled "Setting the Boundaries", which was published in July 2000. My only disappointment is that the Bill does not go as far as that report encouraged people to expect. The report stated:

"The review considers that the commercial sexual exploitation of children should be dealt with by specific offences in which 'child' should refer to any person under the age of 18, and where sexual exploitation means the use of child in prostitution or in the making of pornography."

I hope that the Home Office will give some consideration to taking matters to their logical conclusion and introducing a specific offence in relation to children. The maximum penalty imposed by the Bill is a sentence of 14 years, which is both welcome and appropriate. However, we should recognise that the offence extends beyond the prostitution of a person, and that it should include the trafficking of children for the purposes of prostitution.

The Government are right to introduce the proposed penalty, but we need more information if the policy is to be effective. We need more studies such as that carried out in West Sussex, which has helped to reduce dramatically the numbers of children going missing through the introduction of a multi-agency approach involving social services, the police and others. The problem is that there is still no comprehensive database of separated children that includes both accompanied and unaccompanied children and states whether they were seeking asylum.

The creation of such a database would go a long way towards dealing comprehensively with the problem of trafficking. The production of separate data on asylum decisions concerning young people would also be helpful.

Last year, a group of Members of Parliament was invited to meet some of the young people to whom Save the Children spoke in compiling its report, and we were deeply moved by their stories. Many of their problems stemmed from the fact that the children had been unaccompanied. In part, that was because our system has not kept pace with the scale or diversity of the problems involved. Fairly or unfairly, local authorities bear most of the burden of responsibility for those children's care.

The Save the Children report recommended that the Home Office should increase grants to local authorities for the support of young separated refugees so that they would be able to meet the reasonable costs of support. Clause 36 goes some way towards that. Crucially, it removes the age distinction that previously meant that payments could not be made by the Secretary of State to people under 18. However, there is still concern that the provisions in the Bill will be insufficient.

Will the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), who will wind up the debate, say whether she will consider removing the distinction between the amounts available to children under 16 years of age, and to those over that age?

Young asylum seekers or refugees under the age of 16 who enter local authority care usually come under sections 17 and 20 of the Children Act 1989. When they reach the age of 18, because they have come under section 20, those young people will not be dispersed. There are very good reasons for that: the young people involved have built up ties with the community and are supported by a network of care.

However, a young person of 16 or over who enters the care of a local authority usually is covered only by section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The ludicrous result is that they can be dispersed at the age of 18, as happens very often.

The consequence of that is that all those dispersed children's community supports disappear, and that many of them are tempted to go underground. At the moment, age is the prime determinant of service provision for those young people. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will consult with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to strengthen guidance on how and when section 20 of the Children Act 1989 should be applied, as the Save the Children report recommends.

Children and young people who are asylum seekers present us with special problems and special responsibilities. Article 3 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child makes it clear that the best interests of the child should be the primary consideration. We signed up to that convention because it is right, so in dealing with this group of young people we must be sure that we are acting in the best interests of the child. It is difficult to see a justification for distinguishing what is the best interest solely on the ground of whether a child is a UK citizen or a refugee and providing different standards of care, protection and services accordingly.

Others have spoken about the impact on children placed in accommodation centres and the opportunities for them to participate in social, leisure and other activities that may not be available to others. My concern about this potential disparity is also about the inspection regimes and frameworks for child welfare that will apply in the accommodation centres. How will the provisions of the Children Act 1989 and the Care Standards Act 2000 apply? If there were to be an accommodation centre in Wales, as has been proposed in south Glamorgan, would the powers of the children's rights commissioner be extended to such a centre? In short, will the Home Secretary guarantee that there is no possibility of less rigorous procedures and practices being undertaken towards children in accommodation centres?

My final concern, to which other hon. Members have referred, is education. Many people are genuinely concerned about whether it is appropriate to educate children in accommodation centres. We are talking about 750 people of various ages gathered together from different places, with different cultures and speaking different languages. Is it practical to believe that we could provide a comprehensive education service for children in these centres? Even if they are there for only six months, that is a very long time for a frightened and vulnerable group of people. I hope that the Home Secretary, in the spirit of openness, will be prepared to listen to the words of other hon. Members.

The evidence in the Save the Children report is that young people who came here unaccompanied or accompanied value, above all else, being integrated into full-time education. We will therefore be taking something away from those people that we currently provide. It may be right; there may be very good reasons for doing so, but I have not heard them. The onus is on the Government to make a clear, coherent and

[Mr. Shaun Woodward]

compassionate case for why children will be better served by being educated full time in accommodation centres for those six months than in the community.

Overall, I welcome the Bill. I am sure that it will not be the last of the asylum Bills, but it is a good step. It is pleasing to see the degree of consensus that has emerged and the spirit and tone in which this debate has been conducted across the House.

7.53 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): There is little doubt that our current immigration and asylum system is unmanageable. It does not serve the genuine immigrant, asylum seeker or British taxpayer well. I welcome the opportunity for constructive debate that will lead to the introduction of measures to bring the situation under control as quickly as possible.

One of our greatest challenges is to separate, among all those arriving in our country and seeking to stay, those who are entitled to do so from those who are not. Under the present system, this is virtually impossible. The numbers arriving are too great for immigration staff to cope with and the process takes far too long.

This country has a long and proud tradition of accepting genuine refugees from all over the world and will continue to do so, but we must have a manageable system that enables us to identify them readily. Support services must be in place to enable them to settle and become independent contributing members of society.

So many people choose to seek asylum in the United Kingdom because it is a much more attractive destination than many other European countries. Why else would they travel through so many other safe, democratic countries without seeking asylum along the way? Why else would so many gather at Sangatte without seeking asylum in France—another safe, democratic country—awaiting their chance to smuggle themselves into Britain on lorries, freight trains or Eurostar, often in extremely dangerous circumstances? There have been several deaths on these excursions. A recent United Nations survey showed that more refugees select and reach Britain than any other European destination.

Between 1995 and 1997, there was an agreement with France that allowed the swift return of asylum seekers who had crossed the channel illegally. It was very effective. When it came into force, applications for asylum fell by 33 per cent. The advantage was that of those who arrived in this country, the percentage of eligible applicants was much higher.

The year after the bilateral agreement was replaced by the Dublin convention, applications increased by 41 per cent. However, the Dublin convention did not deliver on its intention to solve the problem of "asylum shopping", where people claim support from local authorities here when they have already been granted refugee status or leave to remain in other European Economic Area countries. There is an urgent need to renegotiate the bilateral agreement; it would facilitate the efforts made here to improve the asylum system.

The agreement alone, however, would not be enough. There are many circumstances that attract such large numbers of asylum seekers to our shores in preference to neighbouring countries. Those include the availability and perception of social security benefits, more generous interpretation of asylum law, slow decision making on asylum cases, lack of an efficient removal system for people refused asylum, access to public services such as free health care, education and housing and scope for living here without documentation or the need for proof of identity.

Ms Abbott: The hon. Lady gave the availability of benefits as the number one reason why economic migrants—bogus asylum seekers, if you will—choose to come here. Economic migrants come here, whether as asylum seekers or anything else, for the same reason they have come here down the centuries—to work.

Angela Watkinson: Four years ago, 20,000 refugees with unresolved appeals, who had been here for at least two years, were allowed to stay indefinitely. That was a great incentive to others to hope that they might receive similar treatment. If the system is to be made fairer and faster, no further amnesty must be allowed.

Controlling the cross-channel flow of asylum seekers is important for two reasons. First, a reduction in numbers would enable a faster, more compassionate service to be provided to those fleeing persecution in their own country, whose human rights have been violated and who are in fear of their lives. The proposed accommodation centres must offer comprehensive on-site services, including reliable legal advice. I use the word "reliable" advisedly. I know from my surgery and from telephone calls to my office here from my constituents that so-called legal practitioners have been engaged whom I suspect may not be qualified but who offer advice on immigration matters. Individuals seeking asylum have spent large sums of money on advice that is virtually useless and, in some cases, they have spent it on no advice at all. That should be brought under control.

The on-site services should include reliable legal advice from qualified practitioners so that asylum decisions and appeals can be made accurately, humanely and speedily. The Bill is deficient on that point and I hope that the opportunity will be taken to amend it to include a one-stop shop style of accommodation centre that will deal quickly with genuine claimants—that is, in a few weeks. Six months is far too long and it should certainly not take years. The centre should remove equally quickly those who are not entitled to remain.

As the accommodation is intended only to be very temporary, it would be acceptable for the children of asylum seekers to receive their education on site and not in a mainstream school. That would be much more difficult to justify if the stay were a long one. However, that is not the intention; indeed, if the stay was long, the system would be failing.

Secondly, the cross-channel flow of asylum seekers has had a devastating effect on freight transport between the United Kingdom and France.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): It may assist the debate if the hon. Lady were to distinguish between asylum seekers and economic migration. She keeps referring to asylum seekers, but many of the people coming in through

the channel tunnel are economic migrants and the Bill sets out different policies to deal with different groups of people.

Angela Watkinson: I accept the hon. Lady's point that not everybody falls into the same category. However, I was pointing out that the education services were intended to be provided for only a short period. If the stay were longer, the children would need to be in a mainstream school.

I was referring to the effects of the cross-channel flow on freight transport. In November last year, SNCF suspended all cross-channel rail freight services through the tunnel after repeated attacks on the staff at its Calais terminal from people trying to enter the United Kingdom illegally. The French Government increased police protection at the terminal and a reduced service was resumed.

Unfortunately, however, 54 illegal immigrants were found on a train that had entered the United Kingdom, so in just one night, English, Welsh and Scottish Railways became liable for fines of more than £100,000, as the Government have reintroduced fines of £2,000 per immigrant. The industry as a whole faces losses of £500,000 a week due to cancelled trains on both sides of the channel. Both Governments have a duty to ensure the free movement of goods between EU member states. It is unreasonable to place the whole responsibility for controlling stowaways on rail operators; a much greater official presence is required at terminals. Ferry operators and individual lorry drivers experience similar problems.

Part 3 and the proposed capacity of accommodation centres make it clear that the existing dispersal system will continue for the majority of asylum seekers for the foreseeable future. The system has been fraught with problems, including the fact that people were sent to places to which they did not want to go, away from people they knew, and then they moved on without informing the authorities. Many "disappear" in that way, so the power to ensure that the whereabouts of asylum seekers are reported is welcome. However, further details are needed as to the reporting requirements and the penalties for non-compliance.

The target for the removal of failed asylum applicants, set at 30,000 in 2001, has been abandoned. The most recent figures show that only about 1,000, including dependants, are being removed each month, despite the fact that about three quarters of the 70,000 applicants each year are refused asylum status. The proposed improvements in the dispersal, reporting and removal systems are welcome.

I very much welcome the increased penalties, set out in part 7, for those guilty of trafficking in human lives, especially in respect of sexual exploitation. The proposals on language and citizenship are positive; they aim to ensure that everyone can communicate and be fully included in the daily life of their adoptive community.

It is clear that control of the cross-channel flow of asylum seekers and a faster and more effective application and appeal process need to be processed concurrently if the system is to be made manageable. Closer scrutiny of the Bill in Committee will, I hope, lead to measures that make that possible, and I look forward to contributing to the process.

8.4 pm

Mr. David Lammy (Tottenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, not just because I am a black Member of Parliament—although I heard the comments of the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) and I am grateful for them—but because I hope that the consensus in which the debate has been conducted marks a turning point on these issues in this country. That is set against the very depressing scenes in France that we have witnessed during the past few days. However, we can take hope from the fact that many, many people, young and old, are on the streets of France making it clear that they are against extremism and the racist points of view of Jean-Marie Le Pen, which would segregate and exclude vast parts of French society.

The debate has been conducted in a consensual manner because the measure is, in general, favourable to the majority of people—those seeking asylum and those who already live in the UK. I welcome much that has been said.

As a young Member of Parliament, I believe that many young people look to much that we say on these issues.

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend has referred to the consensus on the Bill, especially that between the two Front-Bench teams. I point out to him that the fact that Front-Bench Members agree on a measure does not mean that it is any good: they agreed about the Child Support Agency—that was rubbish; they agreed about the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989—that was rubbish; and they largely agreed about the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999—and much of that was rubbish.

Mr. Lammy: We have a cosy arrangement in north-east London and I defer to much that my hon. Friend says; we work together on many issues. Many Members who represent north London constituencies have things to say about the Bill—my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), for example. We have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and I suspect that we shall hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn).

Many Members have strong opinions on the issue, owing to the nature of our constituencies, and I shall comment on that later. I was suggesting that there has been progress. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) may not believe that it is genuine but she must forgive me: naive or not, because of my age I should like to assume that it is. I need to assume that it is because young people—ethnic people—in this country need a spirit of hope, given what is going on across the water. I hope that my hon. Friend will indulge me in my belief. She has, of course, been a Member of this place for some time and it is possible that in 15 years or so I shall join her and accept that I was wrong. On this occasion, however, I think that there has been genuine progress.

I want to talk about the reality for asylum seekers and refugees in my constituency. I am able to do that owing to Tottenham's unique position as a gateway community for asylum seekers and refugees. I also want to touch on the important subject of education in the proposed accommodation centres.

[Mr. Lammy]

Like other Members, I have reservations about certain aspects of the Bill. As a lawyer, I am concerned about bail for detainees. That important basic human right is not included in the Bill and I ask the Home Office to look again at that point.

I am also concerned about the language test—not about the test per se, because I believe in social cohesion and people must have a route up through the system. We should all accept that being able to speak the language of the country one is in must be an added bonus, but with any rule—again, I return to my basic legal training—there are exceptions. There probably ought to be exceptions for those who are elderly and those with special needs, and there probably ought to be some subjective analysis at least for women from communities for whom a language test might pose a very serious problem. There are therefore general reservations.

The Home Secretary has admitted that chaos is part of the current situation. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward) spoke about that in referring to Save the Children's "Cold Comfort" report. I experience that situation daily in my constituency. I said in an intervention that there are between 15,000 and 20,000 asylum seekers and refugees in my constituency. I ought to make it clear that I should have referred to the London borough of Haringey. There are two constituencies in that borough—mine and that of the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche). However, that is a significant number of people.

There are 5,000 homeless families in the area—1,000 more than in any other London borough. Why? Certainly in Tottenham and in parts of Hornsey and Wood Green, the housing stock is unlike that in other boroughs. The area is not full of housing estates; it has a lot of owner-occupied terrace housing, which landlords buy up to rent out to some of the most vulnerable people. I spoke in a housing debate in the House just a few months ago on this very issue. I do not want to repeat much that I said then, but it is clear that there are some serious modern-day pariah landlords in London, preying on some of the most vulnerable people, many of whom reside in constituencies such as mine.

Those people sleep on dirty floors. Some live in so-called bed-and-breakfast accommodation, but they do not get bed and breakfast. The beds are falling apart and there is absolutely no breakfast. They are tremendously vulnerable people in a very poor part of London. Indeed, many of the Members whom I have mentioned face similar deprivation in their constituencies.

Tottenham has wards that are in the top 10 per cent. of the most deprived in London. Our services are under serious pressure. GPs should have 1,300 patients on their lists; in Tottenham, they have more than 3,000. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) said that 64 languages were used in the schools in his constituency. It would be nice if that were the case in our schools, where more than 160 languages are used. It is very difficult indeed to provide quality education in that context. Providing education in those circumstances would challenge the brains of the leading educationists in the world. Given that pressure on our housing, education and medical services, I applaud the proposal to have accommodation centres, where quality services can be provided.

Some hon. Members say that that proposal cannot work because of size. Forgive me for being young, but let us please try to imagine something else. We have institutions where people board and receive quality health care, education and other services. Many Opposition Members know about that—they went to Eton and similar places. Many hon. Members will be jaded and say, "But we never provide that for the most vulnerable." Well, we must work for a society in which we do provide the most vulnerable with those services, and we must believe that we can achieve that.

Mr. Connarty: My hon. Friend knows that I regard him very warmly, but is he suggesting that the accommodation centres will somehow deal with the problem? He has said that 20,000 people in his constituency are seeking asylum or want to emigrate to this country, but we are talking about 3,000 places in possibly four centres, so perhaps we need a spark of realism about what the proposal will do to help the problems that his constituency suffers.

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I suggested at the very beginning of my speech that we need to make progress. I believe that the proposals constitute progress, and I say no more than that. I referred to housing in my constituency in a very important Adjournment debate because I wanted to bring that issue to the Government's attention. We need to take important measures in housing policy to ensure that constituencies such as mine can move up, not slip down. I was born in working-class Tottenham; I am very sad that it has become socially excluded Tottenham.

It is important that we provide specialist education services for the children who need them most. When we criticise education provision in those centres, we must ask ourselves whether our children are currently receiving that standard of education in all our schools. Those centres could attract the very best teachers, who are experienced at working with refugee children. We should hope that that will be the case. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills will ensure that those centres will be inspected by Ofsted and that they will meet the conditions of the European convention on human rights. So, broadly speaking, I welcome the Bill and would urge other hon. Members to do the same.

8.17 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I am very pleased to participate in this debate and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) who, as usual, has made an interesting and thoughtful contribution.

Given the very worrying events in France at the weekend, with the electoral success of Le Pen, and given the threat from the BNP in our local elections, this debate takes on even greater significance. It presents hon. Members with the challenge of responding to the legitimate concerns of people worried by the current asylum and immigration situation. While responding in a way that does not dismiss such fears as ignorant or racist, we must remain true to the principles of fairness and tolerance for which this country is famous.

Much of the Bill is to be commended—as is the Home Secretary—for the way it seeks to address issues that for too long have remained no-go areas with respect to nationality, immigration and asylum. As with all Bills, we will have reservations about certain clauses, but that fundamental fact about the Bill needs to be recognised by all. There has often been a failure to engage openly and frankly with the debate on such issues in a rapidly changing world, when our society is now culturally diverse and international migration is increasing. That has led to an opportunity for those who would peddle narrow-minded nationalism. We have a potent brew if we add to that the feeling of isolation and exclusion on some of our poorer estates from the general prosperity and opportunities available in society.

We have to respond, and part of that response, which includes the Bill, must be the regeneration of those areas, empowering local people and reconnecting them to the political process. Ministers must keep talking about the Bill to people on the ground, allowing them the chance not only to have their say but to influence the policy.

The social and political context in which we debate the Bill is crucial. For too long, the debate has been caricatured as one of wishy-washy liberals on the one hand, who are willing to let anyone into the country with no thought about the consequences and, on the other hand, rabid racists who do not want anyone to be allowed to cross the channel. The truth for most people is somewhat different, and the intention is to create a new consensus for the future.

For centuries, this country has welcomed economic migrants to its shores. They have come with skills and talents, enhancing our economic prosperity and adding to our cultural diversity. We have rightly prided ourselves on the fact that we are a safe haven for those who flee persecution, war or religious or political intolerance. I have seen examples of such problems in Kosovo and Angola. If we found ourselves and our children in those circumstances we too would flee and seek shelter and safety in the lands and communities of others. Increasing globalisation has made migration easier. As I said, however, the opportunities that that presents also give rise to challenges, and the Bill attempts to address some of those in a modern context.

We can be proud of the fact that so many people have arrived in these islands. The diversity of culture that they have brought with them has enriched our nation. However, the tensions in some of our communities, reflected in last summer's disturbances, show that there have also been policy failures. The reports into those disturbances painted a vivid picture of fractured and divided communities that had no sense of shared common values or a shared civic identity to unite around. The Bill introduces measures on nationality and citizenship to address some of those concerns, which I welcome.

I stress that the Bill needs to be set within the context of a range of other Government measures and policies. Many of those have been taken on board, especially with regard to employment, and we need to pursue them with a greater sense of urgency. We need measures to regenerate our poorest communities—black, Asian or white. We must renew their social fabric by providing new housing, youth and community facilities and improved schools. We all need to think about how people can be made more responsible for the regeneration of their communities by taking crucial decisions.

A Bill on nationality, immigration and asylum needs to be set, to an extent, within the context of Government measures to improve the quality of life on our estates by tackling crime, a poor environment, social exclusion and political alienation. If we do not do that, the extremists will use that alienation to gather support by making scapegoats of an ill-defined group. It is up to us in Parliament and elsewhere to take the lead. We need to say loudly and clearly that we do not blame others for the problems, that we will try to find solutions to them and that we are proud of the cultural diversity in this country. It is against such a background that the Bill allows us to restate the value of skilled migrants who come to this country. They are essential to the success of our public service reforms and to our continued economic growth. We should welcome them as we have done others in the past.

The Bill also deals with issues relating to asylum and illegal immigration. The Home Secretary and the Government are to be congratulated on their efforts to do more to tackle those who traffic in people. They bring them here to work in, for example, the sex industry by using force, lies and deception. The harsher penalties are welcome, especially when we realise that many of the people who are brought to this country are young children. We should be proud of our record of offering a safe haven to those who flee terror abroad and we should continue to proud of that.

Of course people want to know that their borders are secure and that the system that the Government operate is fair and not abused. However, we should also recognise that for a long time we have been a country that welcomes people. We should never allow the need for tough and effective action on asylum to blind us to the needs of people who seek refuge here, because many of them are children. I am proud of what we do for people who seek refuge here.

One child in Afghanistan wrote:

"In our country nobody grows old
Because everybody is dying
How long must this be
My heart is full of blood
Even if I will be hanged
I will keep writing my poems
And colour the pages with my words".

Another Afghan child's poem ends with the lines:

"Peace is not sold
Anywhere in the world otherwise I would have bought
It for my country".

We need tough and effective action on our immigration and asylum policies, as proposed in the Bill, but we must never forget why many people, including children, flee their countries. The Bill must and will reflect that.

Save the Children estimates that in 2001 there were 6,000 asylum-seeking children under 18 in the United Kingdom without parents or guardians. Many more refugee children are with parents or guardians. It is essential that the Bill's measures are fair to them and are consistent with the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. Those young people may be asylum seekers, and clearly there have to be systems, but first and foremost they are children. That was made even more real to me when I participated in a project organised by

[Vernon Coaker]

UNICEF called "Journey with a refugee child". We went to Angola to experience at first hand some of the experiences that cause young people to seek asylum. On our return, we visited projects where they spoke of their torture and torment.

Previous legislation and the measures in this Bill have to address the needs of those and other children. We must ensure that the induction centres and the processes within them are child-centred. We must make progress on the Government's social exclusion agenda and targets for tackling child poverty, and apply them to refugee children. In that respect, the abolition of vouchers is welcome, but we must keep the level of support that we give to children and their families under constant review so that it is adequate and consistent with other Government objectives. We need to ensure that the accommodation centres provide proper access to quality services. We must also ensure that the needs are met of those children who are refugees now, and that in the search for tomorrow's solutions we do not forget the needs of today.

The Bill has much to commend it with respect to nationality and immigration. It attempts to rebuild the trust of the British people in a system in which they have lost confidence. In that important respect, the Home Secretary deserves much praise. However, I leave my last words to another child who said:

"The best thing about this country is feeling safe . . . We don't have to live in fear for our lives. We are grateful to be here."

That is a compliment to our country and the British people, and it is on that attitude that the Bill seeks to build.

8.27 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): My constituency is historically a place where refugees and asylum seekers have come. Ever since I came into the House in 1987, I have taken a close and detailed interest in immigration and nationality matters. Ministers have not always welcomed that interest but, undeterred, I have pursued it down the years.

Let me begin by dealing with unfounded asylum claims. People on my side of the argument often do not want to touch on that. I probably see more unfounded asylum claims than most hon. Members because I deal with more asylum claimants. The answer to people sticking in unfounded asylum claims is not to pile unfairness on unfairness. It is not a case of having a punitive and discriminatory system. The key to choking off unfounded asylum claims is to get rid of the delays. The biggest single incentive for unscrupulous immigration legal advice telling people to stick in an unfounded claim is the delay. It has been common knowledge for a long time that it takes years and years to process an asylum claim.

I do not deny that unfounded claims exist—I see them all the time—but the answer does not lie in punitive measures, deterrence or patterns of social exclusion. It lies instead in a fair, efficient and speedy system for both the initial decision and, crucially, the appeal. In fact, the delays for appeals are higher than they have ever been.

The Home Secretary sets great store by the fact that we are united on the Bill and that he has the support of those on the Tory Front Bench. As I said in an intervention, however, the fact that those on both Front Benches agree does not mean that the Bill is any good.

During the passage of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999—which Front-Bench Members on both sides of the House agreed on, with the single exception of the provisions relating to lorry drivers—I was told that the dispersal system, far from being punitive, unfair and brutal, as some of us insisted, meant that people would get high-quality facilities and advice wherever they went. If hon. Members care to read reports by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Immigration Advisory Service and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants they will find, sadly, that the promises made to us by Ministers on the Floor of the House about the quality of services available to dispersed asylum seekers under the 1999 Act were not fulfilled. So if some of us question what exactly the quality of the services will be, especially as regards the new accommodation centres, people will have to excuse us. We are only building on what we know from past experience.

The Home Secretary talked about his use of language. I do not want to harp on individual words, but, as other hon. Members have said, the use of the word "swamping" was unfortunate in this context. The Home Secretary is not here to hear it, but let me say this. He prides himself on being blunt-spoken and on having no truck with political correctness, but he needs to be careful in his use of language regarding this matter. There is a danger that by being the blunt Yorkshireman and trying to conciliate white people's fears he strays into using language that many people find offensive. I say that in the most comradely fashion. *[Interruption.]* All my remarks are made in a comradely fashion, as comrades know.

There is much in the Bill to welcome. I particularly welcome the announcement that fees for family visit appeals will be abolished—as someone who argued against it in the beginning, I am very glad about that—and of course we all welcome the abolition of vouchers. However, I advise colleagues who are so rapturous in welcoming the Bill that during the passage of the 1999 Act many of us argued consistently, on the Floor of the House and in Committee, against vouchers. We predicted how they would end up and how unfair and humiliating they would be. Colleagues lined up to ask, "How can you say that?" and to say, "We have confidence in the Minister", and they trooped happily through the Lobbies for vouchers.

As it was on vouchers, so it will be on exclusion from mainstream education. Of the hundreds of Labour Members who voted for vouchers, very few can remember doing so. I believe that in years to come, many hon. Members who vote tonight to exclude asylum-seeking children from mainstream education will have a convenient memory loss about it.

Mr. Gerrard: Can my hon. Friend jog our memories as to how many Labour Members voted against the Third Reading of the 1999 Act?

Ms Abbott: I think that there were seven of us. We now find that more than 307 have come round to our point of view on vouchers.

The single most important aspect of the Bill is that it is the beginning of a debate that acknowledges the legitimacy of economic migration. I do not believe in open borders, and it is a slur to say that of any of us who criticise any element of the Bill, but as the daughter of economic migrants, in the past I have often said on the Floor of the House that I hate the tenor of remarks made by Front-Bench Members about economic migrants, which suggest that they are criminals. There is nothing wrong with coming thousands of miles to better oneself economically. That is what my parents did and what millions of Irish, Jamaican, Nigerian and Jewish people have done. Economic migrants have made London a great city. Of course the process must be managed; of course we cannot have open borders. The single most important aspect of the Bill is that it begins to open up a debate on how to ensure legitimate, managed economic migration.

Simon Hughes: Given that if any country has sent people out as economic migrants to half the world, then conquered it, run it and brought its wealth back, it is this one, it is extraordinarily hypocritical for people to say that others cannot come here.

Ms Abbott: I entirely agree.

On the language test, of course people should be encouraged to learn English, and there is already provision for those who wish to obtain British nationality to have a reasonable command of English. However, I worry that a language test will discriminate against the elderly and others.

On arranged marriages, the response from Ministers was not very illuminating. It is not for Ministers to tell people whom they should marry. It is wrong to accept that someone can have an arranged marriage so long as it is to someone on the British mainland, but to try to persuade them not to have an arranged marriage to someone from overseas. It causes massive offence, not only to those communities that have historically had arranged marriages, like some sections of the Asian community and European royal families, but to all of us.

On accommodation centres, I know that people are saying that those of us who query the standard of facilities are old miseries and that they are asking why we are not prepared to go bright-eyed into the future with our Front-Bench colleagues. Nevertheless, I have a few questions to ask of Ministers. When accommodation centres were originally discussed, one of the most important services that was to be provided was legal advice, so why has that been excluded from the Bill? In the short term, what asylum seekers need more than anything else is high-quality legal advice. I will not be persuaded of Ministers' good intentions in relation to the accommodation centres unless they include that in the Bill.

On education, I listened with interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), who suggested that the education provision in accommodation centres would be on a par with that at Eton. Well, maybe. I do not want to sound scornful or mocking, but the reality is that it is not right—I know that it is not very new Labour to speak in terms of right and wrong—to exclude any group of children from education, not only from an academic point of view but for the sake of their social and personal development.

Anyone who believes that those children will be in an accommodation centre for a maximum of six months has clearly not sat through the passage of four immigration and asylum Bills. If I seriously thought that those children would be in the centres for only a few weeks, I would have no problem with classes, because it would take a few weeks to sort out a school for them anyway, but I believe that they will be there for months and months. In any case, in the long run such an attempt to exclude from full-time education children who are resident in this country would be challengeable in law, and I advise Ministers against it.

Mr. Lammy: I think that it has been acknowledged that children are not to be excluded from full-time education. Education services will be provided through the Department, working alongside the local education authority. In any case, all LEAs in this country have pupil referral units and learning support units, which take students out of school and educate them. This is a similar provision for children who have just arrived in the country, and it will apply to them for a maximum of only six months.

Ms Abbott: It is separate but equal, with no guarantees as to the quality of the education. It is wrong, and I will continue to argue and vote against it.

I am concerned that the Bill, which does have things to recommend it, says nothing about speeding up appeals or about clearing the backlog of appeals. It says nothing about improving the quality of decision making, which is an absolutely key issue.

On immigration and asylum, it is far easier for us to go with the tide and to reflect popular opinion, and it makes our Front-Bench colleagues look on us more kindly, but the way we treat the most marginalised and excluded—the people whom the tabloid press choose to stigmatise—is the test of a civilised society. There are good things in the Bill, but it needs improving in Committee. I will never vote to see any group of children resident in this country excluded from school for months on end.

8.39 pm

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West): As one of those who did not oppose the voucher scheme and who voted with the Government, may I say that—

Simon Hughes: You were wrong?

Mr. Singh: May I say that it was not the first time that I have voted with the Government and been wrong. When I came to the House, it was a revelation to find that hon. Members sometimes have to vote for things that they disagree with, at least until they are as brave as some of my hon. Friends.

I welcome the ditching of the voucher scheme. It proved ineffective, inefficient and demeaning. I give a guarded welcome to the new two-year probationary period for spouses. In my constituency, I have come across many cases of women who complain bitterly about their treatment by their husbands, who, after a year, having been given leave to remain indefinitely, have just scarpered. They want me to try to have their husbands deported. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) has talked about the difficulties of being a

[Mr. Singh]

third party in such cases. I have to add a caveat to my welcome, however, because the provision could lead to the mistreatment of wives who come to this country if it takes them two years to get their stamp. We need to think a little bit more about the measure.

I have no problem at all with an oath of allegiance. If I want the privilege of having a British passport and British citizenship, the least that Britain can expect from me is my allegiance. I also have no problem with a language test. I have always advocated, as we all do, that English is the currency of this society, and without it people will not get anywhere. I have no problem with the idea of asking people to have a knowledge of life in the UK, but whose life in the UK should they have knowledge of? What does "sufficient knowledge" mean? Will such tests prove to be a real test of allegiance or commitment? I believe that Anthony Blunt spoke perfect English, but he was one of the biggest traitors that we have ever seen.

I welcome clause 37, which allows support to be provided for failed asylum seekers awaiting removal. We have all seen people in our constituencies who have no means of subsistence at all. I also welcome clause 43, which allows the Home Secretary to establish a refugee settlement programme. That could be helpful in times of crisis in particular countries. I welcome too the announcement today of the abolition of fees for visitor appeals.

After all those welcomes, I must point out that I have a number of concerns. All hon. Members have mentioned accommodation centres. I firmly believe that 750-bed centres are too big, although I do not know what the right size would be. I think that having such large numbers of people in a centre would lead to tensions. If we are to have accommodation centres, it is essential that they are run by people who do not make them into de facto detention centres. Who will run them? Will it be Securicor? We have to think carefully about the location of accommodation centres, not just because people will say, "Not in my backyard," although they will say that, but because the location must be appropriate for the people who will be in the centres. Will there be communities nearby to whom they can relate or will they be completely isolated? We need to be very watchful of that.

I am very worried that children resident in the centres will not have access to normal education provision. I can confirm that 64 languages are spoken in schools in Bradford, and I am very happy and proud about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) has pointed out that more than 160 languages are spoken in Tottenham schools. However, it does not matter how many languages are spoken—if those children do not speak English and they are being taught in English, they will still have to be taught English. For the host of reasons already explored in the debate, mainstream education is where those children should be.

I do not know why detention centres are to be renamed removal centres. Neither name sounds better than the other—in fact, I think they both sound pretty crap. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary would not be too happy if I called them concentration camps.

Mr. Lammy: To return to the education issue, does my hon. Friend accept that if the system works well, teachers in mainstream education services will welcome the fact that refugee children escaping vulnerability have had intensive English lessons and intensive education prior to entering local schools?

Mr. Singh: Whether or not I accept that, such arrangements will deal only with the tip of the iceberg. Most refugee children will not be housed in the centres—why should they be treated differently from and not have the same rights as other children who are claiming refuge?

Angela Eagle: I cannot let the hon. Gentleman's comment about detention or removal centres being comparable to concentration camps go unanswered. He should visit Harmondsworth, which is just by Heathrow and therefore quite convenient for the House, where he will see that the facilities are excellent, with training, education and health services available. I resent very deeply indeed his use of that term.

Mr. Singh: I accept the Minister's point. I hope that she accepts that I was speaking in jest.

I am not concerned about names. My concern is that families with children should not be detained in removal centres. That commitment should be firm. Families with children are not likely to abscond, and the only justification for keeping people in a detention centre is that there is strong likelihood that they will abscond.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Singh: I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

I am puzzled by the absence from the Bill of any proposals to deal with delays in immigration cases and immigration appeals. Delay is one of the biggest problems and the greatest cause of frustration to my constituents. Such proposals should be added to the Bill.

I wish that further consideration had been given to guarantees or bonds for family visitors. Those proposals were rejected and then dropped the last time this type of legislation came before the House, but I think that they should be re-examined.

One of the biggest changes that we could make through the new Bill is to the way in which we treat elderly parents and grandparents. The hurdles that they have to overcome to join their children or grandchildren in this country are huge. If I, living in this country, do not send my grandparents in another country any money, so that they have to live in the most appalling conditions, they are allowed to come here, but if I am a dutiful grandchild and send them money, so that they live in better conditions, they cannot come here. That is appalling, and I wish that we could do something about it in the Bill.

I am dismayed that this is the fourth immigration and asylum Bill in 10 years—dismayed because it means that all the others have failed; had they not, we would not be debating this Bill today. The reasons why we are getting immigration and asylum wrong are world events, the number of people involved—no system could possibly have coped, and ours is not coping now—and delays. I am reminded of our policies on drugs: no matter how much money we throw at the problem or how many police officers we have chasing drug barons, drug abuse continues to increase.

We need to take a more radical approach. First, we must act urgently to secure international agreements on asylum. Secondly, we must work hard to eradicate poverty in the developing world, because that is why people want to come to the west. The problem is not confined to the United Kingdom; it is a problem of the west, and it is one that the west created by making other countries poor. Strong action is needed. With the current backlog and an extra 65,000 appeals in the pipeline, how can the new system succeed? It is doomed to failure. Thousands of people are coming in every day and the backlog is growing daily and monthly. Only one solution promises any chance of success in managing the system. The whole House and the parties in it must agree—one party will not do this on its own—to have a general amnesty now, wiping out the backlog and starting with a clean sheet. Without such action, the system is doomed to failure. I hope that Members on both sides of the House will look at that proposal. If we are to have any chance at all of managing a difficult system in the future we must start with a clean sheet.

8.50 pm

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): In the short time available, I shall concentrate on the children of asylum seekers and the way in which the Bill will affect them.

I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement that the voucher scheme will end earlier than planned; that has been strongly welcomed in Wales. I also welcome the fact that, as the Home Secretary said, people can approach the country honestly via the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I welcome the proposed category of economic migration and many other changes. Much of the Bill is positive; it is essential to get a system that is trusted by the public.

As one of my colleagues said earlier, it is essential that the children of asylum seekers are treated first and foremost as children and have the same rights and access to services as other children in Cardiff, North, Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom. I want to look briefly at the way in which the system is operating in Cardiff via the National Asylum Support Service and the way in which it will be affected by the Bill. Just under 1,000 people have come to Cardiff via the dispersal scheme; 336 children have been dispersed to the city under NASS, 253 of whom are of school age and 83 of whom are of pre-school age. We are therefore talking about small numbers compared with the thousands of people in other constituencies about whom my hon. Friends have spoken.

The scheme is operating reasonably well despite the strain on resources. Local bodies have worked together extremely well, and I congratulate the Bro Taf health authority on recently holding a successful seminar about the health needs of asylum seekers. I also congratulate Cardiff council on leading the scheme, and all the voluntary bodies involved.

Initially, it was mainly young men who came to Cardiff, but now it is predominantly families, usually with a lone female at the head; the majority of such families come from Somalia. The community physician has seen a third of the children, in 50 per cent. of whom physical, developmental or mental and behavioural problems have been identified. A block grant from the National Assembly for Wales has been used to set up a primary care general practice with a salaried GP service, which is needed because of the pressure on local services mentioned by several hon. Members. The new service is working effectively and ensures that children have a comprehensive medical examination and, if appropriate, receive inoculations that may have been missed. Severe problems have been identified by the community physician, including congenital heart disease, Down's syndrome and severe emotional distress; there was also one case of a child who lost a hand in a grenade attack. Health and local education authorities have worked together through the charity Children of Conflict, which operates in schools, to deal with traumatised children; health services for children and adolescents have also been supportive. The general feeling is that everybody is pulling together and that the system is generally working. It is unlikely that the same skills could be provided to children who were housed in accommodation centres. Certainly, there would be a duplication of resources if the accommodation centre that is planned just outside Cardiff went ahead.

There has been a proposal to use Sully hospital as an accommodation centre. The hospital is 10 miles from Cardiff in the neighbouring constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith). I do not know the current status of that proposal—I know that it has not been finally wiped off the list—but the suggestion to use a site such as Sully indicates to me the type of accommodation that is being considered. I know the hospital well because I worked there for many years as a hospital social worker when it was a chest and heart hospital. It originally started as a TB hospital and was chosen for its remote position and its view of the sea—a place where patients could spend months recovering.

Sully hospital is in a fairly isolated position. Any accommodation centre there would not easily make links with the local community. The policy of establishing an accommodation centre there is entirely at odds with all the other policies in Wales that are working towards integration and inclusivity. As many hon. Members have said, 750 individuals housed together is a very large number. It would be extremely difficult to manage such a large group of diverse people, including families and single men.

In addition, there would be the cost of converting a hospital such as Sully or building new accommodation centres, as I believe is planned elsewhere. It has been estimated that it would cost £7 million to bring Sully hospital up to standard, which would include the replacement of the sewerage system. The walls are porous and the location was deemed unsuitable for psychiatric patients, who were moved out. I fail to see how it can now be considered suitable for asylum seekers.

I understand the Home Secretary when he says that he is considering accommodation centres to relieve the pressures on the services, but if a centre were established in such a position, just 10 miles away from the dispersal system operating in Cardiff, I do not see that it would be possible to provide resources in the accommodation centre that would match those available in the community. The enormous sum that it would cost to bring Sully up to standard and to build new centres could be much better spent on improving resources for the children being dispersed throughout the country. In Cardiff, the system is beginning to settle down.

[Julie Morgan]

It has been said that the proposal is to house people in accommodation centres for only six months. Six months is a long time in a child's life. I am concerned that asylum seeker children may not have access to the same resources as other children in the community in Wales. We have a children's commissioner, the first in the UK. What duties and powers would he have over the children in an accommodation centre? Will children in families living in such an institution have the protection of the Children Act 1989? I hope that the Minister will answer those questions when she replies.

What opportunities will children have to participate in normal community life? Some of the children will gain refugee status. Surely the opportunity should be offered as early as possible for them to get involved in the community. I am particularly concerned that the Bill proposes that children in accommodation centres will receive education on site in schools managed by the Home Office. That seems to remove the children's right to a normal education.

One of the best ways to acquire a normal pattern of life is to go to school. We all know about the socialisation that takes place at the school gates. Local schools in the small villages in the surrounding area will obviously not be able to cope with a large influx of small children from an accommodation centre, so those children will not benefit from going to the local schools.

There are many unanswered questions and issues still to be addressed, particularly about education. It is important to emphasise the point that has been made several times: the children need to learn to speak English. The best way to learn to speak English is to go to a school where children are taught in English and a number of the children speak English. Many children who come to Wales learn to speak English or Welsh because those are the languages spoken by the majority of the people.

There is a lot in the Bill to recommend it, but I hope that in Committee changes will be made to the proposals for accommodation centres, particularly with regard to how they affect children.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): The hon. Lady speaks eloquently and rightly because time is of the essence, particularly for children in the accommodation centres. Does she think that it might be advantageous for appeals to be heard in those centres, since that would considerably speed up the process?

Julie Morgan: The appeals should be heard as quickly as possible. We do not know how the accommodation centres will work out, but given everything that has been said about how they will operate, I do not think that they will be suitable places for families with children, and they will be even more unsuitable if the children cannot enter mainstream education.

I hope that those issues will be considered in Committee, including the size and concept of accommodation centres. Cardiff has only a small number of dispersed asylum seekers and the system there is working relatively well. If we were to have an accommodation centre as planned just 10 miles outside Cardiff, it would cause problems.

9.1 pm

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): I broadly welcome key aspects of the Bill, but I must raise some issues of concern. My constituency has the highest ethnic minority population of any in Scotland, but it has also become home to an increasing number of asylum seekers.

Hon. Members will be familiar with Sighthill in Mr. Speaker's constituency, but Govan, Ibrox, and particularly Pollokshaws on Glasgow southside, are also home to hundreds of people fleeing persecution.

The Bill recognises that Britain is changing dramatically, with diverse cultures enriching life for us all. I welcome the shift of emphasis from discriminatory immigration policy in the Commonwealth Immigrants Acts and the Immigration Acts. We must look ahead to what our country and our communities will need in future.

I also recognise the genuine measures to maintain our status as a decent and fair country in protecting individuals and families threatened by brutal intimidation and terrible violence in their own homes overseas.

Clearly our borders cannot be open without restrictions, placing undue strain on the economy and way of life, but we must ensure that all those who wish to enter the United Kingdom are treated humanely and with dignity.

I support the Government's measures for a fast-track system for applications. That will discourage those who wish to make false and bogus claims. For that reason, we must concentrate on newcomers with this approach.

Old applications for those who have been settled in Britain for eight to 10 years, are married with children and contribute productively to our economy should not be a priority. Considerable time, effort and resources would be saved for our Government and our courts if we diverted attention from those who would be allowed to live here on compassionate grounds as British citizens.

I have made representations on behalf of a number of constituents who could be deported at any time, breaking up committed couples and dedicated parents, taking hard-working people out of work and forcing families out of their homes. These people are model citizens.

I largely welcome the part 1 measures on nationality and citizenship. It is vital for people hoping to live in the United Kingdom to grasp and understand life in Britain. Language skills are vital. Can the Minister assure me that resources will be made available to implement that aspect of the Bill and allow applicants to play an active role in our society? I am concerned about the nature of the language test and would appreciate some guidance from her on the form that it will take. I also wonder what the results of the same evaluation would be if it were applied to all sections of our communities throughout the United Kingdom.

I must express reservations about deprivation of citizenship. What status would that give those affected who live in Britain, especially if their country of origin also denied them citizenship rights?

I am also troubled by extension of the probationary period on marriages to two years, which will place added strain on couples. Unfortunately, I disagree with my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) and for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) on the issue. I believe that negative decisions for many women—especially those from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan—would leave their lives ruined, as they would never be in a position to

marry again. Very few applicants have used the domestic violence concessions to explain why they have left the matrimonial home.

I am concerned about the couples who have a family and have to leave. If families are not granted an indefinite stay within a year, it can be an added strain on their social life. I agree with the view of the Immigration Advisory Service that

"it is unreasonable to place further strains on a new marriage by delaying indefinite leave to remain to a spouse in a marriage which raises no concerns with the Home Office".

The part 2 measures on accommodation centres must be considered alongside the commitment made by Lord Rooker. In another place on 7 February, he said:

"The centres will offer education, healthcare and legal and interpreting services."

Can the Minister assure me that legal advice will be provided in the centres? Many problems arise for asylum seekers because of bad advice from agents.

Angela Eagle: I can assure my hon. Friend that legal advice will be available in accommodation centres.

Mr. Sarwar: I thank my hon. Friend very much for that assurance.

Lord Rooker also stated:

"The best place for children to be educated is in mainstream schools. They would not be in the accommodation centres for more than six months."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 7 February 2002; Vol. 1863, c. 743–50.]

I very much appreciate that statement, although I hope that the Government will not aim for six months, but look to enforce a shorter maximum period of three months for such children.

I must confess that I do not see the distinction between detention centres and removal centres—their new name in the Bill. I hope that the Government will ensure that asylum seekers will not be detained in removal centres if they are not going to be removed at the final stage. Many of my constituents have expressed genuine concerns about the Dungavel removal centre in Scotland that are shared by community groups, local churches and voluntary bodies. Families with children have been detained in an environment that does not seem suitable.

Last week, in a written answer to a question that I had tabled, the Minister confirmed that last Monday

"there were 15 children at Dungavel Removal Centre and of these, two had special needs as a result of disability or health problems."

She stated that there were

"excellent medical facilities at Dungavel in the dedicated healthcare unit",

including

"two hospital beds . . . a full time doctor and five full time nurses."—[*Official Report*, 19 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 1252–53W.]

I am greatly concerned for the children in Dungavel. With all respect to the staff, and the best intentions in the world, I cannot see how the centre can offer adequate care for children with special needs. I also hope that the Minister will assess the modular education provided at Dungavel for all school-age children. I welcome the recent visit to the centre by the Minister of State, Scotland Office. I recognise his real commitment, and that of other Ministers, and their active partnership with colleagues in the Scottish Executive to support asylum seekers in Scotland.

The issue of arranged marriages has been raised in the House and in the media over many years. We must draw a distinction between arranged marriages and forced marriages. In arranged marriages, parents consult their children, and take their views on board. I can assure the House that the vast majority of people in ethnic minority communities value the views of their children. Unfortunately, a few believe that they know what is best for their children, and their actions are damning their families and communities, and our society. We must oppose forced marriages. Community leaders in Scotland took the view that we must do so, and they are now less of a problem in Scotland than in England.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West mentioned global poverty. If we want to deal with economic migrants, it is important to deal with global poverty. It is unfortunate that there is only one superpower in the world. Although it is the richest country in the world, it contributes only 0.1 per cent. of its gross domestic product to help the developing countries. Under the United Nations charter, that country—or any developed country—should contribute 0.7 per cent. of GDP. I am glad that, under the Labour Government, we have increased our share to 0.36 per cent., and I hope that, in the near future, we will achieve our obligation under the United Nations charter.

9.12 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I am glad that the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) has returned to the Chamber, because my first few references will be to Scotland. When I heard that this was the fourth Bill of this kind in 10 years, I was reminded of Bruce's spider. Robert the Bruce, who eventually defeated the English, saw a spider try six times to get out of the cave where it was hiding; it succeeded only on the seventh try. I am glad that the Government are trying again, because it would be a terrible thing if errors had been made in previous Bills and the Government had buried their head in the sand and tried to make those provisions work.

I have no expertise comparable to that of my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) and for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), or of other hon. Members whose constituencies have large ethnic populations and who have had to deal with immigration and asylum issues to the extent that they have done. My constituency has, however, a small ethnic community, and my brushes with the immigration service have been just as appalling, long drawn out and illogical as they have obviously been for Members in constituencies in England with large ethnic communities.

On the point raised by the hon. Member for Perth about nationality, I went to seek the words of the oath and pledge that citizens will be asked to take. The oath is very similar to the oath that we take here, and which the hon. Lady herself took when she first came here. The pledge states:

"I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values."

I would have thought that the hon. Lady, as a member of the smallest party from Scotland in this place, would have accepted the democratic will of the Scottish people—

[Mr. Michael Connarty]

as well as the people of the United Kingdom—that we should be part of the United Kingdom. Despite all the polls, and everything that we see in the newspapers, the reality is that there is no progress on her party's long trail to tear Scotland out of the United Kingdom and to damage its people and its economy.

Annabelle Ewing: I have been absent from the Chamber for a total of about six minutes in a debate that has lasted five hours and 14 minutes, so the hon. Gentleman's first remark was a cheap shot. I shall deal with his substantive point, however. First, no one was talking about the oath. That is the existing requirement. The new requirement is the pledge of loyalty to the United Kingdom. I do not know his view, but I would have thought, as I said before, that it would be rather odd to impose such a requirement on a new applicant for citizenship who seeks to reside in Scotland when the official Opposition of the Scots Parliament would not be prepared, if a similar requirement were imposed on everybody, to take such an oath. That raises a serious constitutional question that no one has tried to answer tonight.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Lady has made her point.

Mr. Connarty: The people of the United Kingdom and the people of Scotland may be amazed by the hon. Lady's intervention. She has repeated that the Scottish National party does not feel any allegiance and could not feel any loyalty to the United Kingdom, despite the democratic will of the people. Democracy is about winning the people to our side and then going down the road that we would follow. It is not about saying, "We can't win, so we will do something completely different." I keep reminding the people of Scotland that Scottish National party Members have said that they feel no loyalty and would not swear an oath of allegiance to the democratic nature of the United Kingdom. That is what the oath says.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Connarty: No. I do not want to take up too much time.

Several debates about immigration are going on. Interestingly, a debate is being led by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that seems to suggest that we should probably not, in the beginning, have opted out of the immigration arrangements for the rest of the European Union when we had a chance to stay in the treaty. As this debate has shown, that has caused us amazing problems, and we should try to come into those arrangements so that there would be one set of rules for the European Union. It was a good election gambit to say, "We are going to defend Britain against people trying to come into this country", but it has caused us tremendous problems, and we should probably have signed up to the treaty.

Another debate is going on in which the Home Office is involved at a European level. That debate touches on all the issues relating to immigration in the Bill, and some of those issues cause problems for the Bill. The debate is contained in the EU directive 9074/01, which has been discussed in the European Scrutiny Committee of which I am a member. Several comments are very interesting. The right to accommodation, which I thought was a basic right of anyone who wanted to come to this country, even on a temporary basis, to have consideration for asylum, is reduced to a place in accommodation that may be—I am frightened by this idea—an old hospital in Wales.

To set up 3,000 accommodation places, even in four 750-place units, that are of a decent standard for families with children, or even for individuals, would be extremely expensive. I would hate to think that ex-public buildings would be filled with people waiting for their asylum decision to be made. In addition, if there are only four centres, and people are not allowed to move around, article 7 of the EU directive—on the right of appeal on residence and freedom of movement—will be used again and again. Anyone who feels oppressed by their situation would be well advised—we are told that legal advice will be available to them—to appeal immediately for the right to move to a place where they feel that they are better accommodated.

On the right to education, article 10 of the EU directive is more oppressive. I do not know who initiated discussion of this issue in relation to the directive—we never see the minutes—but it says that what was a right to education contained in the relevant articles is being amended to a right not to the same education conditions as everybody else but to similar conditions. That would allow the accommodation centres to be used as education centres, which is a backward move in Europe in terms of people's rights. I would hate to think that our Government were leading that charge in discussions of the directive. As an ex-teacher, I agree with most hon. Members who have spoken tonight that it will not be possible, in an accommodation unit, to give people an education that is similar or the same as that given outside.

I wonder whether those units will provide forced English lessons and be places where people learn to speak English or are given a brief but steep learning curve on how to be British instead of receiving an education, which I understand to be much broader than that. I would be worried if allowing that to happen is the intention behind changing the European directive.

It is the right of everyone who wants to come here as an asylum applicant to try to achieve economic viability and what I would call normalisation. People must be able to use their skills, if they have them, to achieve economic independence. If they could, and if it turned out that they were not allowed to stay, they would not be more impoverished when they left than when they arrived.

Therefore, I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Perth, which I have made before, that the green card system should be available almost immediately to people with skills, particularly professional skills, to offer this society while they wait the six months that we are now told it will take for their applications to be dealt with.

Returning to the Scottish scene, clause 33 appears to suggest that the Home Secretary will take on board all costs necessary to provide a full education for the children in accommodation centres, should they lie in Scotland. I have a particularly good knowledge of the Scottish education system and I note that the national inspectors—that is, the UK inspectors—will be responsible for verifying the adequacy of that education.

However, that does not chime with the Scottish education system, because we still have a good system based on the local authorities, which are responsible for delivery and the standard of education. I would be concerned if some UK standard for what happens in the accommodation centres were to lie alongside much higher education authority standards.

I would prefer to integrate those educational facilities outwith the accommodation centres but into the local education authorities. Perhaps that is what the hon. Member for Perth was alluding to, but, due to the pressures on resources, I do not think that the honest citizens of Perth would welcome a large number of people being dispersed to Perth and put in the local housing and education systems.

We must think seriously about what clause 33 really means for people. In particular, the Government should consider subsection (3)(a), which says that an order under subsection (2) may

"apply, disapply or modify the effect of an enactment (which may include a provision made by or under an Act of the Scottish Parliament)".

They must think that through.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Connarty: I apologise, but I cannot because other Members want to speak.

I hope that that issue will be discussed at length and that there is Scottish representation in Committee—not just from the Opposition, but from within Government ranks—to tease out those points in debate.

I want to say a word about Dungavel prison, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar), who spoke well about it. I have been to Dungavel prison, as it was until three or four months ago. Now it is Dungavel detention centre, or whatever else it is being called, but it is a prison. The last people I went to visit there were two constituents who were the last political prisoners in Scotland. They were sentenced to 10 years for gun running for the Ulster Volunteer Force, which is one of the loyalist groups.

Dungavel is adequate for that purpose, but I cannot see how it can be turned into an acceptable place to put asylum seekers, whether they are awaiting deportation or not. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan tells me, and I have no reason to doubt it, that there are people in there whose cases have not yet been finished. They are still awaiting appeals, yet they are in a prison situation with their children. That is not acceptable, and the quicker we get them out of that prison and into decent accommodation while they await deportation or whatever else we want to call it, the better.

9.24 pm

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): I am an economic migrant. I am a Scots-born, Belgium, Plymouth and Durham-educated economic migrant to Cleethorpes who spends most of her working week in London. Most of us in the House are probably economic migrants by the mere fact of having to come to London to work. There is nothing wrong with people wanting to move for work.

When discussing immigration and asylum, we have a duty and a responsibility to make a distinction between people who move for work because they want a better life—economic migrants—and refugees who come to this country to seek asylum. Many of our constituents do not make that distinction, and that is a problem. They lump everyone into the same category, whether they are fleeing persecution or lying on top of a freight train going through the channel tunnel to come to Britain to work. People think of them all as asylum seekers. We have a responsibility to make it clear that those are different categories of people, and we have different policies to deal with them. I believe that the Bill goes some way towards dealing with that.

A site in my constituency has been identified as a possible location for an asylum seeker accommodation centre. It is in an industrial area close to two of Britain's largest oil refineries and two power stations, with a third under construction. Four villages are nearby, but the site is much closer to the industrial area than to those residential properties.

When the site was identified many people wrote angry letters to the local newspapers. I decided to undertake a consultation exercise to gauge the views of the residents in the four nearby villages. Out of about 1,000 questionnaires and factsheets that I put out, I received 400 responses. I was surprised, because I did not think that I would get such a response.

People said to me that they felt that putting people who were fleeing in fear of their lives into a dangerous industrial area was no way to treat asylum seekers. Those views were replicated in all the villages. The majority of people in each of those villages said that they supported the philosophy of accommodation centres, but not in that particular location.

To put that in context, about a year ago a serious explosion occurred at one of the refineries, which frightened many people. Much damage was caused in the area. Luckily, as it was Easter, the refinery was on shutdown, so not many people were on site and no lives were lost. Given the Yarl's Wood fire, I can understand the fears of people in that area. One person wrote:

"In view of the refinery accident and the accommodation fire, I think it is suicidal to build in such close proximity."

Someone else said:

"It is terrible that people are persecuted and feel the need to flee and I agree we should do all we can to help, but we live in a very sensitive area with highly volatile power stations and oil refineries close at hand . . . There has to be somewhere better."

Other people referred to the lack of facilities in the area, and said that we were being unfair on asylum seekers:

"They need their own communities in areas where there are amenities for them."

The residents called the area of the proposed centre the outback or the sticks, and said that there was nothing there. They felt that it was unfair to consider that site.

Other general comments made to me with regard to this centre were about asylum and immigration. A number of people who were supportive of the policy said things like "I'm not a racist, but . . . ". I do not like that language, but they were expressing genuine concerns about the lack of public services in their area. For example, one woman wrote to explain that her village has no GP, no school, and no recreational or leisure facilities, yet Government press releases state that all such facilities will be provided in asylum seeker accommodation centres. Although she latched on to asylum seekers, her problem is not them but the lack of public services in her area. Many similar comments have been made to me.

[Shona McIsaac]

We must be more sophisticated in dealing with this issue. We need only look to France to discover the problems inherent in such arguments. If, in the same breath as discussing asylum seekers, we demonise those who express concerns about their locality, this country or Government policies, problems will arise. We must not demonise those people because if we ignore their views, we will subtly push them towards extremist, neo-fascist organisations such as the British National party and the National Front. That is a serious worry, and in that regard we all have a responsibility. It is easy to see how people could be seduced by the argument of the far right if we ignore the genuine concerns that they express not about asylum seekers, but through the device of asylum seekers.

My message to the Government is that we have a responsibility to distinguish between different types of people who come to the UK, and to ensure that the public understand that fact. However, we must also distinguish between those who express blatant and abhorrent racist views, which we must dismiss, and those who express concern about public services. If we do that, we will never go down the road of France.

9.31 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): It is common ground that, too often in the past, the debate on asylum has been characterised by provocative and emotive language and a certain harshness of approach, but it deserves and demands good sense. It demands an understanding of the world as it is, and it demands humanity. Today's debate has demonstrated all those qualities. In general, the atmosphere has been supportive, constructive and thoughtful—a point made strongly by the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) in his moving and effective speech.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) for his thoughtful contribution. He rightly pointed out that the lesson of France is that, if moderates who try to respond to concerns about the scale of immigration are silenced by allegations of racism, voters will be driven into the arms of the extremist.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who paid proper tribute to the many people in his constituency who worked so hard after the fire at Yarl's Wood. He spoke of the lessons that we should learn from that awful event, and I pay tribute to his hard work on his constituents' behalf in that connection.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) and for Upminster (Angela Watkinson), both of whom made sensible and helpful speeches. In doing so, they may have talked themselves on to the Committee. Had they known that earlier, how different things might have been. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle rightly referred to the absolute need to grant refugee status where it is merited. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster pointed out that the current asylum system is unmanageable—a point made by other contributors—and that we need greater speed, as well as fairness.

Several Labour Members made interesting and well-argued speeches, some of which did not exactly shower praise on the Home Secretary. I doubt whether that surprised him, however. The hon. Members for Dover (Mr. Prosser) and for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) drew on personal experience in their constituencies and as members of the Home Affairs Committee. Good contributions were made by many other Labour Members, including the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), who said truthfully that it matters not what we do in this House if the Home Office fails to get its act together.

As the Select Committee on Home Affairs reported two years ago, there are now up to 30 million displaced people in the world. They have been displaced by conflict, famine, or disease. They are all either genuine refugees, or economic migrants. They seek no more than a decent life for themselves and for their families. Large numbers of them are on the move. Many undertake horrific journeys. Thousands are children, as many speakers have noted. They pay extortionate prices to criminal gangs who will smuggle them into countries of their choice.

Among those desperate people were the 58 Chinese found suffocated in the back of a lorry in Dover on 19 June 2000. It matters not whether they were genuine refugees, but it matters a very great deal that they were decent, vulnerable people who simply wanted to improve their lot.

Asylum seekers and economic migrants alike are drawn to the west by various push and pull factors. Many cross a number of safe countries in Europe, failing—to our amazement—to make an asylum application in any of them. Many arrive in France, which is itself a safe country, and do not apply for asylum there. Instead, they use the Red Cross centre at Sangatte as a springboard for entry into this country.

Three years ago, the then Home Secretary—the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who is now Foreign Secretary—sought to achieve a great deal with his flagship Bill on asylum. He told us that he wanted a faster and fairer system. He wanted stronger controls at ports, and effective enforcement against those not entitled to stay. He introduced the voucher system, saying that there was much evidence to suggest that cash benefits acted as a pull factor.

We know that the then Home Secretary was wrong in that respect. Vouchers stigmatised asylum seekers and did not reduce the number of applications, which rose from 46,000 in 1998 to more than 80,000 two years later. Many hon. Members have congratulated the present Home Secretary on his rapid reversal of his predecessor's policy.

With 19,000 applications for asylum being made in the final quarter of 2001, we must ask whether the system is working. I believe that it has not been working for years. More than 43,000 asylum applicants were still awaiting an initial decision in the middle of last year. Even today, the time from application to initial decision can be as long as 12 months, and the period between decision and completion of appeal can last as long as another 12 months, or more.

Appeals mount up. In the last quarter of 2001, 5,500 more appeals were received than were determined. The problem is either that we have too few case workers and adjudicators, or that the system does not work effectively. Perhaps the problem is a combination of both factors.

Fiona Mactaggart: I have made similar complaints, but does not the hon. Gentleman welcome the fact that

the number of appeals has doubled? For the first time that I can recall, nearly half as many decisions again have been made as applications have been made. Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that we are beginning to sort matters out?

Mr. Malins: I would be the first to say that the Home Secretary and his team have done a great deal of very good work in the past few months and that progress has been made towards getting more appeals heard more quickly. However, the Home Secretary would be the first to agree that asylum seekers are the losers when there are such considerable delays, as it is probable that they and their families have had time to put down roots in this country.

What about the strong controls at ports that we were promised three years ago? At Dover, the position remains patchy. Only one lorry in 100 are checked. The best piece of technology available is the heartbeat machine, but I believe that, astonishingly, there is only one available at Dover. An efficient system there would demand at least five such machines.

Meanwhile, the exit points at Calais and Coquelles are not secure. Is it in the interests of the French to make them secure? Until we have large numbers of our own immigration officials and police on French soil, with first-rate equipment, the problem will continue.

If the Government's purpose three years ago was to cut the number of asylum seekers, they have not succeeded. If they aimed for a faster and fairer system, they did not succeed. If they intended to tighten border controls, they did not succeed. If they intended to remove a high proportion of failed asylum seekers, they have not succeeded.

Part 1 of the Bill covers citizenship ceremonies, pledges and a requirement for naturalisation that the applicant has sufficient knowledge about life in the UK and its language. We offer a broad welcome to the proposals but ask the Government to administer them with a light touch and ensure that they do not discriminate against the elderly and those with learning difficulties.

Part 2 provides for the trialling of accommodation centres, four in total. Presumably asylum applicants will remain in those for the whole of the asylum process. Each will hold 750, making a total of 3,000. That is a minute proportion of the 80,000 annual applicants, most of whom will still be dispersed around the country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said, 750 is too high a number of applicants to house in one centre. Such numbers invite discipline problems and concerns within the local community. It would be better still to have more such centres, with a maximum number of say, 250 in each, preferably in urban areas.

The Bill gives the Home Secretary the power but not the duty to provide certain services at these centres. If they are to work well, there must be a duty on the Home Secretary to provide services, top quality legal advice and help on site, as is the case at Oakington. I was glad to hear the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), say that such advice would be available. Can she confirm that it will be available on site at the accommodation centres? Given that it is so important that an asylum seeker receives competent advice early, will legal advice and assistance also be available at the induction centres?

Does the Minister accept that if the previous Home Secretary's words are to mean anything, the process from initial application to decision and from decision to appeal must be speedy? Although we welcome measures to streamline appeals, will the Minister tell us the anticipated time frame? How long will a person stay at an accommodation centre? Will it be six weeks, six months, or could it be longer? Does the Minister anticipate that the whole process will be completed within a certain time frame? I ask that because if asylum seekers and their children are expected to live at an accommodation centre throughout the process, the longer the process takes the more compelling becomes the argument to allow children to receive education in mainstream schools rather than on site, and to allow asylum seekers to work.

Does the Minister accept that the best way to avoid delay is to have a one-stop shop with all facilities on site? Those should include better trained decision makers. Many of us believe, as the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) said, that the quality of initial decision making must improve. Most importantly, the presence of adjudicators on site would mean that current delays were avoided. When will the centres be ready? Will it take one year, two years or more?

Many of us have concerns about the detention, particularly in prison, of asylum applicants who do not commit a crime. Surely the appropriate time for detention is in a removal centre at the end of the asylum process prior to removal from this country and only when there is a serious risk of absconding. *[Interruption.]* I am getting more support from the Labour Benches than I had anticipated. I am extremely pleased, and am tempted to carry on even longer, but my colleagues say no.

The introduction of automatic bail hearings in part 3 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 was welcomed at the time and it is a great shame that that procedure has never been implemented and is to be repealed by the Bill.

Let the Government do all that they can to renegotiate the bilateral agreement. Let them place an even greater emphasis on working with our European partners and those elsewhere to break up the criminal gangs who smuggle people for profit. Finally, let our Government and others tackle head-on the causes of economic migration and persecution in the troubled regions of the world. How much money spent in this country could be more usefully spent elsewhere?

A little while ago, the Home Secretary said that he was painfully aware that, if he was still in the job after three years, it would be for him and no one else to answer for the competence, effectiveness and activity of the immigration service. He was a little hard on himself: all of us have a duty to contribute to that extremely important debate. When the time comes, we shall ask the Home Secretary two questions: first, is our asylum system humane and decent; secondly, does it work well? If the answer to both questions is yes, he will have succeeded. We wish him well.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): This matter presents all of us with uniquely difficult and complex challenges, as we face the ever-greater effects of globalisation. Although globalisation creates enormous benefits in the world, we have to acknowledge that it places

[Angela Eagle]

unprecedented strains of rapid development and change on often fragile economies. Millions of people aspire to better their economic circumstances and, understandably, want to migrate in order to do so. At the same time, modern transport systems have facilitated mass movement across the world. In Britain last year, our ports and airports dealt with 90 million visitors, the overwhelming majority of whom were completely legal.

Alongside that, we face the challenge of failing states such as Somalia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Afghanistan which generate large numbers of refugees, the vast majority of whom are looked after close to their borders by some of the poorest countries in the world. However, that produces large numbers of asylum seekers who travel much further, seeking protection, shelter and a new life. All European countries—indeed, all developed countries—face big increases in the numbers of illegal arrivals who want to fulfil their dreams of economic betterment or who are fleeing oppression.

We have also seen the growth of a far more sinister phenomenon that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins): the worldwide criminal, yet hugely profitable, trade in people. People are smuggled by international gangs, sometimes for sexual or labour exploitation and sometimes simply so that they can gain illegal entry and work in the informal economy, where their lack of status can make them extremely vulnerable to all kinds of abuse. Safety considerations rarely apply, as we saw all too tragically at Dover when 57 people suffocated in the back of a lorry.

The spectre of a revival of fascism and the policies of race hatred now loom over Europe. We underestimate at our peril the uncertainty and resentment caused by illegal arrivals among our existing populations—the evidence is there for all to see in recent European election results. However, most of that uncertainty and resentment is not racism, but a genuine concern that needs to be addressed fairly, openly and transparently. We need to be inclusive and open about our anti-racist stance, but we need to acknowledge people's worries and concerns. For that reason I welcome the tone of the debate, which has differed from that of any other debate on this sensitive subject.

How can we be sure that we fulfil our international obligations to protect and shelter refugees while ensuring that our economy benefits positively from economic migration and reassuring people that our systems for dealing with those challenges are fair and firm, thus minimising the scope for the advance of the far right?

The Bill does all those things. It deals in a holistic and forward-looking way with those complex issues. However, I shall not stand at the Dispatch Box and claim that it is perfect. If I did so, no one would believe me. Furthermore, the four immigration Acts that preceded it provide plenty of evidence to show that I should be a bit more humble tonight.

The issues are complex and difficult and we must battle constantly to solve them. We all know that there are no easy or simple answers. We must combine legislative change with sensible administrative change to achieve the improvements that we all seek.

Of course one of the key issues is to improve decision making to ensure that it is speedy, expeditious and balanced with fairness and control. That is what we seek to do with the induction centres, the accommodation centres and the reporting and removal requirements contained in the Bill. We seek to streamline that process, which is inherently complex, as well as the appeals process, which is currently far too complex.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) that ending delay is one of the keys to getting the system right. We have to end the delays, but that is a lot harder to achieve than some may think. We have to do more than simply saying that it is an aim of ours. It has been the aim of many of the legislative changes that the House has considered, but so far it has been more elusive than all hon. Members would wish.

I should like to answer the question about immigration appeal rights asked by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley). If he looks at clause 60, he will see that we have combined the separate provisions. I hope that he will admit that the single provision will deal with the problem that he first saw when at the then Department for Social Security and with which we have been struggling ever since. I hope that clause 60 will provide an answer to that issue.

Many Members on both sides of the House have made impassioned speeches, mainly about a few issues, and I hope that I can reassure them. I shall first deal with the size and location of accommodation centres, what should be going on in them and how we anticipate that they will work. We have announced that, initially, we shall run trial accommodation centres alongside the dispersal system to find out whether they work, before deciding whether to use that system more exclusively to deal with people's asylum claims.

Although we have used illustrative figures on size, nothing in the Bill limits the size or states that we must have four centres. We shall certainly be open to considering more flexible approaches, but any suggestion has to be consistent with a reasonable size to provide training, education and legal advice at an appropriate and economic level. Those services have to be good, as well as providing value for money. We shall consider those issues in deciding how to proceed.

There has been a lot of worry about education, but the situation has been misunderstood. The Bill makes it clear that any children who live in accommodation centres during the trials will be educated to the standard that applies in mainstream schools, that the legal duty to provide education remains effectively with the local education authority and that the standards of that education can be checked by Ofsted and independently audited. After all, this is a trial and if we decide that it does not work, we will not proceed with it, so right hon. and hon. Members are wrong to dismiss the proposal before we have even tried it. We will be open and transparent about the results of the trial.

I need to make the point that we shall table amendments on asylum shopping, which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary did not get around to mentioning in his opening speech. We will include measures to put a stop to a new trade in people who have been accepted for protection in European Union states arriving in the United Kingdom and seeking support under the National Assistance Act 1948, although they fail the habitual residence test. We shall table amendments to try to close what we perceive to be a loophole.

Hon. Members mentioned issues relating to bail, as set out in part 3, and the repeal of requirements of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 which have never been brought into effect. We are not removing the individual right to appeal for bail either under habeas corpus or to an adjudicator if there is an appeal pending. Those rights have always existed and are exercised. We are repealing what are increasingly regarded as cumbersome and difficult automatic bail hearings for everyone in detention. They interfere with our attempts to achieve a fast and efficient process and, as they have to be before the same people, are simply another cause of delay. We do not think that they are practicable. However, I emphasise that repeal of those hearings does not remove an individual's right to appeal for habeas corpus or a bail hearing.

On detention, only a small number of asylum seekers are detained. They are detained for a reason, either because we cannot prove who they are and are trying to find out, or because we believe that they are likely to abscond pending removal. That is why people are held in detention. They can apply for bail.

I hope that I reassured hon. Members when I told my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) that high-quality legal advice will be available in accommodation centres. It is not available in induction centres, and we can deal with that issue more effectively in Committee. The Legal Services Commission will make that facility available, and as an independent service it does not need to be included in the Bill. I assure hon. Members that we are not involved in a manoeuvre to deny people their legal rights.

The Bill is a big step forward in the reform of our entire nationality, immigration and asylum system to meet the new challenges that lie ahead. It encourages legitimate primary immigration to Britain for the first time in many years and celebrates the acquisition of citizenship in a positive way while equipping new citizens more effectively for life in Britain. Those fleeing persecution have nothing to fear from the measures because the Bill upholds and strengthens our commitment to the systems of international protection. It creates the power to introduce a resettlement programme to take refugees from abroad, which will get them out of the hands of the people traffickers and will honour our international humanitarian obligations.

All asylum seekers will go through what we hope will be a well-managed and faster end-to-end asylum process that uses induction and accommodation centres. There will be effective integration for those who are successful and removal for the unsuccessful. It is no good building up a panoply of courts and centres to administer an asylum system if there is no distinction between an individual who is granted asylum and integrated as a refugee into our society, and one who fails and is granted no other protection. There must be a difference between those outcomes. That is why it is important for the integrity of our system that we improve the number of removals. It is also why we will create the 4,000 spaces in detention centres, as we said we would, and will continue to push for more effective removal of those who fail.

New penalties will be introduced to fight people traffickers, including the new offence of trafficking for the purpose of prostitution. Increased penalties will apply to those who are caught. We will also crack down on illegal working. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made and Question put forthwith,

That at this day's sitting, Consideration of a Lords consequential Amendment to the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Question put and agreed to.

NATIONALITY, IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

(2) All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

(3) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 16th May 2002.

(4) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(5) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock.

(6) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock.

Programming Committee

(7) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

The House divided: Ayes 284, Noes 176.

Division No. 219] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*	Austin, John
Ainger, Nick	Barnes, Harry
Allen, Graham	Barron, Kevin
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*	Battle, John
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary	Bayley, Hugh
Atherton, Ms Candy	Beard, Nigel
Atkins, Charlotte	Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
	Begg, Miss Anne

Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and Dan Norris.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John

Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and Mrs. Cheryl Gillan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

NATIONALITY, IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown in connection with the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which under any other Act are payable out of money so provided, and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill

Lords amendment considered.

After Clause 141

COMMONS AMENDMENT NO. 50

Insert the following new clause—

"Premises including railway track

In section 4 of the 1993 Act (premises in the case of which right does not apply) insert at the end—

"(5) This Chapter does not apply to premises falling within section 3(1) if the freehold of the premises includes track of an operational railway; and for the purposes of this subsection—

(a) "track" includes any land or other property comprising the permanent way of a railway (whether or not it is also used for other purposes) and includes any bridge, tunnel, culvert, retaining wall or other structure used for the support of, or otherwise in connection with, track,

(b) "operational" means not disused, and

(c) "railway" has the same meaning as in any provision of Part 1 of the Railways Act 1993 (c. 43) for the purposes of which that term is stated to have its wider meaning.""

Lords consequential amendment 50B: Transpose new clause *(Premises including railway track)* from after clause 141 to after clause 113.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

I shall be brief. Lords amendment No. 50B is a simple amendment. Amendment No. 50, which was printed for the consideration of the House of Lords, would have inserted the new clause after clause 141. That is a mistake; the new clause should in fact be after clause 113. Lords amendment No. 50B would correct that purely typographical error.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I would have the greatest difficulty in opposing the revision, and do not have the slightest intention of doing so; we have no objection to the change.

Lords amendment agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

SUPREME COURT OF ENGLAND AND WALES

That the draft Court of Appeal (Appeals from Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission) Rules 2002, which were laid before this House on 14th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the remaining motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 97) (HC 721), on Local Government On-Line Funding to Local Authorities, which was laid before this House on 26th March, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 98) (HC 727) on Maintenance of Roads Grant 2002–03, which was laid before this House on 10th April, be approved.

FAMILY LAW

That the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 13th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCHES AND QUOTAS 2002

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 14130/01, draft Council Regulation fixing for 2002 the fishing opportunities and associated conditions for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Community waters and, for Community vessels, in waters where limitations in catch are required, No. 15238/01, draft Council Regulation fixing for 2002 the fishing opportunities for deep-sea fish stocks, and No. 6918/02, draft Council Regulation establishing specific access requirements and associated conditions applicable to fishing for deep-sea stocks; recognises that a number of fish stocks have fallen to particularly low levels; notes the Government's success in negotiating TACs which take full account of scientific advice while securing the best possible fishing opportunities for UK fishermen; recognises that action is required to constrain fishing effort in relation to deep-sea species; and supports the Government's attempts to secure a European agreement that will return these species to long-term viability.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon, we tabled Welsh questions. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, many subjects are devolved to the Welsh Assembly, which we fully accept. However, people in my constituency cross over into Wales and vice versa, perhaps to see a doctor, so it is important that Members of Parliament can ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether or not he has had discussions about, say, the number of doctors that the Welsh Assembly is planning to employ. I recognise that the subject is devolved, Mr. Speaker, but I urge you to use your wisdom and experience to persuade the powers that be that we should be able to ask about those subjects in the House.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that matter. I shall make investigations and get back to him.

UK Prisoners (France)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

10.18 pm

Mr. David Stewart (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): I appreciate the opportunity to raise in the House the case of my constituent Mr. Jeffrey Logan from Lochaber who is currently detained in Douai prison in France.

My primary reasons for wishing to raise the case centre on the appalling conditions in which Mr. Logan is held, and the great worries of his wife, family and friends about his health. I want to touch on wider issues, including the extent of the problem and alleged breaches of the European convention on human rights. I shall also discuss an analysis of French prisons by Amnesty International and the International Federation for Human Rights. I shall consider the extent of the problem, the number of United Kingdom nationals held in French prisons and the number of such people who are lorry drivers or self-employed hauliers—my constituent's occupation.

In reply to written questions 208 and 213 that I tabled this year, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), said that 65 UK citizens are held on remand at present. In addition, he said that

"105 UK citizens have been convicted and are serving prison sentences in France."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 1295W.]

Of that number, almost half—26—of the remand prisoners are lorry drivers, and 19 of the 105 convicted prisoners are also employed in that occupation.

Other hon. Members have also raised concerns about the conditions in which UK nationals are held in French prisons. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Hamilton) raised the case of Andrew Beaumont, who is also a lorry driver and is also held in Douai prison, who was handcuffed to a wall with nothing to eat or drink for more than two days.

I shall deal with the details of the case. Mr. Logan was arrested in Calais on 30 May 2000. It was alleged that he had more than 100 kg of cocaine in his trailer. After a long drawn-out incarceration and trial, he was sentenced to seven years and fined almost £6 million by the court in Boulogne. He and his family have steadfastly protested his innocence. The family tell me that the conditions in Douai prison come straight from a Dickens novel—rats, filth, inadequate meals, poor heating, dirty clothes and pools of urine in the exercise yard.

Mrs. Logan is extremely concerned about her husband's mental and physical well-being. Mr. Logan has lost six stone. He has developed severe skin and chest infections and he is very worried about the health risks posed by the hundreds—yes, hundreds—of rats in the prison compound. Last month Mr. Logan collapsed and was unconscious for some time. He was taken to hospital where he underwent investigative tests. The hospital doctor tells me that he was undernourished. He collapsed again a few weeks ago and has been referred to a specialist. Mrs. Logan has met the prison director and consular staff in Lille. She believes that the conditions in the prison

"would not be tolerated in any other civilised country."

What are the wider issues in the case? The family has sought detailed legal advice on possible breaches of the European convention on human rights. First, for example, on Mr. Logan's arrest, he was denied legal advice for four days, he was handcuffed to railings beside a trailer while he was searched, and on a separate occasion he was handcuffed to a wall—possible breaches of articles 4, 5 and 6 of the European convention on human rights. Secondly, every four months Mr. Logan was required to sign a document in French, which he does not speak. No lawyer was present and no interpretation was offered. That again represents a breach of articles 5 and 6.

Of course, some may say—some in the Chamber tonight may say—that Mr. Logan's plight is just a one-off example, that it is self-inflicted, or that it is unrepresentative, exaggerated or fabricated. What do French politicians say about prison conditions? I shall quote extensively, with apologies, from Jon Henley's article in *The Guardian* on 26 August last year. He wrote:

"Two suicides in the space of a week at a jail near Rouen have rekindled debate about French prison conditions, just weeks after a damning parliamentary report said the country's jails were 'the humiliation of the Republic'."

The article continues:

"Prison warders blamed a shortage of manpower, a crippling lack of resources and an atmosphere of 'appalling insecurity' due largely to the growing number of psychologically disturbed inmates.

'The situation is the same all over France,' said Philippe Doré of the prison officers' union. 'We try to do a good job but it's impossible. There are too few of us, we're demotivated . . . There's a terrible malaise in French prisons.'

The suicides have fuelled the row over prison conditions triggered by the chief doctor at Paris's La Santé jail . . . who denounced the inhuman squalor of the capital's most famous prison in a best-selling book this spring.

She said that cockroaches, rats and other vermin were commonplace, hygiene was non-existent and rapes, fist-fights and self-mutilation were almost daily occurrences.

'Some improvements have been made', Ms Vasseur wrote. 'But the majority of problems remain: drugs, the omnipresence of sex, the absence of supervision at night, the filth, the lack of hygiene, the decay. The place remains an inhuman nightmare, an eternal shame to France.'

Partly in response to the furore surrounding Ms Vasseur's book and to surveys showing that nearly 50 per cent. of the French believe their country's prison system is rotten, MPs and senators produced two reports on the nation's jails in July—

that is, July 2000—

"just before their summer recess.

The cross-party reports, based on prison visits and interviews with former inmates, warders, relatives, magistrates and prison directors, concluded that drastic reforms were needed, particularly as France's prison population has doubled over the past 40 years.

'We need to rethink the entire basis of our prison system,' Jacques Floch, a Socialist MP and co-author of one report, said. 'We have no single body of legislation directly governing prison conditions and no consistent penal policy, just reactive, day-by-day chaos.'

The deputies were critical of plans by the justice minister . . . to build half a dozen big new jails, arguing that alternative punishment or treatment would be far more appropriate than prison for many inmates.

They demanded instead a multi-million pound refurbishment programme and the construction of small new detention centres where conditions could be more effectively maintained and inmates prepared for their return to society."

Amnesty International, in its 2000 annual report, said that France had been found guilty of torture and excessively lengthy judicial proceedings, prison guards were accused of ill-treatment and prisons were criticised for cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment.

In July 1999, the French Minister of Justice set up a working group to examine the external control of the prison system. A report by seven non-governmental organisations called for an independent body to control prisons. It said that there was concern about longer sentences in France, overcrowding and lack of guard control and protection of inmates. Ill-treatment by prison guards was particularly highlighted. It said:

"Everyday life in French prisons is all too often not in accordance with the law."

I stress that that is a group of French non-governmental organisations.

In conclusion, I have extreme concerns about the well-being of my constituent, but, more generally, I have extreme concerns about British citizens in French prisons. I acknowledge the tremendous work done by Mrs. Logan, her family, friends and lawyers, and the dedication, composure and compassion that they have shown.

I understand that France is an important country in the EU and I am not criticising France as such. It is a key ally of the UK and of course it is for the French Government to resolve their internal prison issues. But the Foreign Office and consulate staff clearly have a duty to protect British citizens abroad. If anyone does not believe me they should read the inside pages of any UK passport.

I respectfully suggest the following action. There should be direct ministerial contact with the French Minister of Justice to investigate the conditions that Mr. Logan and other UK nationals have to endure at Douai prison and a request for a full public inquiry.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): How many people does my hon. Friend think have suffered in French prisons with no one to help them with the language?

Mr. Stewart: That is a good point. My hon. Friend has just predicted my next line. More than 165 UK nationals are in French prisons and, if Douai is representative of French prisons, as I think it is, squalid conditions are widespread. Moreover, UK citizens have to suffer a legal system that is different, where interpretation is not available to many people. The right to legal advice and assistance is an essential part of our law and we have a duty to protect our UK citizens in French prisons.

The consulate in Lille should obtain a copy of the prison health and safety and infection control policy, and request that an updated risk assessment be carried out immediately, as well as a copy of the recent inspection report on the prison.

The Foreign Office should start keeping statistics on the treatment of UK citizens in French prisons, particularly with reference to access to legal representation, interpretation services, the time taken to proceed to trial and conditions within prisons. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know, his written reply to me on 11 March 2002, No. 212, said clearly that those statistics were not recorded.

I look forward to my hon. Friend's reply and I feel sure that he will understand my real concern about the welfare of Mr. Logan and the hundreds of UK nationals incarcerated in squalid conditions in French prisons.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Would it be worth while pressing the Home Office to ensure that this gentleman is returned to the UK to serve any sentence so that our Prison Service can ensure that he is treated far better than he has been in France?

Mr. Stewart: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention. I am sure that I can speak for the family and say that they would very much welcome the return of Mr. Logan to Britain. I understand that there are some problems at the French end in trying to bring that forward, but in the meantime, he and another 165 UK citizens are living in squalid prison conditions. I am very concerned about those conditions and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

10.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) for raising the treatment of British prisoners in France as the subject of this debate. I welcome this opportunity to talk about the issue and to explain what help our consular officials give to all British citizens detained overseas and not only in France.

Consular staff visit all British prisoners detained overseas, unless the detainee declines a consular visit. They will also visit Commonwealth citizens if there is no diplomatic representation in the country of their detention.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not make decisions about the guilt or innocence of anyone detained overseas. That is a matter for the sentencing state. As my hon. Friend will know, international law prevents us from becoming involved in the judicial process of other countries. Our own judicial proceedings are similarly protected from outside interference, but it is our job to ensure that prisoners are treated fairly and in accordance with international standards.

Consular staff help to ensure that the detainee has legal representation and can provide lists of local lawyers who can speak English. Consular staff also provide detainees with information on the prison and local judicial system. They will ensure that, if necessary, the detainee receives adequate medical attention. If the detainee asks for their family to be informed of their situation, consular staff will arrange for that to be done. They can help by transferring money to the detainee for comforts additional to those provided by the prison, and can also help the family to arrange a visit to the prison.

Consular staff will also tell detainees and their families about the charity Prisoners Abroad. Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff work closely with that charity and provide it with some funding. Prisoners Abroad exists to help provide prisoners with practical support. Its caseworkers speak at least one foreign language and can therefore liaise with the prison or the detainee's legal representative and with consular staff. It can also provide financial assistance to detainees and their families if they

have no other source of income. Prisoners Abroad also provides an after-care system, helping to resettle released prisoners in the UK.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has a separate prisoners unit within its human rights section. The unit helps to implement policy on clemency and fair trials and is also responsible for negotiating prisoner transfer agreements. The agreements, which have already been mentioned, allow a prisoner, once their sentence is final, the opportunity to apply for transfer to serve the remainder of their sentence in their own country. Advantages of that approach include more regular visits from their family and better prospects for rehabilitation and reintegration into their home society. The prisoners unit has also recently set up a number of initiatives to improve further the service that we provide to British prisoners detained overseas. They include two pro bono panels—one for lawyers and one for doctors.

My hon. Friend asked about the situation in France. There are currently 168 British citizens detained in France. Consular staff from our consulates-general in Paris, Bordeaux, Lille, Lyons and Marseilles visit prisoners regularly. Initial contact is made with prisoners within 24 hours of the receipt of notification that they have been charged and imprisoned. That initial contact is followed up with a first visit to the prisoner as soon as practicable. Prisoners are visited at least once a year after the first visit, and more often in some circumstances. The consular officer will ensure that the prisoner has legal representation and that any medical needs are being attended to. If the prisoner raises serious concerns, consular officers will take them up immediately with the prison authorities.

We also help detainees' families in the United Kingdom. If the detainee has given permission for us to confirm the arrest to their family, we contact them and send an information pack about the judicial and prison system in France. The pack also explains how the family can apply for a permit to visit their loved ones. The consulate will also help the family with booking the visit to the prison.

My hon. Friend raised the conditions at some of the prisons in France. This is primarily a matter for the French Government. Britain can intervene only if we have evidence that British citizens are not receiving the same treatment as that which is provided for French or other nationals. I promise him that I will look into the specific matters that he has raised this evening, and I will write to him on those that I am not about to address in my response.

We are not aware of any instances in which the human rights of British citizens have been abused in French prisons. If my hon. Friend is aware of any such instances, I invite him to let me have the evidence so that we can decide whether to take the matter up with the French authorities. It is also open to the British citizen concerned to raise specific points with the French courts and ultimately with the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the case of his constituent, Jeffrey Logan. I will not go into the details of Mr. Logan's arrest and charge, as my hon. Friend has already given them. Mr. Logan appealed against his conviction on 26 September, and was transferred from Longuenesse prison to Douai prison on 15 October 2001. That is the prison to which detainees are normally transferred pending appeal hearings at the appeal court in Douai. Mr. Logan's appeal was heard on 16 April and the result will be announced on 4 June 2002, after which—depending on the outcome—Mr. Logan will be either released or moved.

Douai is one of the older prisons in France; it was built in 1901. As such, its facilities are not as favourable as those of some of the newer French prisons. Although we have no formal system of classification, we do not consider any prisons in France to be "difficult". Difficult prison conditions exist where, for example, the inmates have taken over the running of a prison, where gang warfare, including threats and intimidation, reduces detainees' lives to a level of mere survival, or where even basic rations of food and drinkable water need to be bought. It is impossible to communicate with the outside world from some such prisons, and medical treatment would not exist without the intervention of consular staff. This is not the case in Douai.

As my hon. Friend has acknowledged, the British Government have done all that we can to help Mr. Logan since his arrest on 30 May 2000. His family contacted us on 30 May to tell us of the arrest. Our consulate in Lille made inquiries on that same day, and confirmed to Mrs. Logan that her husband was being held in police custody, as drugs had allegedly been found in his vehicle. Mrs. Logan was then told that her husband would be held for a further 24 hours in custody, and that, as the case was connected to drugs, he could be held for a further 48 hours without being able to contact her or our consulate. That is in accordance with French law.

Mr. Logan was charged with drugs trafficking offences on 2 June 2000 and remanded in custody at Longuenesse prison while the French judicial authorities conducted their investigation. A consular official visited Mr. Logan on 8 June 2000 at Longuenesse prison and explained the prison and judicial system to him. The consular official also delivered clothing on behalf of his family. Mr. Logan did not have any complaints about his treatment by the French authorities at that time. He was grateful for the consular visit and for the assistance that we gave to his family. He received a further consular visit on 22 June 2000 so that he could write a statement enabling his wife to act on his behalf. Mr. Logan was visited again at Longuenesse prison on 14 June 2001. He advised our consular officer that he was in good health, was taking regular exercise and had lost weight. He was also receiving regular visits from his family.

Following her husband's transfer to Douai prison in October 2001, Mrs. Logan contacted consular staff by telephone in early November about the prison conditions. The consulate took up her concerns about the conditions immediately in a letter to the prison director. The prison director replied on 13 November and our consulate provided an unofficial translation of his letter for Mrs. Logan. The director addressed most of the issues that Mrs. Logan had raised in her telephone call, but if my hon. Friend believes that that is not the case, I will happily respond to the specific complaints that he raised.

Mrs. Logan also wrote directly to the prison director on 16 November. The director also met Mrs. Logan on 18 December 2001 to discuss the rest of her concerns. The consulate wrote to Mr. Logan on 14 December 2001 informing him that his wife had been in touch with us

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

about prison conditions. We asked whether there were other issues that he wanted us to raise on his behalf. So far, Mr. Logan has not responded.

Mr. Logan is due to receive another consular visit by June this year. As Mrs. Logan has told us that her husband is now suffering health problems, we have applied to visit him as soon as possible. We also wrote to the medical director of the prison on 17 April about Mr. Logan's health. Our consul-general in Lille has also requested an appointment with the prison director to urge him to review conditions in the light of complaints that Mrs. Logan has raised.

My noble Friend Baroness Amos, who has primary responsibility for consular matters, will write to my hon. Friend to report on the outcome of that meeting. As I said, I shall happily write to him on any point that he has raised in this evening's debate that I have not addressed in my response.

I trust that this debate has reassured you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of our continued commitment to look after the welfare and to protect the rights of all British prisoners overseas.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 25 April 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HSBC INVESTMENT BANKING BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time, and committed.

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL (*BY ORDER*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 2 May.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Learning and Skills Council

1. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): If she will make a statement on the future funding of sixth forms by the Learning and Skills Council. [50345]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): Since 1 April 2002 local education authorities have been funded by the Learning and Skills Council for provision in their school sixth forms. The funding allocations for 2002–03 were announced on 7 March.

Chris Grayling: I thank the Minister for that reply. He will be aware that many school sixth forms are already complaining that they have lost funding as a result of the changes. In a matter of three weeks we have had pronouncements from the LSC that it plans to withdraw funding for a number of smaller sixth forms over the next few years. What do the Government have against school sixth forms?

Mr. Lewis: Because of the new LSC formula that is being applied to school sixth forms they are getting significantly more funding than ever before. That funding is being phased in over two years to take account of the concerns that LEAs have expressed. Let us be clear that there must be initially a poor inspection and secondly a poor reinspection before we consider the closure of a school sixth form.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): There are no schools with sixth form provision in my constituency; the only provision available there is on the Bolton sixth form college south campus. The difference in funding between school sixth forms and sixth form colleges is approaching £1,000, so young people in my constituency are seriously disadvantaged. Can my hon. Friend assure my potential sixth formers that their funding will increase in the very near future?

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The Government are committed to convergence upwards in funding, and we will announce our proposals immediately following the conclusions of the spending review.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): When the Learning and Skills Act 2000 went through the House we were promised that there would be convergence upwards, as the Minister has said, and that there would be a rationalisation of funding streams, particularly those for further education colleges. This year the convergence has been downwards; the funding is £900 less for FE colleges and £500 less for schools, and the average figure is £2,600. There are now 71 different funding streams into FE colleges. When will the Minister deliver?

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman should not get so excited. I am surprised that he is not in touch with the fact that the number of funding streams has been reduced to nine, to take account of the concerns expressed by the FE sector. We have made it clear that we are committed to and accept the case for convergence. The level and nature of that convergence must be worked out in the context of available resources.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the Minister consult LEAs about the effects of LSC funding on school intakes? I am told that in Nottingham a number of schools are having difficulties in attracting and retaining pupils, who are migrating to county areas where they have access to schools with sixth forms, rather than remaining in city schools where funding is more restricted. Will the Minister consult LEAs to find out whether that is a significant problem in the context of funding streams?

Mr. Lewis: The LSC has a duty to consult LEAs about those areas of concern. If my hon. Friend provides me with information about difficulties of that nature, we will speak to the relevant local learning and skills council.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister talks about increased funding for schools, yet the truth was confirmed by the Minister for School Standards in a written answer to me last night: schools will be £150 million worse off as a result of the Chancellor's tax on jobs. Is not the truth that the Government take back with one hand what they have given with the other, and schools are worse off as a result?

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman makes a point that nobody in the country believes; everybody accepts that massive additional investment is going into our primary and secondary schools. As for the Budget and the spending review, the Chancellor has made it clear that education will continue to be the Government's first priority.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that as a consequence of the £1,000 funding

differential between college and school students, teaching staff in colleges suffer from a severe salary differential between themselves and those in school sixth forms? Teachers in the two excellent colleges in my constituency, Bury college and Holy Cross sixth form college, receive up to £5,000 a year less than teachers doing essentially the same job in sixth forms in neighbouring constituencies. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is unacceptable, and will he—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman always speaks for far too long when called for a question.

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend is right to make the point that there is a difference. It is important to define the nature of that difference and create a framework that will lead to a fair funding distribution. Our objectives include more reform and investment in further education establishments in future.

Child Protection

2. **Mrs. Gillian Shephard** (South-West Norfolk): What mechanisms are in place to ensure that schools have a policy on child protection. [50346]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): The right hon. Lady will be familiar with the Department's circular 10/95 on protecting children from abuse, which advises that all staff should be aware of procedures on suspected abuse cases. The circular is backed up by the requirement that Ofsted inspectors must review provisions on pupils' welfare, including arrangements for child protection.

Mrs. Shephard: In the case of six-year-old Lauren Wright in my constituency, of which I know Ministers are aware, both the head and the assistant teacher at her 30-pupil school failed to report her unexplained 4-stone weight loss and bruising as the guidelines required. In the light of that, do Ministers agree that there is a need for guidelines to be made statutory—in other words, that they should be more than guidelines—and for a legal requirement for all schools to have a policy on child protection?

Mr. Timms: I have seen the distressing dossier on the case of Lauren Wright submitted by the right hon. Lady and the all-party group of Norfolk MPs to the Climbié inquiry. Clearly there were serious failings by the school and others, but whether the problem is local or goes wider is less clear. Next month we shall publish a consultation document on revising circular 10/95. I repeat the point made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in a letter to the right hon. Lady—that in response to the matter that she has raised, we are reflecting carefully on whether to introduce changes in the Education Bill to strengthen the basis for child protection arrangements in schools. My right hon. Friend has undertaken to write to her when those deliberations are complete.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Of course, all of us in the House want the highest level of child protection, but we must be careful to get the balance right. Some of us fear that schools are moving towards over-zealousness on child protection and many other issues, which could stop school trips, and stop children getting out of school into the environment. I understand that there is currently a consultation on whether every parent should be vetted by police before being allowed to accompany children on a school trip. We have to get the balance right; we need to protect children, but schools must remain open to the idea of school trips and other ways of using the environment for learning.

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend is right about the need for balance. We are contemplating the quite narrow suggestion that there should be a statutory requirement for schools to have a policy and a procedure on dealing with cases of suspected abuse. Ofsted reports that two thirds of schools already have good child protection procedures; the worry is about the small minority in which that is not yet the case.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I agree with the comments of the right hon. Member for South–West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard). The Minister has just referred to the fact that many schools have clear child protection guidelines in place. Does he agree that it is important that there should be clear sanctions and Government guidelines? Failure to observe guidelines in schools led to the events in the Lauren Wright case.

Mr. Timms: At the moment the guidance is not statutory, so sanctions are not in place. In the case in question the governing body has accepted that it was at fault, as there was no designated teacher to address the issue. It is accepted that that was a serious error on its part. If we were to introduce a statutory duty such as that proposed, it would change the nature of the requirements for schools.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Does my hon. Friend agree that the two watchwords concerning people going into our schools are "protection" and "quality", in terms of who is teaching the pupils, who has access to them and what is being taught? It is vital that we get the procedures right to ensure that there is rigorous inspection of people who go into schools, to whom vulnerable children may be exposed. The quality and the standard of the education that they provide are also important.

One of the concerns arising from the evidence given by Mr. Tomlinson to the Select Committee is the lack of regulation of supply teacher agencies. Very little regard is paid to who is entering such agencies and what the standards are. If a school rings up an agency after being sent a teacher one day and says, "Don't send that person again, because the standard is not satisfactory," that teacher may well be sent to another school the next day—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House of the concerns that have been expressed about supply teacher agencies. In the light of those concerns, we will table amendments to the Education Bill to strengthen the arrangements for reporting misconduct where it arises. The proposals will ensure that agencies and other employers have a statutory duty to report cases of

misconduct by their employees. That will help, and the quality mark that we propose for teacher supply agencies will also be an important step forward.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The case was obviously very tragic, but Lauren Wright was killed not by teachers, social workers or paediatricians, but by a wicked stepmother, who also happened to be a welfare assistant at the school. Does the Minister agree that if a statutory policy had been in place, it would have helped very much in this case?

Mr. Timms: Yes. As I understand it, while Lauren was attending the school her weight fell from six stone to two stone and she was often seen covered in bruises, yet neither of the teachers expressed concerns or referred the matter to social services. The stepmother's employment at the school may well have been a factor.

Further Education

3. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If she will make a statement on the Government's plans for the further education sector. [50347]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): The further education sector is central to delivering the Government's lifelong learning objectives. There is already much excellence in the sector and we want to build on that best practice to achieve high-quality learning for all. We are already discussing with those who work in further education how we can improve standards, and we will announce our proposals, supported by the outcome of the spending review, later this year.

Dr. Cable: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that when we were visited on Tuesday by lecturers and other staff from colleges attended by 700,000 16 to 19-year-olds, there was a genuine sense of betrayal about the fact that although the Government promised a convergence of funding, pay and status with other post-16 education, exactly the opposite has happened? How can she justify the fact that college lecturers at most points of the salary scale are paid £6,000 a year less for giving teaching identical to that provided by teachers in schools?

Estelle Morris: I acknowledge that much of the investment that we made in mainstream school salaries for teachers in our first term led to a widening of the difference between the amount that could be paid for teaching in further education and schools. I have always acknowledged that. We were very straight in 1997 about where our priorities lay—and to some extent, things can only be done one at a time. We invested heavily in early-years education and in primary and secondary schools. I entirely accept from the many people who lobbied us on Tuesday that there is an issue about differential salaries. The Government made it clear before the 2001 election that we would seek to redress that balance during this Parliament, as our education reform agenda moved on into the further and higher education sectors.

Having acknowledged that issue—although I think that those in further education accept that it was right to prioritise early-years and primary education—I must add that nobody should run away with a belief that there has been no investment in FE. There had been a steady year-on-year cut under the Conservative Government, and there has been a 20 per cent. increase in real-terms funding in further education since 1997. We certainly hope to build on that in the years to come.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my right hon. Friend recall that at the previous Education Question Time I referred to the threatened demise—according to some newspapers—of the North Derbyshire tertiary college, and called on the Government to ensure that it would be kept open? A rescue plan has been put forward today by the college's governors and others. I am pretty certain that that will be linked with the Markham employment growth zone, an exciting development involving about 8,000 jobs, and the training capacity at Clowne would be excellent. Will my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that the Government will look into this and make sure that the college is kept open? We have had all the pit closures we can stomach in our area; we have got to save this college.

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend has been assiduous and vocal in bringing the North Derbyshire tertiary college to our attention. My starting point is the same as his: those who live in his area are entitled to top-rate further education and training opportunities for employment, for personal fulfilment and for all those other things that we know education is for. He is absolutely right about that.

I know that he will also agree that we want the best quality we can possibly get, and there is no reason why people who live in Bolsover should get lower quality because they happen to have a further education college that is not as good as it should be at this time. We want provision, but it must be excellent provision. I know that that is our shared starting point. A lot of discussions are taking place at the moment. The plan that my hon. Friend mentioned is one of many, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning will be visiting the college to talk to everyone who wants to put any points to her. No change is not an option, because my hon. Friend and I both want better quality provision for the people in that area.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): Just what is it that makes today's Government so different, and so appealing to further education that for the first time, principals, staff unions and students all combined in this week's lobby of Parliament? Is it related to the dismay over the lack of trust displayed by the Government as core funding continues to decline, or to the blank astonishment illustrated by the sharp intake of breath that greeted the claim by the Minister for Lifelong Learning to those who were lobbying that they had received extra money, although none of them was able to identify it? Or is it Ministers' misleading comments last month on quality, which, according to the Association of Colleges, aroused "deep concerns and absolute anger"?

Will the Secretary of State confide to the House the secret of her Government's success in uniting further education?

Estelle Morris: I will tell the hon. Gentleman exactly how this Government are different from the last Government: we invest in education; we make capital investments; FE lecturers have the opportunity to train for

qualifications; there are centres for vocational excellence that did not exist before; we have targets and are delivering on them; and more people have learning opportunities. That is the difference between us and the Conservative Government.

Those in the FE sector are impatient for change, but so are we. As I said to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), we made it clear in 1997 that our priorities were early-years, primary and secondary education. We delivered in those sectors, and we delivered well. We made it clear in our 2001 manifesto that our priority—as well as schools—would be further and higher education. Believe me, we will deliver—and deliver well—on that, too.

School Buildings

4. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): What assistance is offered to local education authorities to replace and improve old school buildings for secondary education; and if she will make a statement. [50348]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): We have provided more than £7.5 billion in the last five years for school buildings. In the next two years we are making a further £6.5 billion available. Most of this money is allocated by formula to local education authorities and they allocate it to schools according to locally determined priorities. We do not separately allocate capital for primary and secondary schools.

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend will be aware of the bid by the Wakefield local education authority for help and resources for refurbishing its secondary schools, including Horbury school and Ossett school. Normanton, a former mining community and railway centre, is acknowledged to be a deprived area, and we are in desperate need of new buildings at the Freeston high school to replace the 70-year-old buildings in which children are being taught at present. Does my hon. Friend agree that if future generations in Normanton are to achieve the necessary standards, skills and success, we need those new buildings? Will he visit my constituency to see for himself the need for refurbishment of its secondary schools?

John Healey: My hon. Friend will be aware that central Government have provided £40 million extra in the past five years for capital expenditure in the LEA area, and we have already allocated a further £22 million over the next two years. I am aware of the £38 million private finance initiative bid, and I know that two of the three secondary schools that would have benefited most are in his constituency.

Wakefield LEA will have another chance to bid again later this year and my Department, which has offered detailed feedback to the authority on its previous bid, is happy to work with it to develop a future application. My hon. Friend's constituency shares many characteristics with my own, so I would be happy to take up his invitation to see the state of the schools for myself, following his expression of concern about them.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Education Ministers are well aware of the problems that we have in Macclesfield in connection with secondary education and the possible amalgamation of two schools. Is the Minister aware that the Learning and Skills Council has made a most exciting proposal to establish an education learning zone in Macclesfield, which could solve all the problems about the money that might be required to improve and modernise Ryles Park school. Is he prepared to meet me to discuss that exciting project, which would solve a lot of education problems in Macclesfield?

John Healey: I would be only too pleased to meet the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). However, if he will forgive me, I shall first have a good look at the plans put together by the LSC to see whether they are as exciting and visionary as he suggests. I look forward to discussing them with him.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): Will the Minister confirm that the Government intend to use the money for new schools not just to improve the building stock, but to raise aspirations and expectations among children in areas such as the coalfields, where there has historically been underachievement in schools? That would provide not just new buildings, but a catalyst for improving and raising the aspirations of the kids as well as teachers' and communities' expectations of them.

John Healey: My hon. Friend, too, has a constituency that shares many characteristics with my own, and he is absolutely right to remind us not just of the significant increases in capital investment in schools under this Government, but the reason for them, which is that better buildings and better equipment produce better schools. That encourages better learning and improved aspirations among the kids who attend them, which are essential for students and staff as part of our bid to raise attainment, especially in disadvantaged areas where staying-on rates and kids' achievements have for too long been too low.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The Government are to be congratulated on introducing asset management plans for schools, but given the huge backlog of buildings that need renovation, the so-called temporary classrooms and the need for new science laboratories in many secondary schools, does the Minister share my concern that often, the capital resources available to local education authorities will not match the needs identified in the asset management plans? Does he agree that expectations have been created that can only lead to disappointment? How can we produce more capital assets for the LEAs so that we can get the schools built?

John Healey: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's endorsement of asset management plans, which we introduced in 1999, along with the first ever full survey of all schools in every LEA area—although I am not surprised to hear another bid for extra funding made from the Liberal Benches. I remind him that central Government investment has increased sharply since 1997. In the final year under the Tories it was £700 million. Last year it was three times that. Next year it will be five times that. Clearly there is a limit to what central Government can provide, even through such a generous settlement, which is why the PFI has an important part to play in supplementing it.

University Entrants

5. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): What steps she is taking to encourage university applications from pupils from lower socio-economic groups. [50350]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): My Department's excellence challenge will encourage applications for higher education among young people in many of the country's most disadvantaged areas by raising their attainment and their aspirations. In addition, through its postcode premium, the Higher Education Funding Council for England supports universities in meeting the additional cost of recruiting and retaining students from those groups.

Tony Cunningham: I thank the Minister for that reply. For about 11 years, I taught in Netherhall comprehensive school in my constituency. It was attended by many talented young people who deserved to go to university but did not, because their parents, grandparents and friends had never been. There is a lack of expectation and aspiration. Will my hon. Friend share her thoughts on how we can improve and increase the expectations and aspirations of those children, who deserve the opportunity to go to university?

Margaret Hodge: I share that view and that desire to raise aspirations and prior attainment levels among children, especially from the lower socio-economic groups, so that there is equality of opportunity for our young people. Raising aspirations is a long and slow process. It is shocking that almost half of young people from the lower socio-economic groups never hear about university as an option for them during their school years. We need to tackle that problem by working with those children from a young age, with their teachers and career advisers and with their families. Many of our programmes are intended to do that.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Does the hon. Lady accept the fact that her attempts to achieve the laudable aim of widening access have so far been monumentally ham-fisted? She said that in some cases, universities should not award places on the basis of A-level results. What would she say to an applicant who had worked hard and obtained good grades but was denied a university place because the Minister's political interference meant that the university gave it to someone with worse results?

Margaret Hodge: What I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that the difference between this Government and the Conservative Government is that for generation after generation the Conservatives denied good quality education to the many and focused opportunity only on the elite, whereas we are determined to change that. I would then tell him that we want the very best brains to have the opportunity to go to our best universities. The issue that I raised was that many of our universities need to think about how they recruit and assess potential in selecting their students.

I would draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention three studies carried out by three universities—Bristol, Cardiff and the department of economics at Warwick—all of which say the same thing, which is that applicants accepted from comprehensive schools do better than those from independent schools with the same A-level points score. If three studies show that, universities need to become more sophisticated and ensure that they pull out the best potential when they select their students.

Mr. Green: Clearly the Minister has nothing to say to the applicant whom she has unfairly excluded. She said that the Government were manipulating the money for universities so that applicants from certain postcodes were favoured. Surely the basis for university admissions should be what young people can learn, not where they come from. Just as it was wrong 50 years ago for crusty dons to prefer good chaps from their old school, it is wrong now for Ministers to impose political tests for university admissions. Does the hon. Lady not accept that the way to widen access is to improve the schools, not to bully the universities?

Margaret Hodge: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that universities control their own admissions. The additional resources that we give to universities for taking in students whose parents are unlikely to have attended university reflects the additional teaching and support that those students may need to get the best out of their university experience. It is our desire to ensure that we stop focusing on the elite, and provide opportunity for the many. That is what governs that funding. For the hon. Gentleman to pretend—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister has done well in that reply. I call Mr. Harry Barnes.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Young people from lower socio-economic groups who miss out at school can be picked up by the adult education system at a later stage. Some do not take advantage of that opportunity because they are late developers, but others do not because their home life has not provided the necessary knowledge, understanding and encouragement, although they can become amenable to such influences at a later stage. What is being done to improve access for adult students who may not have prior qualifications?

Margaret Hodge: I agree entirely with those who say that we should open opportunities not just to young children, but to those who perhaps did not have a proper chance at the beginning of their education. One purpose of the reform agenda for the further education sector is to ensure that the quality of education offered will provide the sort of progression to which my hon. Friend refers. The introduction of foundation degrees—many of which will include work-based experience, leading to the higher education qualification—is another initiative in that direction.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): In the 1960s, 70 per cent. of students at Oxford and Cambridge universities came from a state school background. These days, the figure is much lower; indeed, it has declined over that entire generation. In the Minister's opinion, what is the reason for that, and is there a connection with the ending of grammar school education throughout most of the country?

Margaret Hodge: The current record of Oxford and Cambridge—which is measured not by us but by the

Higher Education Funding Council for England—shows that they are not yet meeting the HEFCE benchmark for entrance from state schools. In my view, the reason for that is being addressed in part by the universities themselves. Although we must raise aspirations and the prior attainment level, universities must reach out to other colleges. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the arrangement made by Pembroke college with a particular student demonstrates that there is probably a long way to go in ensuring that universities themselves have fair admissions systems.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): May I turn my hon. Friend's attention to Anglia Polytechnic university, the other university in my constituency, and the huge problem that many of its students experience in finding reasonably priced accommodation? That is a common difficulty in constituencies such as mine, which have very high housing costs. Has my hon. Friend carried out an assessment of the cost of accommodation for students in such constituencies, and does she consider that such costs might deter some students from poorer backgrounds?

Margaret Hodge: Most of the analysis that we have undertaken suggests that the level of loan is sufficient to cover students' basic accommodation and living costs. However, we are anxious to ensure that the costs associated with attending university do not become a deterrent to students' deciding to move on to higher education. The purpose of the student funding review is to address issues such as those raised by my hon. Friend.

Teacher Work Load

6. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What recent meetings she has had with the teachers' unions to discuss the level of paperwork issued by her Department to teachers. [50351]

10. **Derek Twigg** (Halton): What steps she is taking to tackle excess teacher work load. [50355]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): The school workforce working party, which includes all teacher and head teacher associations and several other key education partners, continues to meet regularly. One key issue for that group is teacher work load. The school teacher's review body is expected to report on work load shortly.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the Secretary of State for that rather bland reply. Does she recall her recent written answers to my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State, which revealed that, in the past 12 months, documents with no fewer than 1,601 pages have been sent to secondary school teachers, and that documents with no fewer than an astonishing 2,839 pages have been sent to primary school teachers? Does the Secretary of State stand by her statement to the House of 10 January, when she said that "sending teachers less paper will neither raise standards nor satisfy them of our ability to give them the support that they need to do the job"?—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2002; Vol. 377, c. 661.] Does she realise that, until she changes her attitude on these matters, teachers will not want to remain in a profession that requires them to deal with a blizzard of unnecessary paper instead of teaching students?

Estelle Morris: It is far from being the case that teachers do not want to stay in the profession. Yesterday, I was delighted to announce a further increase in the numbers of teachers in teaching. There has been an increase of more than 20 per cent. in the number of applications, and we have more teachers than we have had for 20 years.

The trouble with the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and his Front-Bench colleague the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) is that they ask questions and receive written answers, but they are only interested in how many pages have been sent out. They never ask about what was on the pages, how useful it was or what use teachers made of it. Just for clarity, I shall itemise two documents in the pages to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. There were 370 pages in the numeracy key stage 3 document that was sent out. I have not met a maths teacher working with children in the early years of secondary education who does not think that what we are doing in respect of such teachers' continuous professional development is of good quality, and that it will lead to higher standards.

Another document was 115 pages long. It dealt with schoolteachers' conditions and pay: is the hon. Member for New Forest, East suggesting that we should not send that out? As long as he appears only to count the pages, rather than looking at what they contain, I do not think that he will make progress on this matter.

Derek Twigg: Last year, the key stage 2 results for schools in Halton and the rest of the country showed the biggest improvement on record. Recently, I visited Ditton primary school in my constituency, to open a new building for which local people had been waiting for 20 years. No such new building would ever have happened under the Tories, and people were delighted with it. It has great new facilities, and the environment for teachers and staff is excellent. However, teachers told me that they were worried about the amount of paperwork and bureaucracy with which they had to deal. The school has excellent results. Will my right hon. Friend say whether there is any chance that schools with proven track records in terms of delivering the required results could be granted some sort of exemption or flexibility in that respect?

Estelle Morris: First, I am delighted with the progress that has been made, in terms both of academic attainment and of building work, at the school to which my hon. Friend refers. I hope that he will take my thanks and congratulations to all those who have worked so hard to achieve that.

My hon. Friend is right. I do not know the details of the school in question, but schools that perform well are now subject to far less frequent visits by Ofsted inspectors. We need to make more progress in that respect. Our approach is that we need a strong framework for accountability, which allows us to guarantee to parents that we are on top of underperformance. Increasingly, however, we are able to give more flexibility and

autonomy to schools that are performing well. That is at the core of the Education Bill and is the next stage in education reform.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The Secretary of State will be aware that Bognor Regis community college in my constituency has been on a four-day week for the first half of the current term owing to teacher shortages. I hope that the matter has been resolved for the remainder of the term, but is not that school's experience an indication of the seriousness of the teacher shortage, which is caused by an excess of paperwork, poor discipline in schools, and poor teacher pay?

Estelle Morris: In my answer to the previous question I explained that teacher pay has gone up and that lecturers in further education have noticed the difference, so the hon. Gentleman cannot claim that the problem comes down to teacher pay.

I am delighted to hear that the school in Bognor Regis to which the hon. Gentleman referred will be back to full-time education next week. Of course I share his concern: no hon. Member would want his or her children to be in a school offering only short-time education because of teacher shortages. I do not underestimate or diminish the nature of the problem for some schools. I have always said that we are not complacent. I intend no comment on the school in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but some schools facing especially challenging problems find it far more difficult to recruit and retain teachers. We have been working closely with the head teacher and the local authority to do what we can to help. I hope that our contribution has been appreciated and useful.

I am not complacent, and acknowledge that real problems exist for some schools. Overall, however, in terms of vacancies—even in London, where traditionally they have been the most difficult to fill—yesterday's figures showed that the huge investment that we have put in over the past few years is beginning to bear fruit. We will continue to monitor and to offer whatever help we can to those at Bognor Regis community college. I hope that from Monday onwards, things go really well there and continue to improve.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): My right hon. Friend has partly anticipated my question in her welcome remarks about Ofsted's light touch. Will she confirm that she intends Ofsted to have a much lighter touch when it comes to the majority of schools and for its visits to be much less frequent? In that way, we can show teachers that we trust them to deliver our education service on our behalf.

Estelle Morris: We must remember that, on average, Ofsted visits a school once every six years. It is not as though its inspectors are in school, every day of the week, every week of the year. I do not think that that is unreasonable. Ofsted offers us the ability to guarantee to parents that we will spot underachievement and take action to remedy it. Ofsted also identifies good practice and success which we can share and celebrate. We must seek to move this forward and reduce the amount of paperwork that Ofsted asks for. I know that David Bell, the successor to Mike Tomlinson—who is in his last week in post and to whom I wish to pay tribute for the work that he has done—will continue to work for that. My guarantee to parents is that external inspection and accountability will stay in place. Equally, when teachers improve and perform well, we should seek to give them more freedom and autonomy.

School Counselling Services

7. **Sue Doughty** (Guildford): What measures are in place to improve counselling services available to young people in schools. [50352]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): For older pupils, the Connexions service will, by 2003, be available across the whole of England. We have also established a network of 3,000 learning mentors to help children and young people in challenging circumstances overcome any problem that affects their learning.

Sue Doughty: I thank the Minister for his reply. I had the privilege last week of addressing a social inclusion conference for youth in my constituency. It was clear that giving as much help as we can to young people, their teachers and their families will provide a real benefit in avoiding problems that may stack up later on. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is responsible for much of the current provision. Will the Minister do everything that he can to ensure that every child in every school has access to the counselling services that will help them, their teachers and families?

Mr. Lewis: I agree entirely with the hon. Lady. In my view, tackling emotional and psychological difficulties is integral to raising educational standards and performance. I pay tribute to the work of the NSPCC, which is doing some tremendously innovative work in this area. I recently met pupils and staff of the Aldersley high school and the Kings secondary school in Wolverhampton, which are benefiting directly from those NSPCC projects.

As the hon. Lady will know, there are now learning mentors in schools and we have 2,000 Connexions personal advisers in post. In the Budget we announced the establishment of new multidisciplinary support teams to work with clusters of primary and secondary schools. That is all to ensure that individual young people have intensive support where they have multiple and complex difficulties that get in the way of their learning and succeeding at school. The reasons why young people do not do as well as they could are sometimes very complex, and we need that intensive adult support to ensure that all young people fulfil their potential.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): Despite the appalling spelling of "Connexions", I pay tribute to its work and that of the NSPCC, particularly in Wolverhampton. It has a long record of connecting with local authorities, especially my own, which has worked long and hard with a series of joint arrangements and often joint purse arrangements. Will the Minister ensure that he facilitates such working by making sure that all

local authorities have sufficient resources outside the ring-fenced arrangements to develop imaginative and innovative partnerships with the NSPCC and others?

Mr. Lewis: I agree with my hon. Friend, who always points out that more innovation takes place in Wolverhampton than anywhere else—with the exception of football recently. The challenge for us all is to combine the professional contribution of counsellors, Connexions advisers and learning mentors to ensure that together they add value to the contribution made by teachers to ensure that every child has the chance to pursue their dreams and fulfil their potential.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—

Rape Prosecutions

34. **Vera Baird** (Redcar): What steps the Government are taking to implement the recommendations of the report by the inspectorate of constabulary and the inspectorate for the Crown Prosecution Service published on 8 April. [50380]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): My hon. and learned Friend refers to the CPS and police inspectorates' report on the investigation and prosecution of rape. I wholly agree with her concern that we must ensure that women can have confidence that the criminal justice system will take rape allegations seriously and prosecute them effectively, and that offenders and potential offenders must know that they cannot get away with it. The CPS will take action on the report's recommendations, including extending the areas of good practice commended in the report; establishing a national network of specialist rape prosecutors, based in each of the 42 CPS areas; and reviewing the CPS guidance for prosecuting rape. My hon. and learned Friend will know that the offence is difficult to prosecute, but we must do better and I am sure that we can.

Vera Baird: I am very grateful indeed for that reply and for the indications that my right hon. and learned Friend well understands the difficulties involved in such prosecutions. Given that at each stage the decision as to whether to further a rape prosecution is inevitably influenced by the possible outcome at trial, and granted that, even in cases that get to trial, there is an extremely low conviction rate, will my right hon. and learned Friend use her best endeavours in every step that she takes to involve the judiciary, whose attitude to rape complainants needs urgent updating?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. and learned Friend raises a point about the attitude of the judiciary. I have two things to say about that. First, the Lord Chancellor is well aware of the important role of the Judicial Studies Board in that regard, and of the need constantly to update the work of involving judges in discussion of this important matter.

Secondly, it is important, as I am sure my hon. and learned Friend will agree, that we have more women judges. We need to train all judges, but it is unlikely that women victims alleging rape will have confidence in a criminal justice system in which nearly all the barristers and nearly all the judges in the higher courts are men. We need action on that, too.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I pay tribute to the report and to the work of Her Majesty's inspectorates of both the Crown Prosecution Service and the constabulary. I note that the Solicitor-General says that she will act on the report. She will need the assistance of other Departments of State to do so and I hope that she will give us an assurance about that.

Will the right hon. and learned Lady confirm that the Government do not intend to introduce different rules governing disclosure of defendants' previous convictions in sexual offence cases from those that govern other cases?

The Solicitor-General: I thank the hon. Gentleman for paying tribute to the CPS and police inspectorates which worked jointly on the report. I join him in congratulating them on their work.

In respect of the involvement of other Departments, the hon. Gentleman is right. The whole criminal justice system—police, prosecutors and courts—needs to work together to ensure that those criminal offences are properly dealt with. At the suggestion of the Attorney-General, the Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department and our own Department will work together on those issues and will issue a full report in July as to how we can take them forward across the criminal justice system.

The hon. Gentleman asked about disclosure of previous convictions. He will know that the Law Commission drew up a well-considered report on disclosure of previous misconduct; that includes looking at all the evidence of the effect of disclosure of previous criminal convictions in sex cases. He will also know that that was considered by Lord Justice Auld in his report on the criminal justice system. The question of the admissibility of evidence will be covered in the response to the Auld report in our White Paper, so I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's question as to whether the Government's response will be to treat admissibility as different in sexual offence cases. He will of course be aware that separate rules govern admissibility in respect of section 41 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, which is also an issue.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I am very pleased to hear that the Government will act on the recommendations of the report.

In a recent survey undertaken by the women's safety unit in Cardiff, which works with the victims of domestic violence, 30 per cent. of women disclosed forced sexual activity that they had never reported, mainly because of the belief that rape in marriage does not exist. What does my right hon. and learned Friend think can be done to make women more aware of their rights in that situation?

The Solicitor-General: One of the important things that we can do is to back up the efforts of organisations such as that led by my hon. Friend in Cardiff. That will involve police, prosecutors and the voluntary sector

working together to ensure that women who have been subjected to rape by strangers or within marriage know that the criminal justice system will support them and will work with the voluntary sector. My hon. Friend is right to say that there is often a link between under-reporting and the fact that women think that the man will get away with it because the criminal justice system will not take their complaint seriously. Sadly, there is clear evidence that that is so. We have to build up that confidence at all levels.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the Solicitor-General be good enough to tell me exactly how the 18 recommendations in the report will be implemented, and whether we will be given a full report? The recommendations are clearly set out, but the mechanics of achieving them will require a lot of administrative work.

In the light of this highly critical report, will the Solicitor-General tell me how we can give rape victims the confidence to approach the police? The report says:

"The training available to police personnel does not conform to a common minimum standard."

It also notes that there was

"late decision-making—

by the Crown Prosecution Service—

"which, in some instances, led to cases proceeding to the Crown Court on the wrong charges."

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman rightly draws attention to some of the serious criticisms in the report, which we shall deal with as follows. The Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department and our Department will work together. A working party will be formed to deal with cross-criminal justice issues, and it will report back to the House in July.

The Crown Prosecution Service is working on the issues that relate directly to it, and it will continue to do so. I undertake to keep the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) informed at all stages. We have to build confidence and to do better than we are doing at the moment.

Domestic Violence

35. **Mr. Ken Purchase** (Wolverhampton, North-East): What support the Crown Prosecution Service gives to victims of domestic violence who are fearful of recrimination. [50381]

The Solicitor-General: To protect victims of domestic violence who fear recrimination, and to ensure effective prosecution of domestic violence, the Crown Prosecution Service has reviewed its guidance on prosecuting domestic violence. Last November, new guidance was published that requires the CPS to work closely with the police and voluntary organisations to protect and support the victim.

Mr. Purchase: Is the Solicitor-General visited in her weekly surgeries, as I am, by many victims of domestic violence who say that they simply do not get the support to which they feel they are entitled, and that they are timid about making further complaints because the protection process has broken down? I am exceedingly pleased to learn that the CPS is taking the matter more seriously, but more social policy input is required into the decisions taken in the course of that work to ensure that women, who are most often the victims of domestic violence, have their needs properly understood.

The Solicitor-General: I absolutely agree with everything that my hon. Friend says. It is also important that women know that the courts take such offences seriously. To ensure that sentencing properly reflects the seriousness of domestic violence, I have referred to the Court of Appeal a case in which, in my view, the judge passed an unduly lenient sentence in a domestic violence case. That will be heard on 16 May, and will give the Court of Appeal the opportunity to consider sentences for domestic violence.

Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act

36. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): How many man-hours have been spent by the Crown Prosecution Service on preparing prosecutions under the legislation on bribery and corruption in the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [50382]

The Solicitor-General: The provisions of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 amending existing anti-corruption legislation only came into force on 14 February 2002 and apply only to offences committed after that date. No cases have yet been referred to the CPS or the Serious Fraud Office by the National Criminal Intelligence Service, and as a result no time has been spent preparing for prosecution.

Hugh Bayley: Bribery is wrong and is bad for business. It is exceptionally bad for poor people in poor countries who find that money from trade and aid which would otherwise help them is no longer available. However, experience in the United States, which has had legislation against international bribery for many years, since it was introduced by the Jimmy Carter Government, showed that until there had been convictions, American business men did not recognise that going along with so-called local business practices would result in major fines for them or their companies, or in jail sentences. Will my right hon. and learned Friend give the House an assurance that evidence will be sought, and that when it has been obtained, the CPS will vigorously pursue convictions?

The Solicitor-General: I can give the House and my hon. Friend that assurance. The SFO, the CPS, Customs and all the other prosecuting authorities take these issues very seriously. The Government consider it vital for this country to play its part in investigating and prosecuting all international crime. The week before last, I attended a conference of fraud prosecutors who stressed the importance of prosecutors in this country working together with those in the rest of the world to tackle fraud and corruption worldwide. I know that my hon. Friend has a long-standing interest in this matter. He might like to meet some of the prosecutors and see how they are proceeding with their work on an international basis, and I extend that invitation to him.

Business of the House

12.32 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the Leader of the House for the business for next week, please?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be:

MONDAY 29 APRIL—Second Reading of the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill [*Lords*]. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hurrah."] I hope that sentiment continues.

TUESDAY 30 APRIL—Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 1 MAY—Consideration of a Resolution on National Insurance Contributions.

THURSDAY 2 MAY—There will be a debate on Wales in the world on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 3 MAY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week after will be:

MONDAY 6 MAY—The House will not be sitting, as it is a bank holiday.

TUESDAY 7 MAY—Second Reading of the Police Reform Bill [*Lords*].

WEDNESDAY 8 MAY—Progress on consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

THURSDAY 9 MAY—Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

FRIDAY 10 MAY—Private Members' Bills.

The House will wish to know that subject to the progress of business, it is envisaged that the House will rise for the Whitsun recess on Friday 24 May and return on Monday 10 June. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that Members will be keen to return to business sooner than they had anticipated.

The House will wish to know that on Wednesday 8 May, there will be a debate relating to railways in European Standing Committee A, and on Thursday 9 May, there will be a debate relating to the execution of orders freezing assets or evidence in European Standing Committee B.

[*Wednesday 8 May 2002:*

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union documents: 5721/02, 5744/02, 5723/02, 5724/02, 5726/02 and 5727/02; Railways. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-xxii, (2001–02).

[*Thursday 9 May 2002:*

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union document: 6980/02; The execution of orders freezing assets or evidence. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-xxiii (2001–02).]

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business. Can he clear up a bit of a mystery? Last Thursday, he told us, at column 699, that on 1 May there would be the Second Reading of a Bill to give effect to the swingeing increases in national insurance proposed by the Chancellor. Today, he said rather mysteriously that next Wednesday there will be a resolution on national insurance increases. We must get to the bottom of this. Presumably, it is yet another Government cock-up, but we would like to know the nature of the error. Who made it? Why is he having to carry the can? Can we please now be told the exact relationship between the previous Bill, the present resolution and the implied time delay? Whose fault is it? When will we be told the full story? The national insurance increases are of enormous importance to businesses, individuals and everyone else. To start to deal with the matter in this way is depressing and disappointing to say the least.

There is something called the European Convention going on at the moment, which has the potential, regrettably, to have a profound impact on the nature of the European Union and our role in it. There are three Members of the House taking part in that convention, not the least of whom is the Minister for Europe, the right hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain). When will the Minister for Europe give the House an opportunity to ask him what he is doing on our behalf, what commitments he is making, what the convention is up to and where it is heading? I am told that two of our representatives at the convention will appear before the House of Lords some time next week. It seems that the House of Lords can quiz members of the convention, while that opportunity has been denied to this House. When will we have a chance to find out what is taking place on our behalf in the European Convention so that we can have a say and give our marching orders to our representatives?

Will the Leader of the House confirm whether he spoke to *The Sun* yesterday? *The Sun* claims that he did—I have the newspaper in front of me. It says that something is going to be done to protect the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's Question Time. We know that he needs protection, and that he is incapable of dealing with what we call the open question as successive Prime Ministers have done for decades. It appears that the Prime Minister's plight is so desperate that he needs the Leader of the House's help to shut down the open question and to make sure that all questions are planted and scripted. We know that many of them are already, but it looks as if that will become routine. Why does *The Sun* quote the Leader of the House as saying of Prime Minister's questions:

"The public love it as theatre, but it would be in everyone's interests if people could set specific questions"?

Did he say that to *The Sun*? If not, where did it get the story? Can he assure me categorically that the Prime Minister will not be provided with extraordinary protection from the rigours of Prime Minister's questions, and that we can continue to put the Prime Minister through his inadequate paces every Wednesday?

During Question Time yesterday, the Prime Minister made the following remarkable assertion on the subject of rising street crime:

"As a result of the additional measures being taken, we are confident that by the end of September we will have brought that problem under control".—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 326.]

The Leader of the House will accept that we cannot allow that assertion to hang in the air unchallenged and unquestioned. Can we have an early opportunity for the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary, when he is not using robust language, to come to the House and tell us what has changed that means that street crime, instead of rising—as it is, sadly and dramatically—will fall dramatically over the next five months? What is the

reason? Is it legislation, more police officers or more effective measures, and, if so, of what kind? Alternatively will the Prime Minister be out and about personally feeling the collar of muggers and making sure that they do not commit the crimes that they have been committing? We need an opportunity to quiz the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary about what they have in mind.

Finally, I want to raise the question of planning gain tariff, on which I have no doubt that the Leader of the House is an expert, as he is on so many things. A Green Paper on huge and dramatic increases in the planning system has been published. I am told that the Government have received about 15,000 responses, which indicates a high level of interest and alarm. It would appear that framework legislation will be introduced in the next Session, within which will be provision for statutory instruments to be used to vary the suggested planning gain tariffs. Will the Leader of the House give us a commitment that, if that happens, this new stealth tax and the enormous effect that it may have on every constituency will not be hidden away Upstairs in a statutory instrument Committee but debated on the Floor so that all right hon. and hon. Members have an opportunity to explore fully its potential impact on their constituencies and their way of life? It is a simple commitment to make. I accept that I am looking a little ahead, but I know that, with his legendary commitment to the parliamentary process, he will be only too happy to give such an undertaking.

Mr. Cook: First, on the business relating to the national insurance contributions, the right hon. Gentleman asks who will carry the can. I will carry the can if anything is wrong because that is my role as Leader of the House. I am happy to assent to that proposition, but I do not see that there is any can to be carried. It is certainly not for the inconvenience of the House that we will debate national insurance contributions on that date, which I announced a week ago. A Bill will certainly be introduced. In the event that the House carries the resolution, the Bill will be published the next day. The House authorities have informed us that it is necessary to have a founding Ways and Means resolution. It was not possible for us to consult the House authorities in advance of the Budget.

Mr. Forth: Oh!

Mr. Cook: I think that hon. Members would be miffed if we discussed with the House authorities the contents of the Budget before we shared them with the House.

I agree about the importance of the measure. It is enormously important to the national health service because it will enable us to continue our programme of record investment in the health service so that it becomes a world-class service.

As for the European Convention, there are two separate issues of accountability. The first is the accountability of the Minister for Europe, who sits on the convention as a member of the Government. He is, of course, regularly held to account by the House. Indeed, he answered Foreign Office questions only recently.

The second and separate matter of accountability relates to the two people who are there not as representatives of the Government, but as representatives of Parliament. That is a novel situation. I fully share the right hon. Gentleman's sentiment that they should report to the House and be held to account by hon. Members. I am exploring with one of those Members how we can best go about that and what mechanisms we could provide. The convention is important, and I fully share the right hon. Gentleman's view that there should be novel mechanisms for those two representatives of the House to report on what they do in our name.

I am not aware of having spoken to *The Sun*. I detect from the extract that the right hon. Gentleman quoted faint echoes of what I said to the Procedure Committee yesterday. I am happy to say that that is on the record and he can check the full report. My impression from memory, without having the opportunity to check the record, is that *The Sun* has conflated two separate paragraphs. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stands in no need of protection. Indeed, were I to offer friendly advice to the right hon. Gentleman, it would be that it is on the Conservative side of the Dispatch Box that protection is required.

I have frequently said both in and outside the House that we do not help ourselves when we appear to be interested in scoring party political points rather than in pursuing the public interest. Although it is the case that the public admire the theatre and high drama of party confrontations, it is important to convey that we are carrying out serious business. I have always taken the view that it is much better for Members who ask a question to be open and honest about the subject on which it is based.

The right hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of street crime. I am grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to put it on the record that the chance of being a victim of crime in Britain is at its lowest for 20 years. That reflects the fact that when he and his colleagues were in office, crime doubled in Britain. The commitment that the Prime Minister referred to yesterday was first given in February this year, although the right hon. Gentleman appears not to have noticed it at the time.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): He was too busy reading *The Sun*.

Mr. Cook: Indeed. Too much time spent reading *The Sun* may distract one from noticing what is being said by the Government.

The commitment given in February was that we will stabilise street crime in London within a six-month period, by September, and will thereafter proceed to reverse the increase. *[Interruption.]* That is precisely what was said in the February commitment. If we are to be successful in getting on top of crime, stabilising it, reversing street crime and achieving the same cuts in street crime that we have achieved in other offences, we need to ensure both that we continue the record increase in police numbers which the Government have achieved, and that we support police numbers with the community safety officers that we have introduced.

It is bogus of the Opposition to express concern about street crime when only the other day in the House of Lords their Conservative colleagues defeated the proposed detention powers for community safety officers, who have been given a real role to play.

[Mr. Cook]

The right hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. He cannot pretend to affront on behalf of victim and at the same time stop the measures that are necessary to catch those carrying out street crime and street violence.

I am happy to assure the right hon. Gentleman that if any tax is introduced on the back of planning gain, that would require legislation, and the matter would have to come before the House.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): As a new Member who has not yet been conditioned by too many years of planet Westminster, it is patently clear to me and most members of the public that the present system of Prime Minister's questions does nothing to improve Government accountability or allow scrutiny of what a Prime Minister is doing.

May I urge my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House—if he needs any urging—to ignore the advice of the shadow Leader of the House on Prime Minister's questions, and to talk to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister about ways of improving how Prime Minister's Question Time operates? Is my right hon. Friend prepared to consider ways of improving Prime Minister's Question Time to achieve genuine accountability and scrutiny of what the Government are doing?

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has not raised any proposal with me or, as far as I am aware, with anybody else for any change to the procedure at Prime Minister's Question Time. It is for the House to consider how we proceed.

I am impressed by the seriousness and thoroughness with which the Procedure Committee is addressing the matter. The Committee has adequate representatives from the official Opposition and from the other party that is represented in the Chamber this afternoon. I hope that they will consider seriously ways in which we can improve the way that Prime Minister's Question Time contributes to our task of scrutiny.

For me, as I set out in my memorandum on modernisation, a key task must be to reduce the ridiculously long period of notice for oral questions.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am full of admiration for the adroit way in which the Leader of the House juggles business. However, will he look again at the provisional business for Tuesday 7 May, because it would seem that Second Reading of the Police Reform Bill will clash with consideration in Committee of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill? The right hon. Gentleman will recognise that these are both extremely important Bills that require most careful and diligent scrutiny by Members on both sides of the House. It seems that probably the same Ministers will be involved.

Will the Leader of the House give urgent attention to the possibility of a debate as soon as possible after the local council elections on the encouragement of participation in the political process to reduce current apathy and disconnection—a phrase that he uses?

May I ask him especially to read an article in the *Financial Times* of 24 April? It is headlined "An electronic electorate". The article states:

"Ministers want to modernise polling. But it may take more to revive voters' flagging interest."

This well-researched article concludes:

"This will not bring turnout above 50 per cent. The answer is making voting attractive by making votes count."

I think that that phrase will be familiar to the right hon. Gentleman.

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that no gimmicks—not even new technology—will give equal weight and value to equal votes, and that we need to look again at a voting system that gives fair representation to all views? Does he note that Le Pen has had his success in France without a proportional system but with a first-past-the-post system, albeit with two stages? Has he seen early-day motion 1184, and the amendment?

[That this House expresses its concern at the National Front candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen securing a place in the final stages of the French presidential election; rejects the racism, intolerance and isolationism for which he stands; believes that apathy and declining turnout rather than a significant increase in the National Front vote share enabled Monsieur Le Pen to win second place; and calls on all democrats across Europe to stand together and resist these extreme influences on the political process, by offering imaginative policies based on the values of solidarity, compassion and enterprise which inspire and engage the public, and consign Monsieur Le Pen and his ilk to the margins of European politics.]

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that what has happened in France is precisely the result of an inadequate voting system, which the Opposition want to impose upon both Houses of this Parliament?

Mr. Cook: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I do not accept that we cannot proceed with the Second Reading of a Bill from one Department while that Department has another Bill Upstairs in Committee. It is one sign of the health, energy and commitment of the Home Office that it has many Bills before the House, and we cannot confine ourselves to proceeding with only one Home Office Bill at any one time.

On the local elections, I wholly share the hon. Gentleman's sentiment that we should make sure that we do everything possible to encourage the electorate to turn out and to take part, whatever way the electorate may choose to vote on the day. There are too many people in France who regret that they missed that opportunity when they had a chance to take it, and who now complain about it.

If we are to have a fair electoral system and a fair result, it is important that we should be honest with the electorate. As the hon. Gentleman raises the issue of the local elections, may I say that I was disappointed to read in this morning's papers the report of the Liberal Democrat campaign literature, which invites Liberal Democrat candidates to

"be wicked and act shamelessly"?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): What's new?

Mr. Cook: What is new is that we have it in writing. The advice continues:

"Don't be afraid to exaggerate. For example, responses to surveys . . . are always 'massive'. . . Oppose all service cuts . . . why court the unpopularity that goes with . . . responsibility".

[HON. MEMBERS: "More!"] The House has other business to proceed to. The document is entitled "Effective Opposition". I say to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that so long as his party follows that advice, it will remain in opposition, without responsibility.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on ITV Digital? The focus has rightly been on the situation of Football League clubs, but of much greater importance is the position of dozens if not hundreds of companies that have been left high and dry, with debts owed by ITV Digital, after contracts were signed on the understanding that Carlton and Granada would guarantee that company. My constituency faces the loss of 600 jobs because of the activities of ITV Digital, and the matter should be debated on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the severity of the situation to which my hon. Friend refers and the extent to which it has a direct impact on many constituency interests of hon. Members. I assure him and the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is following the issue closely. I touched base with her this morning in the margins of Cabinet, and she will certainly want to keep the House informed of the progress of discussions. The only caveat that I would enter is that we cannot proceed on the basis of the public purse accepting responsibility for the rather exaggerated expectations of ITV Digital. Consistent with that caution, though, we will do anything that we can to be helpful.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Although I have no quarrel with the right hon. Gentleman for deleting a day from the Whitsun recess, am I right in assuming that he had to do that because of the mess that he has made over the national insurance Bill? If I am wrong, could we instead have a debate on 10 June on Liberal election tactics, which he could perhaps open?

Mr. Cook: I would not want to rule out a debate on that topic, and I shall bear it in mind, among the competing pressures. I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that he is wrong on that point. We took the decision on the recess in advance of the latest announcement. The Whitsun recess will be two full weeks. It is a generous recess; indeed, it is much longer than usual, and I do not think that hon. Members have any ground for complaint.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): I have just learned of the result of the Damilola Taylor case, and like many people in this country will, I regard it as yet another judicial farce that has let down many people. Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on the role that the police and the Crown Prosecution Service played in that farce, and give hon. Members an opportunity to comment on it?

Mr. Cook: Like my hon. Friend, I learned of the announcement from the teletext just before I left my office. It would therefore be foolish of me to express any view on it, and it would also be improper to do so. We have a clear segregation between politicians and Government, and the courts. Whatever we may think privately, it is important that in the House we respect the judgment of the courts.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Last week, the Government published their response to the Select Committee on Public Administration's report on the House of Lords, entitled "The Second Chamber—Continuing the Reform". There is a suspicion on both sides of the House that continuing the reform is not actually the Government's policy at all. To allay those fears, can the Leader of the House promise that we will have a debate before the summer recess on the Government's response, so that their policy on the second Chamber can be fully tested?

Mr. Cook: I am dismayed to hear that there are such fears, so I am glad to take the opportunity that the right hon. Gentleman offers me to repeat our commitment that we wish to take this forward before the summer recess, and I hope to be able to speak to the House on that matter before then.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that the first question to the Prime Minister on 8 May is, in fact, a closed question from one of our hon. Friends? However, does the Leader of the House accept that without open questions it would not have been possible for the events in France to be raised yesterday? That is as good an illustration as any that a contemporary issue can be raised without notice being given. It is farcical that we have to give a fortnight's notice. The sooner that ends, the better. However, even if we give less notice, it would be a retrogressive step if we took away from Members the opportunity to raise a contemporary issue without having given notice beforehand. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider that matter carefully.

Mr. Cook: I have great sympathy with all the points that my hon. Friend made. I do not recall saying yesterday that open questions would be suppressed in any way, although I did plead for a better balance with Members who wish to raise a specific issue being open and clear about what they wish to raise.

I totally endorse what my hon. Friend says about the importance of topicality. I was struck by the fact that not a single question on the middle east was taken at the recent Foreign Office questions. Of course Members found another opportunity to raise their concerns about the crisis in the middle east, but there is something wrong with a tabling system by which Members of the House of Commons, in holding the Foreign Secretary to scrutiny, cannot raise the biggest single foreign policy issue.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): A number of my constituents are deeply concerned about the activities of gypsy families on the eastern end of the weald. A key to resolving the problem is the efficient operation of the planning system. At a recent meeting with the local borough council—I should add that it is not Conservative—it was alleged that a change in the

[Hugh Robertson]

Government's approach to the planning inspectorate has directly caused the problem. A letter that the head of planning has written to me this morning states:

"I can only presume that advice which the Inspectorate is now receiving from Government is leading to the very lenient approach . . . local residents are being severely disadvantaged".

Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Home Secretary to come to the House to explain why that approach is now being adopted?

Mr. Cook: I regret to say that the hon. Gentleman's local authority did not copy the letter that he received this morning to me, so I obviously cannot comment on it. I will draw his remarks to the attention of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, but my willingness to do so does not imply agreement with the view that has been expressed to him. I remain a little sceptical on the basis of the facts as stated.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): The House and my right hon. Friend will be aware of the growing incidence of hepatitis C. The Department of Health set up a working group—chaired by Howard Thomas—which reported back before Christmas. I understand that the report is lying on a civil servant's desk at present. Will my right hon. Friend investigate when that report will come before the House and will he make time to debate it?

Mr. Cook: I fully share my hon. Friend's concern about the incidence of hepatitis C—a very serious condition, which is of concern to health workers as well as patients. It is very important that we take the issue seriously. I cannot say when it is anticipated that the report to which he refers may be published, but I will draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Turning to the Prime Minister's pledge to stabilise street crime in London by the end of September and bearing it in mind that his past delivery on public services has not always been very successful, will the Leader of the House give us an absolute assurance today that the House will be recalled if street crime in London has not been stabilised at the end of September, so that the Prime Minister can come to the Dispatch Box to explain again why he has failed to deliver?

Mr. Cook: I am always open to invitations to recall Parliament during the Tory party conference, and we shall reflect on that request as the conference coincides with the turn of the month. *[Interruption.]* I see that some Opposition Members may support me in that endeavour.

The hon. Gentleman is particularly unfair to the Government with his claim that we have failed to deliver on our commitments, given that in recent months we have spectacularly delivered on our commitments to reduce both waiting lists and waiting times, and we shall continue to make progress on that.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that 17 per cent. of British workers still receive no bank holiday pay? Will he arrange for a debate on employment law and employment rights, in which we can highlight some of those bad practices?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an issue of real concern to a number of our constituents. I have always been proud that this Government implemented the working time directive, which for the first time gave 2 million working people the right to paid holidays. We shall always consider the best way to advance working conditions, consistent with our commitment to an enterprise and successfully competitive economy. I shall reflect on what my hon. Friend has said and draw it to the attention of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Could the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary or the Northern Ireland Secretary come before the House in the near future to clarify the situation that is developing in the battle against international terrorism? The homespun element is very much active. We have heard comments clarifying only from the IRA's point of view what has happened in Washington. Yet it is significant that, since 1998, senior members of the IRA, after signing the Belfast agreement, have been involved in international terrorism and continue to murder Roman Catholics in Tyrone and to target and threaten people in this House.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman's last point is a weighty and important one: more members of the Catholic community have perished at the hands of nationalist terrorism than by any other means. We fully share his concern about the activity of the IRA in Colombia and elsewhere, and we are concerned about the findings in the report of the committee in Washington. However, that does not have a direct bearing on the present process towards peace within Northern Ireland or the existence of a ceasefire within Northern Ireland and on the mainland, which is warmly supported by the great majority of residents in both places.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the progress of his discussions on the memorandums which he recently published, in particular the roll-over of Bills from one parliamentary Session to another and the rescheduling of business to start earlier in the day?

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): She wants an early night.

Mr. Cook: I think that my hon. Friend's question is less about when we might finish at the end of the day than when we might start. It is well known that my view is that if the House wishes to restore itself as the place in which the agenda of public debate for the day is set, we must meet earlier in the day.

Mr. Forth: Why?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman asks why. It is self-evident that if we do not start until the early afternoon and do not carry out our main business until the late afternoon, we have missed the morning opportunity to set the agenda for the day. It is in the interests of all Members of Parliament, whatever side we sit on, that Parliament

should be seen as the place where the agenda for public debate is set, not simply a place of response. On the timetable, we are carrying out good and, I am happy to say, consensual progress in our discussions in the Modernisation Committee and I hope that we shall be in a position to report before the House rises for the summer recess.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate in Government time on the Budget's specific implications for local government? I am advised that the national insurance contributions will cost East Sussex county council £1.8 million—£1.1 million for education alone—and Wealden district council £100,000. Those both equate to a 1 per cent. increase in council tax, so people are hit not only once by the national insurance changes, but a second time by a hike in council tax.

Mr. Cook: The Government are happy to debate at any time their record on support for local authority expenditure and draw attention to the 20 per cent. increase that we have maintained for five years compared with the almost nil increase of the last five years of the Conservative Government. We are also very happy indeed to discuss relative council tax rates, because the average council tax by area per dwelling for next year will be £738 for Labour authorities, £824 for Liberal Democrat authorities and a whopping £833 for Conservative authorities. In those circumstances, a period of silence from the Opposition would be welcome.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): My right hon. Friend mentioned the middle east earlier. He will be aware that the European Parliament recently agreed a resolution calling for an arms embargo on Israel and Palestine and the suspension of the EU-Israel euro-Mediterranean agreement if Israel continues to refuse to comply with recent United Nations resolutions. Will my right hon. Friend introduce a substantive motion in the House to enable hon. Members to express a view on those and other important matters raised in the European Parliament's comprehensive resolution?

Mr. Cook: Any decision on an embargo of the EU-Israel Association Council falls to the European Union's General Affairs Council, not the European Parliament. In fairness to the Government and the House, I remind my hon. Friend that only the other day we provided a full day for debate on the middle east crisis, which is an issue of the gravest concern to the Government. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary continues to be in close contact with people in the region and the international community to make sure that we do all that we can to secure an end to the violence and a return to the negotiating table and, in addition, to ensure that the international community, particularly the UN Commission on Human Rights, has an opportunity to examine the accusations of a breach of human rights during the occupation.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): With more than 240 people, including 30 or 40 possible terrorists, still trapped in the Church of the Nativity, will the Leader of the House say whether the House can do anything to show that we are not sitting back while that horrific tragedy continues to unfold?

Mr. Cook: The Government and the EU are already doing all that they can to find a resolution to that appalling crisis and the severe conditions that now exist in an important church that is valued by everyone in the Christian community around the world. Javier Solana, the EU High Representative, has been engaged in the area trying to find a way forward and a basis on which the siege can be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is fully engaged in those efforts and gives what support he can through diplomatic contact. At the end of the day, we cannot make progress unless the Israeli Government themselves are willing to enter into a spirit of trying to find a way forward and a solution that enables us to relieve the appalling suffering now being experienced by people who represent the Christian community and are in the grotto of the Church of the Nativity.

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West): Does my right hon. Friend share my dismay at the continuing communal violence in Gujarat? While we feel for anybody caught in that violence, whether Hindu or Muslim, we must ask why Indian security forces stood back and allowed Muslims to be massacred. There is a question mark over India's treatment of its minorities, so would my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the issue?

Mr. Cook: I am aware of the serious concern throughout communities in Britain, including the community represented by my hon. Friend, about events in Gujarat. We share that concern and have expressed it to the Indian Government. I hesitate, however, to follow my hon. Friend in his generalisation; the Muslim community in India is one of the largest in the world, and on the whole India has maintained an honourable tradition of equal rights within an open democracy. It is important that it can continue to do so, which means in part that it must co-operate fully in making sure that we learn the lessons of what may have happened in Gujarat.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The right hon. Gentleman appeared before the Procedure Committee yesterday as part of its inquiry into parliamentary questions and gave valuable and excellent evidence. I suspect that it could well be as a result of that evidence that some publicity has appeared in *The Sun* newspaper today. Indeed, the comment was made that Prime Minister's questions created theatre, but the overall impression was very negative. The Leader of the House will appreciate that his memorandum on modernisation has an impact on Committees, Select and Standing, that are part of this House. Would he therefore be prepared to meet the Liaison Committee to discuss its concerns about the impact of his proposals on changing sitting times of the House? He can then be fully apprised of the concerns that are currently felt.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for confirming that I was speaking to a Committee of the House and not to *The Sun* newspaper yesterday. On the modernisation paper, I would be very happy to meet the Liaison Committee if I am invited to do so to discuss

[Mr. Cook]

this or any other matter. Indeed, I can see merit in our having such a discussion before we debate the forthcoming proposals on Select Committees.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the restructuring plans that the ferry companies announced this week, which could undermine the Government's integrated transport policy? Will he consider finding time for a debate on P&O's announcements, which could threaten seafarers' jobs, slow down the movement of freight off the roads and on to rail, and cause all sorts of traffic congestion in Dover?

Mr. Cook: I totally understand the importance of that issue to my hon. Friend's constituency and constituents. I would not wish to comment on the proposals of a commercial organisation that is making its own judgment, but I am happy to take this opportunity to restate the Government's political priority, which is to ensure that we provide maximum opportunity for freight to travel by rail rather than road. Of course, we want to work with the private sector to secure that objective.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): On that very point, will the Leader of the House now invite the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to come to the House to debate the lack of freight movement through the channel tunnel, as the 72 trains a week that he promised would be passing through the tunnel by 15 April are not yet doing so? Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern that, as of yesterday, illegal immigrants are jumping off moving trains, which puts their own lives at risk and makes it impossible for the police to apprehend them in this country? Will he take the opportunity to debate that issue with regard to reinstating the bilateral agreement with France and getting a commitment from the French Government to improve security in France, as well as a commitment from the British Government that they will take the French Government to court for breach of free movement provisions under the treaty of Rome?

Mr. Cook: In the event of a legal move of the sort to which the hon. Lady refers, it would in the first instance be a matter for the Commission rather than necessarily for ourselves, although we remain in discussion with it on the issue. In terms of clandestine entry into Britain, we have made good progress in reducing the number of people who arrive clandestinely and, indeed, of those who arrive without proper paperwork. Those matters are in our control, but provision for freight movement on the other side of the channel is not. We have considerable and continuing dialogue on the matter with the French authorities. We have a joint commission that will meet again shortly and we continue to put every possible pressure on the French authorities to ensure that security is improved to enable freight movements to achieve the capacity of the tunnel. After all, that is in the interests of the French economy and the British economy. Those matters are not, however, within our direct responsibility.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): In common with many Members of Parliament from London and the south-east, I represent a borough that has a severe housing shortage. The obvious consequence is the fuelling of house price inflation, coupled with the fact that many council properties—especially houses—have been sold off as a result of the right-to-buy scheme. Like many hon. Members, I see the consequences in my advice surgery week after week. I have also been extensively lobbied by public sector workers, as have many MPs from Greater London. Can we have a debate or at least a statement on housing policy?

Mr. Cook: I understand the problems to which my hon. Friend refers. In particular, we all fully understand their importance to the provision of decent public services throughout the south-east, which requires housing whose cost is within the income of people working in the public service. I assure him that the matter is very actively under consideration in the Government. I am sure that my colleagues will report to Parliament whenever it is appropriate to do so.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the Leader of the House have a word with his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister about an error that the Prime Minister appeared to make at Prime Minister's questions yesterday, when he told the House that police numbers were now at record levels? He neglected to say anything about special constables, who are also police officers, and who are leaving in alarming numbers. In the Essex force, for instance, there were more than 1,000 specials when this Government came to power; sadly, there are now only about 400. They play a vital role in reinforcing the regular police, particularly at weekends, and we cannot afford to do without them. Would not one way to improve Prime Minister's questions be to ensure that the Prime Minister gets his figures right?

Mr. Cook: Let me say to the House that the Prime Minister got his figures absolutely right when he said yesterday that the police establishment was at record numbers. That is true, and the number of those in training is also at a record level. Had the Conservatives paid the same attention to increasing the police establishment when they were in office, instead of presiding over a decline in the number of police officers, we might not have the problems that we now have on our streets.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Sunderland association football club gives a great deal of assistance to charity? It is not just that it keeps giving points away to other teams; its manager, Peter Reid, is involved with a charity event run by Emmanuel college, Gateshead, which raises money to send mercy ships to Africa. The team's striker, Niall Quinn, is involved in a testimonial game on 14 May, the proceeds of which will go to charities in the north-east of England and in Dublin. Might it not be a good idea for us to have an easy load that day, to allow those of us with tickets to go to the game and to encourage people to buy non-attendance tickets, which are available for this charitable purpose?

Mr. Cook: I shall, of course, take careful note of my hon. Friend's request when I plan the business for 14 May, although I shall have other factors to consider when I make those decisions. In the meantime, I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Sunderland

club and its members on the work that they do for charity. I recognise that many local football clubs provide an important focus for community identity and community pride.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Will the Leader of the House assure us that, after the local elections next week, there will be a thorough assessment of the security and confidentiality of the experimental postal voting system that is to be used in the London borough of Havering and elsewhere? Will he arrange for a debate on the Floor of the House to allow my colleagues and me to raise the real concerns of our constituents on this matter? Those concerns are deterring them from voting, which is the opposite of the intention of that experiment.

Mr. Cook: I would certainly welcome a longer opportunity for the hon. Lady to explain why her constituents are being deterred from voting by the wider use of postal voting, which is the basis of the pilot scheme in her borough. I can assure her that the Government will be looking very closely at the results of those experiments. The pilots and experiments have been set up precisely so that we can consider the lessons to be learned from them and evaluate what happens on those occasions. As Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on e-democracy, I hope to spend polling day in the London borough of Newham, studying the borough's use of the internet to see whether it has facilitated voting and contributed to more people voting than might otherwise have been the case. I very much welcome the innovative way in which it is taking the facility, in advance of polling day, to old folk's homes and hospitals, to enable people there to vote using the internet in a way that they would not have been able to do on polling day.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): May I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 1171?

[That this House congratulates the staff of further education and sixth form colleges on their outstanding service to over four million students; welcomes the increased capital and revenue funding now available to the sector; notes, however, that colleges' core funding remains at 90 per cent. of 1995–96 levels and that the funding gap between schools and sixth form colleges for the same three A-level package remains at £1,000 per pupil; further notes the current recruitment crisis caused by low pay throughout the sector; welcomes the campaign led by the Association of Colleges, NATFHE and NUS, and supported by all the sector's recognised trade unions including UNISON, TGWU, GMB, ATL and ACM, for increased financial support for further education students, an improvement in the core funding allocated to colleges and a recognition of the recruitment crisis caused by growing salary differentials between schools and colleges; and calls on the Government to provide a fair allocation to the further education sector in the forthcoming comprehensive spending review.]

It deals with the funding of the further education sector—an issue that attracted considerable attention at education questions earlier this morning—and focuses on the differentials between funding for colleges and sixth forms in schools. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is unique in the public services to have such a large differential in salaries and per capita funding between two areas doing essentially the same job? Will he find time for an early debate on the subject? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an important issue, which is, I detect, supported by a number of others in the Chamber. He is aware that the Government are committed to trying to ensure not only that there is adequate funding for further and higher education, but that we make progress towards greater equality within that funding. I shall certainly draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to his early-day motion, and I am sure that he will find opportunities to press his concern through one of the many ways open to him in the House.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): The Leader of the House is aware that I have previously raised in this place the plight of cancer sufferers in my constituency, particularly women with breast cancer who face an unprecedented wait for radiotherapy following surgery. The most recent case is that of a lady in Battle. She was operated on after Christmas, but has been told that she must wait until June to begin radiotherapy treatment.

Unfortunately, that is by no means an isolated case. This morning, I met the president of the Royal College of Radiotherapists, who told me that, despite the crisis prevailing right across the country,

"there is no long term plan for the provision of radiotherapy treatment which clearly anticipates the level of radiographers and radiotherapy equipment, relative to forecast demand."

May we have a debate that clearly addresses the issue, so that the Government have an opportunity to reply and tackle the crisis head on?

Mr. Cook: My impression is that the House has not been short of opportunities to explore health issues and health provision, and I am sure that that will continue to be the case. The hon. Gentleman raises a precise issue, but I plainly cannot comment on his constituent's case. However, I am happy to communicate the particulars to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and to secure a reply.

On the general issue, I remind the House that the Government have increased cancer treatment funding and the number of cancer specialists. We shall continue to do so, and the results that we are securing show increased cancer survival rates. We want to build on that. That does not mean that every single case has improved, but it does mean that we must ensure that support services such as radiography are properly funded and properly developed. I would not want the hon. Gentleman's one case to obscure the general picture, which is more investment and more results for the cancer service.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Although I had wanted to thank Mr. Speaker while he was in the Chair for providing lunch for my daughter as part of "bring your daughter to work" day, I am pleased that he has gone to meet the girls. Perhaps, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will convey my thanks to Mr. Speaker for hosting that event.

Young people will benefit eventually from the knowledge-based economy, which is at the heart of the Government's programme, but does the Leader of

[Mr. Tony McWalter]

the House share my distress at today's Science and Technology Committee report, which points out that research and development in many science subjects will fall substantially next year because of the research assessment exercise? Will he bring the Minister responsible for science to the House soon for a long-overdue debate on science policy, so that we can redress deficiencies such as the 22 per cent. decrease in nursing research over the next year?

Mr. Cook: I very much hope that my hon. Friend's daughter does not fall into the error of thinking that going to work means being taken to lunch. That may result in sad disappointment in later life.

My hon. Friend raises a question relating to the Select Committee. I heard the Chairman on the radio this morning, and he made some interesting points. We shall, of course, reply to the Select Committee in the usual way and I am sure that the Science Minister will be crafting a robust response. I can only say to my hon. Friend that it is important that we get the balance right between the research output of our higher education centres and their commitment to ensuring that they give proper attention and proper energy to the education of the next generation of students.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the strategic, environmental and commercial issues surrounding the proposal to site a new airport in the Thames estuary, which is particularly important to my constituents? Although such an airport would impact on a number of communities, it would impact particularly on 40,000 of my constituents who live on Canvey island. They would be delighted if we debated the proposal's impact on the environment and local infrastructure networks, as that would ensure that their interests are covered.

Mr. Cook: I understand that there is not such a proposal, but the issue is under consideration. I cannot believe that we would make any strategic decision about aviation or airports in the south-east or elsewhere without full discussion and exploration by the House. Any decision must be a balance between the need of the nation to ensure that we have proper aviation facilities and services, and the important environmental and social considerations to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The Leader of the House will recall that last week I raised the question of the £32 million contract for smallpox vaccine awarded to PowderJect and the large donation to the Labour party by Paul Drayson, its chief executive officer. We have now heard that PowderJect will subcontract that work to a Danish company, Bavarian Nordic. PowderJect is only acting as the middleman, so the Government could have gone straight to that Danish company and saved the taxpayer a lot of money. Can we have a debate, so that the Government can answer the allegation that they are for sale to the highest bidder? When the right hon. Gentleman replies, will he not go on about the Tories, because people are not interested in what the last Tory Government did in the previous century?

Hon. Members: The hon. Gentleman is right about that.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friends have stolen my punchline. I fully concur with the hon. Gentleman that the public are not interested in the Conservative party.

I remind the hon. Gentleman of what I said to him last week. PowderJect submitted the best, most cost-effective and most attractive of five tenders. It has long been the practice in the public sector that the company that secures the offer of work can then consider the best way to provide it. It may be that on this occasion, as on others, it has involved other companies and other plants in the production. The Danish company to which he referred did not get the contract because, as far as I am aware, it did not bid for it.

International Development

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

1.27 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): I welcome a debate that gives us a chance to review progress on international development and the United Kingdom's contribution to it. Since 1997, we have increased the time that the House of Commons spends discussing international development issues, both in Question Time and in the very effective Select Committee on International Development. I am keen to have annual debates, so that each year we can consider how the world is doing, what contribution we are making and where things are improving. We are moving towards that. There is definitely a growing interest in international development among hon. Members from all parties, and that is important and welcome.

No one can but argue that the issue of international development and poverty and inequality in the world is the biggest moral issue facing humanity, given that Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries have enormous wealth and opportunity for education and health care. We can always call for improvement, but compared with the lives of our great grandparents, we live in enormous comfort and people are able to fulfil their ambitions, exercise their freedom and develop their talents.

One in five of all human beings who share this planet with us—1.2 billion people—still live in abject poverty. They have purchasing power equivalent to less than $1 a day, and that is not a measure of what a dollar would buy in a poor country, but in the United States of America. It is a minute amount of money. Half of humanity live on less than $2 day.

We are living in an era of rapidly increasing global integration. People see more of one another than ever before because of the quality of communications that are now available. World population is urbanising rapidly. For the first time in human history more than half of humanity live in urban areas, and the projections are that over the next 15 years it will reach 65 per cent. Teeming slums of masses of poor people see television pictures of how the rest of us live. That is a recipe for conflict and tension. It should shame the rest of the world, given our knowledge, capital and capacity to promote development.

I have no doubt that this is the biggest moral issue that we face, but it is also enormously important for the future safety and sustainability of the planet. Such levels of poverty are often linked to failed and imploding states, the spread of conflict, and the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, which is spreading across the world, multi-drug resistant tuberculosis, and much more pernicious and dangerous forms of malaria. Indeed, the area of the world in which malaria is endemic is increasing. There are also the pressures associated with refugee movements and people leaving their homelands. There are more refugees in the world than at any point in history, and most of them are hosted by poor countries. Moreover, great strains are being placed on the environment, such as growing desertification and over-fishing.

As I have said, this is the biggest moral issue that we face, but if we do not make quicker progress, the prospect of bitter divisions, more conflict, more instability, more environmental degradation and the spread of disease will threaten future generations, wherever they live. In Afghanistan, we witnessed the consequences of a failed state and the ability of pernicious movements to hide themselves there, endangering and threatening the future of the world, as well as the people of Afghanistan.

If we are not careful in doing better by Africa, we will have virtually a failed continent on our hands. That would cause enormous suffering to the people of Africa, but it would also endanger the future safety and security of Europe. Africa is our near abroad; the distance from the south of Spain to the north of Africa is less than 20 miles. If Africa remains in its current condition, the human suffering will be appalling, and the future of our two continents will also be put in great danger.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I pay tribute to the work that the Secretary of State's Department is doing. On broken states, she will doubtless be aware that there are more than 700,000 registered refugees and displaced persons in Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro. What can we do within our own continent to try to ameliorate that situation?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is right, and programmes are in place in all former communist countries to help them make the transition to a democratic market economy. Of course, such countries have to adjust their systems of government. We are trying to bring stability to the Balkans by helping the countries concerned to build up their systems of government, so that they can grow their economies, care better for their people, and get refugees resettled. We are committed to all those tasks, and we are working as effectively as we can to achieve that objective.

The question arises of the suffering of those who originate from Serbia and Montenegro, but the pressure of refugee movements from eastern Europe to western Europe has played into the hands of those who have tried to incite far right, racist politics in western Europe by putting the blame on the many refugees who have settled there. Doing what is right and doing what is in our self-interest are not in conflict they are entirely complementary.

On present trends, Africa is getting poorer, and much greater efforts must be made to help—a point to which I shall return shortly. In the past five years, we have worked hard to improve the effectiveness of the international development system, which is full of conferences and grand declarations. If even a minor proportion of the declarations made and agreements reached at various conferences had been implemented, the world would be in better shape. We have tried to hone the international system, so that its objectives can be focused on much more clearly, and to secure collaboration with the World Bank, regional development banks and the UN system. That is preferable to the funding by various organisations of lots of separate initiatives and projects, which uses up much of the administrative capacity of the organisations themselves, and of the Governments whom they seek to support.

We have made considerable progress. Our first White Paper made it a target to get the international system agreed so that we could all work together to implement

[Clare Short]

the international development targets. At the millennium assembly—which was attended by more Prime Ministers and heads of state than had ever before assembled for a single event—the world agreed to seek to secure the millennium development targets, as the international development targets were renamed.

One of those targets is to halve, by 2015, the number of people in the world measured as living in extreme poverty in 1990. Meeting that target means that 1 billion people will have to make the journey out of extreme poverty. Other targets include getting all the children in the world into quality primary education, and reducing infant, child and maternal mortality. The latter requires improved health care systems and that people have access to clean water and better nourishment.

Last weekend, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I attended the spring meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. We have ensured that both organisations are focused on seeking to deliver those targets in countries around the world. They are also focused on measuring the reform programmes that they recommend to developing countries against progress towards the targets that have been set. Where once there were mixed messages and differing objectives, the measure of economic reform is now the systematic reduction of poverty and the provision of better services for people.

That is a very important consensus, and it is a new departure for the world. Historically, there have been lots of clashes between the World Bank and the UN system. Nowadays, there is much more collaboration and effective working together.

At Doha, we achieved agreement on the very important proposal that there should be a new round of trade negotiations to deliver better trading opportunities to developing countries. If we can deliver on that agenda, the result will be much fairer world trading rules.

Fairer trading rules will give developing countries a much better chance to grow their economies. Of Africa's total exports, 70 per cent. consists of unprocessed commodities. The payment that countries receive for such commodities is very low. Most of the added value for commodities such as cashew nuts, tea, coffee and chocolate is added on in Europe. As soon as African countries start to try to process some of those commodities they hit all sorts of tariff walls and escalations. On chocolate, for example, those tariffs and charges add up to 100 per cent. of the original cost.

The present trade rules almost amount to a conspiracy to keep Africa underdeveloped. Better trading opportunities will give African countries a better chance to grow their economies and create jobs. At Doha, we agreed a framework to deliver those better opportunities, but the task of ensuring that they are delivered will be considerable, and will require much attention.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I wholeheartedly agree with what the Secretary of State is saying, but how does she intend to get developing countries better represented in the World Trade Organisation? Time and time again, those countries are failed by their lack of representation, and their lack of capacity and expertise in these matters.

Clare Short: The hon. Lady is right. We need improvements, but some of the criticism of the WTO at the time of Seattle was terribly misinformed. The WTO was born out of the most recent Uruguay round of trade negotiations. With its inception, the world moved forward to adopting a trade system based on rules and membership. Before that happened, the big trading blocs negotiated with each other in such trade negotiations, and the developing countries tended not to have a strong voice. Although it was of course right to bring down the protectionist barriers erected in the 1930s, the result was that developing countries were squeezed out of the negotiations.

Since the WTO was established, more than 140 countries—including China—have decided to join. Developing countries, therefore, make up the majority of the WTO's membership. That creates the possibility of them getting together and negotiating as a group, and thereby getting more fairness into international trade rules. That is how we got to Doha, but the problem remains that some of the poorest countries do not even have an ambassador in Geneva. We and other countries are working with the Swiss to set up a secretariat for those countries—an organisation with pooled resources that will enable them to be properly represented.

In addition, the UK has taken a leading role in the establishment of what might be considered a type of law centre, giving developing countries access to advice from trade lawyers. Such lawyers tend to be enormously expensive, but we now have a joint facility giving the poorest countries proper legal advice, and that helps them to exercise their rights under WTO rules.

My Department also has a considerable programme of working with UNCTAD—the UN conference on trade and development—and others to strengthen developing countries' negotiating and trade analysis capacity so that they are more able to be clear about their self-interest and negotiate their self-interest in all trade negotiations. Trade has become enormously complex, yet it is crucial for the chance to grow economies. So we are making a lot of progress in that field.

I was very impressed in Doha by the performance of the developing countries. The countries of Africa moved together. As Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean have shared as well as different interests, they need to pool their interests and negotiate together to secure more from the OECD economies. That will involve us in reforming the common agricultural policy, which we would welcome, but is also important in the interests of developing countries.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I wonder whether capacity is also relevant to debt relief. The early-day motion with the most signatures calls for more and faster debt relief. Is it the case that some of the poorest countries do not have the capacity to argue their side, which may be holding them back from getting more debt relief? I am thinking particularly of commodity prices—the analysis has not been strong enough to get the message through so far.

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When the debt relief process started, many countries did not

even know what they owed. There were bundles of bills in their central banks and a lot of work had to be done to tidy up and build the capacity for countries to manage their debt. We are engaged in work to build up countries' debt management capacity. It is quite right that countries should borrow responsibly and take out loans, but they need to manage their debt and ensure that they can afford to repay it.

I think that 26 countries have now qualified for heavily indebted poor countries status. Sierra Leone has just qualified, which is very good news. It is about to have elections and there are police across the country, which is a welcome development. However, there is a problem with the HIPC initiative. It had a formula for how much debt a country could afford in relation to earnings from its exports. Because commodity prices have dropped considerably and oil prices have gone up, many countries such as Uganda, which had already exited, are no longer sustainable under the formula. That was a matter of discussion at the World Bank meeting at the weekend. We will have to find extra resources for many countries to achieve sustainability. That is another argument for opening trade access. If countries are dependent on the export of a few commodities and prices fall, their economic development is called into question. All the countries that have been through the HIPC process have been helped to manage their debt for the future so that they do not get into these difficulties again.

The other very important meeting that took place a short time ago was the UN conference at Monterrey on financing for development. There was remarkable consensus between OECD and developing countries about the best kind of reform in which to grow economies to reduce poverty. It really is an extraordinary change since the days of the cold war. In the past, developing and developed countries would have found contentious, ideas such as encouraging the public sector to grow, having effective governance, regulating an economy responsibly and having better public services that are universal, but today there is agreement on the reform agenda across the world. That was one of the things accomplished at Monterrey. Again, there was a focus on implementing measures, not on arguing about what constitutes a desirable reform agenda.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I totally agree with the right hon. Lady's analysis of the need to help Africa develop so that it is capable of producing more than just the most basic staple commodities. We need to reduce institutional and trade barriers for that to happen. We have our own part to play with the Commonwealth Development Corporation. Is the right hon. Lady happy though that, in the past two years for which figures are available, the number of investments that the CDC made in sub-Saharan Africa almost halved from 41 to 26?

Clare Short: I am happy with the way that the CDC is being reformed. Some of the criticism is grossly misinformed. Our proposals, which the House supported, were to reform the CDC so that rather than being a public sector investment institution, looking for low rates of return and with a limited investment fund, its expertise on investment in developing countries could be used so that it became more of a conduit for private sector investment in those poorer countries—places where the markets do not attract much investment at all. That meant selling on some of the businesses that it owned to local or other ownership so that they could continue to function, and trying to increase the rates of return to encourage the private sector to move into those countries.

Last year was especially difficult for the world economy. Most investment houses have reduced their estimate of the value of their investments because of the state of the world economy. That has affected the CDC, too.

We are engaging in a difficult reform. It is being watched by other public sector development investment institutions across the world. If we succeed, the institution will be enormously important. Inward investment will provide the means to achieve technology transfer, access to clean water, sanitation, electricity, modern communications and so on. The amount of such investment going to the poorest countries is still extremely small.

We should try to find another opportunity to discuss at greater length the progress of the CDC reform. The hon. Gentleman correctly expressed the concern of the House that we get that right, but I completely reject the criticisms, for example, those in the article in *The Times*, which were malicious and ill informed.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I share the Secretary of State's concerns, and welcome the definite co-ordination that is under way.

The issue relates not only to inward investment but to what countries can do for themselves. Does the right hon. Lady welcome the fact that the President of South Africa has at last acknowledged that AIDS and HIV must be tackled for the good of the country? On a negative point, does she share my concern about the latest threat in Zimbabwe? White farmers have been dealt with and action is now being taken against Indian traders. Surely, that will further impoverish the country.

Clare Short: I agree that the changes in South Africa—offering treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS and offering tests and anti-retroviral treatment to women who may have been infected after sexual assault or rape—are both right in themselves and will heal a bitter row that probably distracted the country from getting on with the task of preventing the spread of the infection.

HIV/AIDS is yet another burden for Africa. It has also spread considerably in India, and Russia has the fastest growth rate in the world, so it is wrong for people to think that the disease is a problem only in Africa, although it is more advanced there.

The good news is the achievement in Uganda, where rates of infection are down to 6 per cent. from the high 20s. There is a massive reduction in the rate of infection among young people. That shows what can be done and what needs to be done throughout the whole continent.

I agree that Zimbabwe is a complete tragedy. The economy is collapsing; there is negative growth, and hunger and poverty are increasing. The elections were flawed. The country should be an engine of growth in Africa. It has a highly educated population, good land and other resources, but the economy is being wrecked and the people are suffering terribly. We must hope for, and work towards, an end to its misgovernment so that the people of Zimbabwe have the chance for a better future.

[Clare Short]

I was describing the achievements of the past year and focusing on the world's efforts. At Monterrey, more official development assistance—aid—was committed by both the United States and the European Union after years of declining aid spend. That was a turnaround in the world's commitment to development and is a step towards the achievement of the millennium development goals.

The EU made a commitment that, by 2006, we would reach an average of 0.39 per cent. of gross domestic product. That means an extra $7 billion every year thereafter. The US made a commitment to an increase of $5 billion from the same date.

So that is good news. It is still not as much as the amounts that the reports commissioned by the World Bank and from former President Zedillo of Mexico said will be needed from the world in aid resources to reach the millennium development goals—that is, roughly double the assistance that is already given through the international system. However, the meeting reversed the decline that has taken place for many years in the international system, and that helped to make it an important success.

Dr. Tonge: I am becoming a little confused by the number of declarations, conferences and pledges on development that are going on around the world, so will the Secretary of State clarify a couple of points?

First, what is the relationship between the fund recently set up at Monterrey and the global health fund? I presume that they are completely separate, but is there any cross-over? Secondly, has the money merely been pledged or is it in a bank somewhere gaining interest that can be dished out to the countries that need it? I sometimes worry that such pledges remain just pledges, and may seem grandiose but do not really amount to much.

Clare Short: A fund was not set up at Monterrey—rather, the United States and the European Union committed themselves to grow their spending on aid. It was a commitment on future spending, so the money is not in the bank. The US has suggested that its $5 billion might go into a new fund that is run in a different way to USAID. The EU's pledge is to increase our spending through existing channels, not through establishing a new fund. So no, there is no money in the bank. There is a pledge and a commitment, and it will be our duty and that of others to ensure that the EU keeps to it. It would be a betrayal of the developing world to sign up to a radical reform agenda, and then to fail to keep our part of the promise.

The global health fund arose from the G7 meeting and from commitments made by Kofi Annan. There has been some confusion about whether it is only for HIV/AIDS—it is not—and whether it is the only instrument for getting more spending into the care of those with HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB, three illness that cause enormous ill health and suffering, and thereby economic loss, in developing countries. We in the UK have always seen the global health fund as a fund to provide drugs and commodities through which, by pooling resources internationally, we can achieve greater reliability of supply and lower prices, and then encourage developing countries to improve their delivery systems. As a country, we have pledged $200 million to the fund. We are already spending £1 billion on strengthening countries' health systems.

That is what the fund is for. Because Kofi Annan made a speech saying that we need an extra $10 billion a year to combat HIV/AIDS—he meant all forms of spending, including Government spending—everyone sees the global health fund as a failure, which it is not. It is in the final stages of appointing its chief executive, or whatever title the person is to have, and it has received a series of applications from developing countries on which it is about to make decisions.

The final UN international conference that is required to complete the architecture is the forthcoming world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg, Rio plus 10. We have discussed that in the Select Committee. I hope that the prize that we will get from that conference is an overcoming of the division between the environmental lobby of the north, which tends to be cautious about promoting development because it believes that the world is under strain and cannot afford any more economic growth, and the view from the south that such an environmental agenda locks them out of development. I very much hope that we will get a real commitment to sustainable development at Johannesburg. We need to guarantee development for the poor, but in the context of a sustainable planet, and to bring the development and environmental lobbies together properly to promote sustainability, rather than a "do not disturb, do not develop" approach. If we can achieve that, we will have global agreement on how to drive the world forward.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The Secretary of State took part in an interesting sitting of the Select Committee on Environmental Audit on just this point. At the risk of sounding like a voice for the north, does she agree that it is important in the context of Johannesburg to transfer our technology to developing countries? That offers huge opportunities both for our domestic markets and for developing countries, which could be enabled to bypass some of the environmental degradation that we have undergone through the process of industrialisation. For example, we could take them straight to the future of electricity generation—embedded generation instead of huge grid connections.

Clare Short: Of course I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should transfer not old technology but modern, more environmentally sustainable technology. However, we will not transfer technology on the scale that is needed. Half of humanity has no sanitation, and more than a billion people have no access to clean water, which means that their children constantly get sick because the water has been used for other purposes by other human beings. The need for investment in sanitation, water and energy is massive, and we will get that investment only if we can grow economies so that countries can afford more imports. They would then be able to afford the transfer of technology that occurs through trade and foreign direct investment. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must make sure that any transferred technology is state of the art, rather than old and polluting—that would be a terrible development.

The achievements of the past year which I have just summarised mean that the world now agrees on the agenda and on the best way to engage in reform. We need

now to drive forward implementation and to improve the measurement of our progress in achieving development goals. The World Bank is calling a meeting in June to improve the collection of statistics and measurements across the world system, so that we can learn from the progress that has been made and find out which countries are not making progress.

At the meeting last weekend, the World Bank issued a report on progress towards the development targets. We are on track to achieve the targets to halve poverty, so we are set by 2015 to reduce by a billion the number of people living in abject poverty. That is partly because progress in China has been remarkable for the past 10 years or so. Progress in India and Bangladesh has been considerable, but it could be better, and we must remember that two thirds of the world's poor live in Asia.

We are not, however, on track in Africa—it is getting poorer. The population is growing faster than the economy. Africa is by far the poorest continent, and 50 per cent. of its people live in abject poverty. I repeat: it is getting poorer. Twenty per cent. of the continent's people are living under conditions of conflict. For example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is hardly a state. It is an enormously resource-rich part of the world, as big as western Europe, but it lacks the institutions of a modern state and it is in desperate humanitarian need.

We have to do better in Africa, and we have two opportunities to do so. The first is through NEPAD, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, in which African leaders are coming together to say that they are determined to do better, to end the conflicts, to reform their states and run them better and to provide better services for their people. That gives us an opportunity to respond to Africa's own reform agenda. In the past the agenda has tended to be set in Washington and imposed on reluctant states, so it has been more likely to fail. The importance of NEPAD is that Africa is leading its own drive for development.

There is another major opportunity. We must concentrate on ensuring that Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola all come to peace. According to World Bank estimates, the levels of conflict in Africa are costing 2 per cent. of economic growth to every country on the continent, including those that are not in conflict, simply because of the reputation of Africa, the difficulties of transport systems and so forth. If we can focus on bringing to peace those three massive, resource-rich countries, which straddle the continent and have been engaged in war for two generations, that really would improve Africa's prospects.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): As usual, I do not find that much to disagree with in what the right hon. Lady is saying, which is always slightly depressing for a Conservative Member. Does she agree, however, that NEPAD has resulted in marvellous words with which we all concur, but we need to see some concrete action from its leaders, particularly the President of Nigeria, who presides over an extremely corrupt state and yet has signed up to NEPAD's statement on the importance of good governance and accountability?

Clare Short: I agree very much with the hon. Gentleman. We must have implementation, but it is important that Africa is calling for reform itself rather than being hectored by others. I agree that lack of progress on reform in Nigeria is very worrying. In that oil-rich country, 70 per cent. of the population live in abject poverty, and all its systems are riddled with corruption and ineffectiveness. One in five of all Africans cannot go forward without Nigeria going forward, and progress has been very slow.

Nigeria is now in pre-election time. Some of the reforms in which Governments in developing countries must engage to run their economies better and provide better services to their people threaten vested interests and are difficult to implement. A wave of reform tends not to happen in a pre-election period, so I am worried that there will be still more delay before the reform agenda can be driven forward in Nigeria. Nigeria is in bad shape and we must do all we can to ensure that the reform effort moves forward so that the rich oil resources there are used for the benefit of the people and not just for the benefit of a corrupt elite while the rest go poor.

This is an important time of opportunity. There is more and more agreement across the world about what needs to be done and about the urgency of doing it, and more and more knowledge about what works in development. We now need to progress more sharply and rapidly with implementing what we have agreed. Extra aid is needed, but we need to use the existing aid better. Only half of the $55 billion that is already in the international system is spent in low-income countries. Much of it is used for foreign policy purposes or gestures or to procure trade for the giving country. If it were directed to the poor and put behind reformers, its poverty-reducing effectiveness could be increased by 50 per cent.

We have redirected the whole of the UK effort and untied our aid, but we need to drive that process forward across the world. As the House knows, the EC is a major sinner in this regard and is getting worse. We have worked for a reform agenda that is being put in place and that will improve the performance of the staff and the capacity of the organisation to spend money, but the way in which it is allocated has moved even further away from poor people, which is a disgrace. We are working hard, and we need parliamentarians across Europe to join in exposing this scandal and to establish a determination to do better.

That problem is the result of gesture spending and old alliances. Lots of resources go to Latin America, for example, where most of the countries are middle-income. They are the most unequal countries in the world, however, and they have lots of poor and excluded people. Those countries do not need aid resources; they need to use their own resources better to include all of their people, educate all of their children and provide work and opportunities to all of their people to improve their lives. We must therefore work to redirect the money available to where it would be most effective.

We also need to implement the commitments made at Doha. The European Union is about to negotiate regional trade agreements with all the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries under the Cotonou agreement. We need to keep an eye on that to make sure that the offers are generous and that they improve the trading opportunities of developing countries.

We must do better in terms of dealing with conflict. The Government have two mechanisms—a global conflict prevention pooled arrangement bringing together the

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my Department and the Ministry of Defence, and one for Africa that I chair. The bringing together of those three Departments and their expertise has really improved UK thinking about conflict resolution and conflict prevention. I am trying to focus sharply on bringing the three big conflicts to an end, which would transform the prospects of the continent. I hope that the House will watch that and try to give support. If the kind of international energy and quality of attention that went into the Bonn agreement for Afghanistan were put into the three conflicts in Africa, they could be brought to an end.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Having recently visited Sudan, I agree absolutely with my right hon. Friend on the prospect for peace and the imperative for peace in that country. We commend the efforts that are being made to step up the diplomatic process and influence.

With regard to Angola, which I know my right hon. Friend has visited recently, will she explain further the role that this country could take to try to eliminate some of the desperate circumstances that some of us have seen there, particularly in internally displaced person camps? There seems at last to be an opportunity to get to grips with those appalling circumstances.

Clare Short: Angola has been at war since the early 1960s. It fought the Portuguese for its independence, and the Russians allied with the country, so it declared a one-party state and adopted a Soviet model of development. That led to support from then apartheid South Africa and the United States for UNITA, a rebel movement. A civil war has therefore been going on there ever since independence. Again, although it is a very rich country in terms of natural resources—it has masses of oil, diamonds and other rich resources—it suffers from desperate poverty.

The country has now come to peace, which is a very important opportunity, and it is sincere about wanting that peace to succeed. The UNITA fighters must be disarmed, demobilised and resettled, which is a considerable task. A third of the population of the country has been displaced in the course of the war—4 million people have been removed from their land, and the country is littered with land mines. The resettlement effort will therefore be enormous, but it should be an engine of economic development, given its richness in natural resources.

The UK does not have a big programme in Angola. We do not speak Portuguese and do not understand Portuguese bureaucratic systems—I am not sure how many people do; it is an intensely bureaucratic tradition. I am working to release resources from the Department to help to bring in the best advice on how to demobilise and resettle people, however, and I have offered to enable a team representing the Government and UNITA to come to Sierra Leone to talk to all the people engaged in disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation there, to learn the lessons. I had discussions at the World Bank meeting, and a mission is about to go to Angola to help with DDR.

Angola also has terrible problems of corruption, and the IMF programme there has gone off-track. I had discussions with Hans Kohler about looking again at Angola, as it is no longer a country in conflict but a post-conflict country. That does not mean that we should lower our standards on reform, but the effort is worth while. I shall probably contribute some expertise from the UK, too. Angola should be able to access international expertise to help to move its peace process forward.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): I have a couple of points. We are talking about the Sudan, the Congo and Angola, but there are conflicts in other parts of the developing world. Although they may be at peace at the moment, the fact that they are not oil-rich or diamond-rich means that they tend to get neglected. Not too long ago, Ethiopia and Eritrea were at war. In one battle, something like 80,000 people were killed, but that did not even appear on page 17 of *The Guardian*. It was forgotten about because the countries involved do not have oil, diamonds and so on. Two of the poorest countries—they are both in the UN's bottom six—were wasting huge amounts of resources on fighting each other.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to spend more time and effort on all the countries that are in conflict rather than just on those that are highlighted because of their natural resources? In addition to Sierra Leone, will she consider the success in Mozambique on bringing the former Renamo and Frelimo guerrillas together after the civil war there? That might be a good example for Angola.

Clare Short: I agree that we should bring wars to an end everywhere. I do not agree that the focus on Angola, Sudan and the DRC is coming from people who are interested in investing in those countries. Those countries are in such an appalling state that their natural riches are not being deployed to the benefit of their people. I do not therefore apologise for focusing on the Sudan, the DRC and Angola, as, if they moved to peace, it would transform the prospects of the whole continent.

My hon. Friend is right to say that the Ethiopia-Eritrea war was an absolute tragedy. It was fought out like the first world war with lots of young men thrown at each other and slaughtering each other over a barren piece of territory. There has now been an adjudication on the border, which both sides have accepted. There are no rich resources in that border area, and the war was completely wasteful and caused great loss of life and suffering, and was a setback to economic development.

I am hopeful about Ethiopia. Prime Minister Meles is a remarkable man. He is determined to bring reform to Ethiopia. It is one of the poorest countries, with a gross domestic product of only $100 a head. Some 62 per cent. of its children are chronically malnourished and many of those who do survive are stunted physically and mentally. Even if they get the chance to go to school, they will never be able to develop their natural talents. We desperately need a major reform effort in Ethiopia.

I agree that Mozambique is a great success. It is a very poor country, but has had 10 per cent. economic growth for many years. We need similar levels of growth in other countries in Africa if we are to halve poverty there.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I agree about the importance of focusing attention on those particular conflicts in Africa to get the economies growing again. However, does the right hon. Lady agree that it was

counter-productive to increase substantially this country's arms sales to Africa over the past four to five years? I accept that countries have a right to defend themselves, but increasing arms sales, which are usually paid for by increasing debt, goes against sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty.

Clare Short: I have seen the claim about increased United Kingdom arms sales to Africa made in documents produced by non-governmental organisations. I am afraid that I have not checked the figures, but I think that they are largely explained by South Africa's big arms order. Let me make my position clear: properly procured weapons and equipment for properly and transparently managed armed forces are essential to achieve stability and order in the continent of Africa, so some arms sales are legitimate and right. However, there is much corruption in the arms industry throughout the international system. Indeed, Transparency International published a report on that today. Badly procured arms and wasteful expenditure often lead to bloated armed forces, which sometimes results in coups. That type of procurement is the last thing that countries need in order to develop.

Africa needs better, more disciplined, more transparently managed and properly equipped police forces, courts, judicial systems and armed forces. I am pleased that we have agreed to carry out a defence review with Uganda. People from the Ministry of Defence are in Uganda helping it to look objectively at the security threat that it faces, what equipment it needs and the size of its armed forces. It will be possible for it to manage its expenditure properly through public finances rather than secretly, which is how most defence expenditure is managed at the moment. I agree that the issue is important. We are making progress, but we need to make much more progress on supply and demand.

The world is grossly unequal and in danger, but we have an opportunity to make enormous progress. We have great clarity about what we need to do. All sorts of lessons have been provided to promote effective development and some countries are doing very well. Those examples need to be widened. If we also do better at resolving conflict, we could have a period in which countries make enormous advances. It is within the grasp of our generation to remove abject poverty from the human condition, which was only a dream for previous generations. That is an achievable objective, but it is not inevitable that we will be successful. If we are not, the world will become more unstable and more dangerous for us all, and no privileged country will be able to buy its way out of the trouble that will otherwise spread across the world.

2.13 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): People are so weary of politicians carping about each other that I want to begin by congratulating the Government on holding this debate on the occasion of the publication of their annual report on international development. We asked for that during the passage of the International Development Act 2002, and although the amendment was rejected, we are delighted that it has been accepted in spirit. I think this is the first time that the publication of the annual report has given rise to an annual debate. All of us with a deep interest in international development appreciate the opportunity that that offers us.

I also thank the Secretary of State for letting me have a copy of the annual report at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon. That certainly made a difference to my ability to prepare. However, speed-reading a document of about 136 pages is not the best way to achieve close scrutiny, so inevitably my remarks are based on a mixture of what I read in the document and what I have seen of the Government's work in practice.

On the positive side, last year we saw improved responses to international crises in Goma, Gujarat and Afghanistan. There is no doubt that the Department's emergency relief model is becoming more refined. We applaud the Department for that, and it is right to place that on the record. We also gave a warm welcome to the Home Secretary's decision to incorporate the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development convention on bribery and corruption into emergency legislation following the events of 11 September. We pressed for that to be part of the International Development Bill, and thank the Home Secretary for giving credit to the Conservative party for pressing for its inclusion.

There are many positive aspects to developments, but there are also some serious concerns. In the report, there is a deafening silence on the Commonwealth Development Corporation. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) for raising that in an intervention, and also my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), who secured an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall on that very subject.

The Commonwealth Development Corporation was a model of its kind. It was established in 1948 specifically to encourage, through investment, small, mostly agricultural enterprises in the third world. What made it different was that there was never an expectation of a return on the investment of more than about 8 per cent. It was something good, something that worked, something that did not cost a lot of money, something that was constructive and something that had dignity.

So what happened? The Government abandoned the guiding principle of the concept to replace the scheme with a planned public-private partnership. Investment will move away from small businesses with low profits to be invested instead in more high-tech high-yielding enterprises with greater profits. As likely as not, those will be companies that could attract investment without any help from us. What madness!

After we debated that issue recently in Westminster Hall, I received a letter from a former employee of the CDC. Without wishing to exaggerate in any way the investment success of the CDC, he says:

"it has delivered numerous examples of sustainable agricultural businesses throughout Africa, which employ large numbers of rural Africans . . . CDC's withdrawal from this sector has resulted in large-scale redundancy programmes, declines in standards of management and business ethics, and an apparent investment void."

He cites the example of a CDC-supported teak company that made 80 per cent. of its work force redundant in one of the poorest regions of the country before re-employing many of them on a casual basis and without the benefits that went with the CDC's terms of employment. He asks the question, and I echo it: is this development?

Clare Short: I find it extraordinary that the Conservative party has adopted a posture of supporting

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sub-optimal public sector-led investment that gets a rate of return to which the private sector would never respond. If the hon. Lady is saying that Africa and other regions in which the CDC operates can get investment only at that level, she is suggesting that the private sector will never invest in those countries and they will be marginalised from the globalising economy for ever. *[Interruption.]* I am not missing the point. If the CDC goes for a lower rate of return than the market would accept because it is not possible to make better investments in such countries, those countries will be marginalised for ever.

We have not wrecked anything. I suggest that the hon. Lady looks at the CDC's annual report, published a short time ago. Perhaps the Select Committee will decide to reconsider the issue. We obviously need to ensure that we get things right, but the hon. Lady seems to be making a Communist argument.

Mrs. Spelman: It is not just the Conservative party that is raising serious concerns about the CDC. If the right hon. Lady consults the Under-Secretary of State for International Development, who responded to the Adjournment debate, she will discover that not one Labour Member spoke in defence of the Government's actions. Indeed, the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) crossed the Floor to speak with the Opposition. The lack of support for the Government from any part of the House on that occasion should at the very least be cause for concern.

Hugh Bayley (City of York) *rose—*

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Mrs. Spelman: I will give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle and secondly to the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley).

Mr. Barker: Does my hon. Friend accept that it may be right, as the Secretary of State says, to modernise the CDC, but that the right hon. Lady does not appreciate the huge leap implicit in going from a rate of return of 8 per cent. to one of 25 per cent? That cannot glibly be regarded as modernisation. It is a massive step change to get a return on equity of 25 per cent. Surely a much better model for Africa would be in the form of the old 3i corporation, which was seen as seed-corn development, pump priming where other equity will follow, with returns on capital of perhaps 15 to 18 per cent. either as equity or mezzanine debt. I speak as someone with venture capital experience, and I do not think that the Secretary of State grasps the nature of a 25 per cent. return on capital.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. It shows the benefit of having the opportunity to debate what can be done to improve the present situation. My hon. Friend's expertise in venture capital was valuable when we debated these matters in an Adjournment debate.

The great difficulty is that the sort of returns that it is now the strategy of the CDC to secure are extremely difficult to achieve from agriculture. Agriculture is the bedrock of civil society in many developing countries. The loss of investment through the CDC in agriculture is extremely serious for many developing nations.

Hugh Bayley: I shall defend the Government's policy on the CDC. For the hon. Lady's argument—that it is a bad thing that the CDC is beginning to move away from its agricultural investments—to be convincing she would need to make the case that the CDC is a better source of finance for agricultural development than the Department for International Development.

The Department is increasing its investment in agricultural projects. As the hon. Lady has said, that is because they would not necessarily generate a commercial rate of return. Surely it is right to get each part of the development operation addressing the problems that it is best attuned to addressing.

Mrs. Spelman: The hon. Gentleman makes a revealing point about what may be at the back of the Government's mind in connection with the CDC's change of strategy. During the passage of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 1999, the former Member for Hertford and Stortford, Mr. Bowen Wells, made exactly the point that the root cause of one of the problems was innate competition between what the CDC could do and the work of the Department. At the time, that was strenuously denied by the Government spokesman. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has brought out an underlying truth that needs to be addressed. There is still a fundamental problem, as many United Kingdom farmers know too well, which is that with a low rate of return in agriculture, it is difficult to secure the necessary investment for the essential modernisation of agriculture. Our deep concern is that opportunities are moving away.

Clare Short: I would welcome a debate. I hope that the usual channels are listening

Mrs. Spelman: I have had a hint from the Secretary of State that she might be prepared to allow another debate on the CDC in Government time. There may be an important reason for doing that. Is it not better, when something is going wrong, that we admit that honestly together and try collectively to work out how to put things right? Perhaps all hon. Members whose hearts are in this matter could contribute to a subsequent debate.

Clare Short: For the sake of clarity, I must point out that I do not have the power to allocate time. I would welcome the chance to debate the CDC; we need more informed debate. Some of the allegations are misinformed, but I am sure that they are well meant. We should find a way, either through the Select Committee, on the Floor of the House or elsewhere, to pursue the issues properly. I give that undertaking—but unfortunately, I cannot allocate time.

Mrs. Spelman: I am well aware that the usual channels have major control of how parliamentary time is allocated. However, the right hon. Lady has made a welcome suggestion. I am sure that, with the presence of the Chairman of the International Development Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), a number of us can bring pressure to bear.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): It may be for the convenience of the House to know that the Select Committee has a

firm date in the diary to take evidence from the chairman and senior members of the CDC. I hope that that will enable the Committee to ask the sort of questions that the House would like it to ask.

Mrs. Spelman: I hope that the usual channels are listening to the calls on both sides of the Chamber for the opportunity to be given to us.

Dr. Tonge: My intervention has already been answered. I heartily concur with what the hon. Lady is saying. I know that many Members have reservations, as I did when the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 1999 was passing through the House, and as did the previous Member for Hertford and Stortford, Mr. Bowen Wells. The Chairman of the International Development Select Committee has said that he will take the matter on board and have a thorough investigation. I am sure that the Secretary of State would welcome that, too.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank the hon. Lady for her support in our endeavours to secure an opportunity to rework things together. We shall all contribute to try to make that possible.

Without turning these proceedings into a mini-debate on the CDC, I wish to defend the individual who sought to give me his perspective of what is really happening in the organisation for which he worked for most of his professional life. The letter from the former employee was thoughtful, and should not be too quickly dismissed as having no relevance to this discussion about where the CDC is heading.

The ex-employee pointed out in a measured way that

"at least the old CDC made small investment returns and operated with the best intentions. Its former staff knew how to plant tea and coffee. Until 1999 CDC made only one loss in its fifty year history: the combined losses in 1999, 2000 and 2001 are likely to exceed £150 million."

He asks, and I join him in asking, whether it

"is too late for the DFID to consider taking over CDC's existing agricultural businesses and managing them on a trusteeship basis?"

That is a constructive suggestion, to which the Government might like to give time. Together, we need to see what can be done to retrieve the situation.

An issue that is significantly underplayed in the report, but to which the Secretary of State rightly gave great attention, is the question of our overseas aid given through the European Union. There is a fairly bald statement on page 83 of the report that the

"share of EC official development assistance going to low income countries fell from 52% to 38%".

That is in direct opposition to our national aim of helping the poorest. As the Secretary of State said, this situation cannot be allowed to continue.

There is not much in the report about how to improve on such a disastrous situation. By coincidence, this week the Select Committee published the results of its inquiry into EU overseas aid, which amount to a discerning critique of the failures. It is worth highlighting a few points from the report, and I am sure that members of the Committee will raise these matters today.

For example, the aid budget is vulnerable to being raided for political purposes. There is a weakness, compared with our capacity, in focusing on where aid is given. There is a lack of transparency as to which funds are intended for poverty reduction. There is too much of a focus on middle-income countries at the expense of developing countries. It seems that wherever we go in the world, no one has a good word to say for the EU assistance development programme.

While I was in India, the European Commission representative in Delhi came up with one constructive idea for tackling the lamentable delays and inefficiencies of the EU aid programme. He suggested that a member state such as ours might contribute manpower and expertise at grass-roots level to oversee the programmes in which we have a share.

There is an oblique reference to that idea on page 30 of the annual report, in the context of delegating more responsibility to the EU's overseas offices. However, those offices have few staff. Perhaps by that means we could help to avoid duplication. Fundamentally, we must face up to the criticisms that abound about EU overseas aid, and together work out how it could be made more effective.

If the EU aid budget is a thorn in the side of the Secretary of State, Tanzania must be another. I could find nothing in the annual report about the notorious BAE Systems deal. We know that it was a test case to find out whether the good intentions of getting debt-relieved nations to spend money on health and education would work, and it failed. The Secretary of State might have had more chance of opposing the deal if she had found out about it earlier. BAE Systems applied for a licence in 1997, but as the Secretary of State told me in a written answer, she was not informed until October 2000. A constructive suggestion would be to improve that process in Government.

The Secretary of State will be aware of the sustainable development amendment to the Export Control Bill, which was recently approved in another place. It was supported by Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and bishops, and might give the Department for International Development a greater say in such matters. I call on the right hon. Lady to have the courage of her convictions and tell the House that she will support the sustainable development amendment.

As I read the report, my big concern is whether our aid programme is really effective. We cannot be complacent or rest on our laurels. To her credit, the tone in which the Secretary of State presented her review of international development showed no complacency. I welcome that.

There is much rhetoric about helping the world's poorest, but the truth is that much aid is determined by political motives. The vast majority of European development aid goes to central European countries hoping to accede to the EU. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) rightly drew attention to the genuine plight of a nation in central Europe, I feel deeply uneasy about the fact that more European development assistance goes to Poland than to Asia, Africa and Latin America put together.

The largest recipient of British overseas aid is India, from which I have just returned. We are about to treble the amount that we give from £110 million to £300 million. India is a country of terrible poverty, with a third of the world's poor living there. Imagine my surprise when I opened *The Times of India* to read an

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editorial with the headline "Who needs foreign aid anyway?"—a startling point of view from a major recipient country.

The editor points out that incoming aid just about cancels out the interest on loan repayments, and all the while India is undergoing phenomenal growth through foreign inward investment, especially in computer services. I need to be clear: I am not saying that India should not receive aid, but the way in which it is given is crucial. If the Indians themselves challenge the way in which we do that, perhaps we should stop and listen. There should be seed-corn capital for investment, grants for projects and assistance to kick-start local initiatives, but not dependency-creating loans. There is a crying need for internal reform in India, and our expertise in good governance is almost as important as money.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): The hon. Lady refers to an editorial in *The Times of India* suggesting that we should withdraw aid from India. Is that her position?

Mrs. Spelman: I thought that I had made it clear that I am not in favour of ceasing to provide aid to India. The question is how it is given. In fairness to the Government, there has been considerable refocusing of the way in which the Department for International Development is working in India. I met DFID's head while I was in Delhi. We are now focused on four of the approximately 30 Indian states. My concern after visiting that country is that although there is no doubt that we can achieve greater effectiveness through backing politically reforming states such as Andhra Pradesh, where there is a state Government with a zeal to modernise agriculture, one of the consequences is that the poorer states, such as Bihar, will fall further and further behind.

Tony Worthington: The hon. Lady raises these questions, but she is a politician. She is supposed to be putting forward policies. What is her policy on India?

Mrs. Spelman: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, it is for the Government to propose and implement their policy, and it is the role of the Opposition to ask questions. This is the one debate a year in which we get the chance to ask a series of questions.

As the Secretary of State said, there is no room for complacency. One glance at the graphs in the annual report showing progress towards millennium development goals reveals an appalling picture for sub-Saharan Africa. All the performance indicators are right off target. In addition, it is almost impossible to factor into such an assessment the terrible question of how HIV and AIDS will affect those poor regions of the world. My experience of visiting India teaches me that the full scale of that epidemic is about to strike another region.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall) *rose—*

Mrs. Spelman: I shall move on now, if I may, to discuss trade.

I was taken to India by Oxfam, as part of its fair trade fortnight campaign, to see one of those fair trade projects outside Vellore. The women involved in the project are earning only 70p a day from palm weaving, but with their profits they have already managed to provide sanitary facilities in their village. That is an example of how development policy can be made even more effective.

Our strategy in India, as I said, has been to back the reforming states, but an important question is: what makes a good donor and what makes a good recipient? The relationship between donor and recipient entails responsibilities on both sides. In India we have succeeded in finding good recipients, and I hope that we have demonstrated the skills of a good donor—but enabling the very poorest states to become good recipients is the fundamental challenge for us. The irony of our strategy is that it will leave poorer states lagging behind.

That problem is writ large in sub-Saharan Africa, where the combination of political chaos, conflict and corruption holds us back from helping the most needy. We must develop a model of development assistance for failing states that may go on to become rogue states. As 11 September taught us, we cannot afford to neglect them.

Hugh Bayley: I am pleased to hear the hon. Lady speaking of the need to define a good recipient of aid. We must ask what kind of Government or regime allows aid to be used cost-effectively to implement the millennium development goals. The reason for raising that question, and the reason why I raised it in the International Development Committee earlier this week, is that if we make a distinction between good and poor recipients of aid, we need different policies for our aid relationship with each type. How would the hon. Lady use different policies for good recipients and poorer recipients?

Mrs. Spelman: Again, we are not at the stage of the parliamentary cycle when we have formulated our full plans for the future of international development—*[Interruption.]* None the less, as the hon. Member for City of York says, we are thinking about it.

In the short term, one of the things that I want to impress on the aid agencies that work in many of those failing states is that it is perfectly reasonable for the donor to expect the recipient to take responsibility, as well as the assistance that is given. The writing of a blank cheque without an emphasis on such responsibility is unlikely to be as effective in the long run as if the recipient state could be incentivised to move closer and closer to good governance.

That is my line of thinking, without yet giving specific policies that would bring that about.

At times, we are worse than unhelpful to the developing world. That is shown most clearly by our policy on trade. For decades now, we have been talking about reforming the common agricultural policy, but, with some minor changes, it continues to deprive developing countries of access to our markets. It is even failing to provide a reasonable income for our own farmers. Of course we accept that they need to make a fair living, but the subsidies that we pay to dump agricultural surpluses in world markets are, frankly, iniquitous.

It may surprise the House to know that India is the largest producer of milk and the second lowest cost producer after New Zealand. India aspires to a new regional market in the middle east, but EU subsidies price it out of that market. In 2000, America's subsidies to its farmers were six times the amount that it spent on

overseas development aid. The EU spends nine times more on agricultural support and export subsidies than it does on aid. That is entirely inconsistent with the political rhetoric following the events of 11 September.

We understand the need to address inequalities, and the head of the International Monetary Fund, Horst Kohler, seems to agree. He said in a television interview:

"The big issue is subsidies for agriculture . . . we need leadership to tackle these subsidies and then we will create a better world."

Britain should provide that leadership for change and advocate the fair trade model.

Mr. Robathan: May I say how much I agree with my hon. Friend? As someone who has a farm, I have a personal interest. I agree with her about the pernicious effect that export subsidies have on markets in developing countries, but does she see any tangible evidence that there will be reform in the near future?

Mrs. Spelman: My hon. Friend will recall that the Secretary of State has said that reform will be brought about only by getting parliamentarians throughout Europe to agree to, and press for, it. We cannot do it on our own. We can provide leadership because Britain is uniquely placed, given our history of trade and our relationship with many developing nations, together with the fact that our agriculture is highly efficient. I would expect the Government to provide leadership to build an alliance for real change.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) *rose—*

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West) *rose—*

Mrs. Spelman: I think that the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) was first.

Mr. Drew: I could not agree more with what the hon. Lady says, so will she join the Government in getting entirely behind the Curry commission report and taking forward what we need to say through the various farm organisations—not just in this country, but across Europe—as well those involved in international development? Of course that report refers to the way in which we would want to move towards modulation in this country, which will help.

Mrs. Spelman: The hon. Gentleman will know that I have 15 years' experience of working in agriculture, so I am fully aware that we have got—

Clare Short: Subsidised agriculture.

Mrs. Spelman: As the Secretary of State says, agriculture is subsidised, but that has brought our own farmers to their knees; it is not working for farmers in this country. Reform is long overdue, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that we must push hard for reform that is not only fair and does not disadvantage our farmers, but—given this brief in particular—allows a fair opportunity for the developing world. That is the vision for which we must strive.

The Secretary of State may be aware that Oxfam put the EU at the top of the double-standards index—a measure of the gap between the free-market principle and protectionist practice. I was interested to see on page 64 of the annual report a picture of the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister in Ghana with some cocoa producers, but Ghana is excluded from the everything but arms initiative. Why do not we help Ghana by offering it better access to European markets? Again, there is an opportunity for real improvement.

Debt relief is the final issue that I want to raise where we can make a real difference. We have heard today that 27 nations have had their debt relieved, but does that reflect reality? What is the recipients' indebtedness now? What about the countries that do not qualify under the tortuously complicated HIPC rules?

Ethiopia, for example, expects a 47 per cent. reduction in debt under the World Bank-initiated HIPC programme, despite which it will have to spend the same amount on the remaining debt as it spends on health. As I speak, 42 countries that could be included in the programme have not even reached the first rung of the criteria required before they can expect some interim relief on their debt service payments.

The IMF warns that the HIPC initiative is likely to fail in many countries and that eight to 10 countries will still be in debt by the end of the programme, so I just hope that, on debt, the Secretary of State is not saying to herself, "That's it. No more needs to be done now." The Jubilee 2000 campaign was one of the most effective campaigns in recent times. Those of us who took part in the human chain around Birmingham during the G8 summit will not let this rest. We are a rich nation. We must find more and better ways to prevent the cycle of indebtedness. We can will the means to the end.

Annual reports from school always contained a series of platitudes, but parents learn to read between the lines. This annual report shows that the Government must work harder if they are to prove next year that they mean what they say about helping the world's poorest. Old relationships built around foreign aid, welfare and donor-driven goals are finally being challenged and re-evaluated. The future is about establishing partnerships and enhancing the situation, so that developing countries take ownership of events in their own countries and use that to go forward.

We do not doubt the Secretary of State's sincerity, but she must ask herself some hard questions about the pattern of British development assistance and its effectiveness, the CDC's retreat from rural Africa, our thinning patience over EU aid reform, and the failure to get it right in Tanzania. To use the scholastic euphemism, there is room for improvement, but I am delighted that the Secretary of State said that we have to do things better.

2.47 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I welcome this debate and the publication of the report. May I tell my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the report represents an encouraging year of leadership, vision and action? After 15 years as a Member of Parliament, I am delighted that international development is being debated more on the Floor and in Westminster Hall. Moreover, more of our constituents are interested in and concerned about international development, so there has been a shift. I also welcome the remarks on agricultural reform made by the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and hope that they can be taken forward.

[Mr. John Battle]

I want to give some practical examples of joined-up Government. I was delighted to see that page 107 of the Red Book includes a significant paragraph on financing development. The Department for International Development also publishes a bulletin with the Treasury, but I suggest that that should be a tripartite report by this time next year. I should like the Department of Trade and Industry to be included in the heading as well as DFID and the Treasury. Let us take trade matters further forward with that interconnection of development.

The Secretary of State said that we need to drive forward implementation. As my journeys with the Select Committee have shown me, we need to be careful that we are not lulled into a sense that we are making inroads when we are not. I am terrified—this is one of those great illusions—that people are running up a down escalator. They think that they are moving up, but they are really being pushed down. We must be sure that we are making deep inroads in reducing poverty.

The poverty of many regions of the world is still unimaginable. The figures hide the reality that millions of people have to bury their children prematurely. I shall give some practical examples. One in five people live in abject poverty, and one in three in relative poverty. A whole continent of countries—Africa—is mostly locked out of the global economy. As is recognised in the DFID report, on current trends sub-Saharan Africa will fail to meet the millennium development goals. Much more needs to be done.

On a Select Committee visit to northern Nigeria, I saw the sheer scale of rural poverty as the desert sands blow in and take over the land. There is a crisis of water provision, food production and rural agricultural sustainability. People in villages eke out a living by growing and drying tomatoes on a tiny scale, without access to processing, markets or real trade. There were thousands of villagers living in what I would describe as pre-Biblical conditions but, sadly, lacking Jacob's well. So the millennium development goal of halving poverty by 2015 is a tough target. We are rising to that challenge, but internationally much more needs to be done for individual countries, particularly the rural poor in Africa.

At Monterrey, the European Union and the United States made additional commitments to increase development assistance by $12 billion. The new American money, the $5 billion, will not arrive until 2004. It is not yet clear how it will be used or what the nature of the new fund is. Financing for development has a long way to go.

The campaign to cancel debt must be continued. What is more we must ensure that promises are delivered. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) raised that point. If I may, I shall put in a plug for my early-day motion 386, calling for Members to support that target of 0.7 per cent. We must keep up the pressure, and not just here in Britain, because it sends a signal to Europe and the wider world.

We need to work with America. I say that as a parliamentarian. We need to work with non-governmental organisations, Church and faith groups, Congressmen and women and Senators. We must make contacts with all people of goodwill to encourage America not unilaterally to isolate itself from international development strategies. Yes, America gives an immense amount of humanitarian aid—often it makes its surplus grain available—but it needs to engage much more positively with progressive development strategies and assistance to Africa, and to get behind the New Partnership for Africa's Development as the most hopeful vehicle for action for the future.

Arguments are shifting. We need to understand the role of trade as well as of aid in future. Trade rather than aid will be the long-term key to the global inclusion of the poor, so it is crucial to make the international trading system fairer to poorer countries and people. I welcome the Speak Out for Trade Justice lobby that will take place on 19 June. I hope that it will be a catalyst for Members of this House and spark off a debate in constituencies about the relationship between trade and aid, and our international obligations.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s when I was working on these matters there were debates on trade policies: the EU policy on textiles and the notorious multifibre agreement. I remember being lobbied hard to say that we in the Yorkshire area where we have textiles should work to keep out textiles from third-world countries. Someone came to me and said that we must keep out textiles from Mauritius to protect jobs in textiles. I remember checking the import penetration of textiles from Mauritius into the Leeds market and it was 0.03 per cent. What happened? The lobbying was effective and worked. Mauritius was blocked off. Import controls were put on.

I recall going to a social club in Bradford to talk about these matters with textile workers. I talked to a man who was playing snooker. He said, "You realise it's a bad day. I have been in here all day because I lost my job." I asked why. He said, "I used to work as an engineer making textile machinery, but the order for my machine came from Mauritius and because people in this same room campaigned against Mauritius I have lost my job." Think of the snooker table. The job will go across the table, hit the cushion and come back into the pocket of the person next to you. That is interdependency. That is the global economy. We should recall that the economic interlock on our globe is much tighter than we realise. Trade is the key to tackling poverty.

We are learning that globalisation promises unity, but it cannot achieve that because of the lack of justice. Globalisation divides as much as it unites. What appears as globalisation for some is localisation for others. What is a new freedom for some descends as an uninvited and cruel fate for others. Some of us can be globally mobile; others become fixed in their localities. Being on the move for some means travelling on a jet; for others it means a refugee truck. Localities in a globalised world can lose their meaning and their negotiating capacities. That great visionary of environmental initiatives, Schumacher, urged us to "Think Global and Act Local", but that is no longer adequate. The world is more interdependent, interconnected and vulnerable. We need to be more subtle and to think and act globally and locally at the same time. The structures of poverty north and south are interlocked.

I close with two themes for the future that are not covered in the report, but which we should take more seriously. The first concerns the whole notion of migration, refugees and asylum seekers. I should like to see them included in the development debate internationally. In 1975, about 80 million people—about 1.5 per cent. of the world's population—lived outside their country of birth. According to the world migration

report the number of migrants has now risen to 150 million people, who are mostly legal residents of their new country. No problem with that.

The banker from Seattle who signs a five-year contract for a post in Berlin is a migrant and so is the labourer from Indonesia or Thailand who is subcontracted to a building site in Brunei. Refugees, too, are migrants with that well-founded fear of persecution in their home state. There are now 7 million refugees in Africa alone. Most refugees do not travel thousands of miles away to a new continent but move across the border to the country next door. How often are the refugee camps that we may visit increasingly seen as permanent new townships? If they are, we should face that reality and include them properly in development strategies.

We need to shift the thinking from the static model that refugees live in a temporary camp site and will go back to the place they left, and recognise that increasingly that is not the case. Refugee action and international development strategies must be threaded together. Refugees should be seen as part of development, as valuable human resources and as part of the international solution. That could change the debate.

Secondly, I compliment the Department for International Development sincerely for supporting the development of poverty reduction strategies which put developing countries into the leadership with donors working to support development efforts. I will go further. The work of DFID field workers, for example in Ghana and northern Nigeria, in developing participation strategies, including building from the base up and genuinely working with and including the poor, is radical, innovative and tremendously encouraging. Too often, top-down models have prevailed, even under the cover of language of empowerment, good governance and participation.

An academic, Bill Cooke, who works at the Institute for Development Policy at Manchester university wrote a set of brilliant essays called "Participation: The New Tyranny". He warns us that:

"an emphasis on the micro level of intervention can obscure and even sustain broader macro level inequalities and injustice."

We need to bear that in mind when we consider the whole approach. We need to be aware of the need for more subtle and more complex power analyses at local, national and international level. Moreover, we in the north, in our large cities, can learn from those participatory strategies and basic community development how to work with people and engage them in popular powerful management of their local economy, culture and life.

If scarcity is the discipline of economics, solidarity should be the inspiration of politics. When I first entered the House, I used to joke that I had to raise five issues in Ardsley, Bramley, Wortley, Kirkstall and Burley before daring to raise the question of international development, otherwise I would be regarded as straying too far from home base. I put my neck out today and say that it is now one for one; for every question I ask about my locality I can ask an international one because the debate has shifted. We should maintain that pressure to show people in inner cities that they are linked to people in rural Nigeria and that their futures are bound together.

The challenge is not just economic, but about developing genuine international solidarity. The universality of globalisation is not about the unity of capital alone; it is not about the unity of the haves but about the true universality of humanity. I close with a quotation from George Bernanos, who said:

"The ways that lead to freedom are not peaceable or calm. We don't wait for the future like waiting for a train; the future is rather like a climb; the future is not something we have to accept passively, it is something we have to create."

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that international development is the key moral, political and economic challenge of our time; we in the House and people elsewhere must all rise to it.

3.1 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on a fine and moving speech, which I enjoyed very much. I shall send a copy to those of my constituents who oppose me and criticise me for caring more about the third world than I do about them. My usual response is that I care as much about the third world as I do about them.

It is difficult to tackle the report when we have had only 24 hours to look at it. I admit that I have not read it from cover to cover, but I have dipped in and out trying to find facts and figures. To lighten the mood a little, I shall comment on two pictures. The picture of the Under-Secretary of State for International Development sitting cross-legged on the floor of a hut in Indonesia is particularly fetching. We have all done such things, but he looked very endearing indeed. On page 64, there is an extremely intriguing picture which should go into the Christmas caption competition. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State are in Ghana apparently discussing the merits of polystyrene chips; I cannot work out what they are looking at—it is certainly not cocoa pods.

Clare Short: It is cocoa; the picture shows what you get when you chop open a cocoa pod.

Dr. Tonge: I thank the Secretary of State. I have not been to Ghana yet; I am going next week or the week after to investigate the water industry. However, I thought that explaining what the Secretary of State was up to in the picture would make a wonderful caption competition. I wish that the civil servants who produced the report had included an index, although I accept that that would be a huge undertaking.

I sometimes get tired, and people say that I am suffering from compassion fatigue. A lot of them ask me why I bother, particularly old cynics in the medical profession and elsewhere. Billions of pounds have been ploughed into Africa over the past 20 or 30 years; hon. Members only have to look at page 89 of the report and those extremely depressing graphs to see that every measurable indicator of progress is going down; nothing is improving, as the Secretary of State confirmed.

Is aid a waste of money? We respond superbly when providing humanitarian aid; DFID is probably one of the best organisations in the world for rapid reaction, getting things moving and getting things done. Some of my friends and colleagues, however, ask whether we are not just throwing aid at people who will take a bit longer to die; we save their lives temporarily, but perhaps they will die later from AIDS, malaria, diarrhoea or starvation.

In southern Sudan, where there is civil war, we know that aid has on occasion been diverted to the Sudanese People's Liberation Army. Has that prolonged the war and

[Dr. Tonge]

made matters worse? Is aid really worth while? To use the words of dear old Hippocrates, are we striving "officiously to keep alive" and trying too hard? Would it be better if we left well alone?

My response to people who ask those questions is "How can we not do something?" Travelling to third-world countries, it is difficult to ignore the suffering. Archbishop Tutu said that just because people are used to children dying like flies from diarrhoea, malnutrition, malaria and so on does not mean that they care any less; mothers do not love their children less because they are likely to die soon. Morally, therefore, we must do something but, as the Secretary of State said, and as we have all said many times, we must do something because it is in our interest. Failed states breed terrorists and send asylum seekers and immigrants to our shores. All the problems of the third world and poverty-stricken countries ultimately affect us. There is therefore not just a moral argument but a practical one for doing something.

Sometimes, people in international development think that they will concentrate on a particular country for a week, only for a natural disaster to occur. Responding to those disasters is DFID's job and, as I said, it does it superbly. Civil wars, such as those in the Balkans and Afghanistan, create problems, and DFID is expected to clear up the mess. I resent that. I have frequently said in the House that funding such action should come not out of the budget reserved for the poorest people in the world, but out of some other budget. Before we take military action, we should consider who will do the clearing-up and who will fund the reconstruction; the Department has had to look at that, too.

Palestine has received millions of pounds of much-appreciated development aid from the European Union, which put in an awful lot of time, effort and resources. However, that was destroyed in two or three weeks by Israeli military action, probably by weapons that we sold to Israel, which is an enormous paradox. I cannot find the right word, but it is appalling that we sometimes do not think through the results of our actions.

This morning, the World Food Programme put out a plea for aid to tackle problems created by bad governance in Malawi and Zimbabwe in southern Africa, which everyone saw coming. All sorts of reasons have been given about why we could not do anything, such as the fact that Zimbabwe is a sovereign state. All the aid that went into those countries has been wasted; there is a huge crisis and a looming famine. It is a crazy situation, and I sometimes wonder whether we are going in the wrong direction. However, I must stop depressing myself completely and make a few specific points.

Clare Short: The hon. Lady should remember that Uganda has consistently grown its economy, has achieved a measurable reduction in poverty and has got all its children in school. Mozambique, which is recovering from the same awful problems as Angola, is doing enormously well. Tanzania has turned around; it is growing its economy and getting more and more children into school. There are successful African models, which we must generalise across the continent. It is not all hopeless and aid is not all wasted; some of it has been enormously effective in improving the lives of some of the poorest people in the world.

Dr. Tonge: I thank the Secretary of State for cheering me up. Nothing in the world would stop me from delivering aid, but I want better and more honest ways of doing so. We should not stop examining what we are doing or questioning how we are doing it, however good DFID is and however many plaudits it receives. We must not be complacent, but must continue to search for different ways of developing underdeveloped countries.

I have been reading the OECD Development Assistance Committee report that looked at UK overseas aid last October, and I want to release one round of unfriendly fire in this debate. The committee considered our progress towards spending 0.7 per cent. of gross national product on overseas aid—a worthy target, to which I hope we all adhere. The Chancellor announced that the ODA budget would increase to 0.33 per cent. of national income in 2003–04. That is excellent; it is to his great credit that he is moving towards the target. He also announced that Britain, along with the United States and Canada, has promised to cancel 100 per cent. of debt for the first 20 countries in the HIPC—heavily indebted poor countries—scheme. Again, that is to his great credit. It is absolutely wonderful and he has received many plaudits. The position of Mother Teresa has already been bagged, but I suggest that he is fast becoming a sort of Albert Schweitzer of the Treasury, who is concerned about the things that we care about.

That is wonderful stuff, but the money to finance that debt relief through the HIPC scheme is apparently coming out of the ODA budget. Does that not mean that two announcements have been made about the same money and that the debt relief is not extra, but is coming out of the overall budget, which has been increased slightly? Debt relief should be not a substitute for aid, but additional to the aid budget.

According to DFID's annual report, the estimated cost in 2001–02 of the HIPC 100 per cent. policy of debt relief will be £8.5 million. That sounds like peanuts, but as the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said, only 26 of the 42 countries eligible for the HIPC scheme have qualified, and only four have reached completion and had a proportion of their debt written off, so we are only at the beginning of the process.

Therefore, despite the Chancellor's announcement of the cancellation of 100 per cent. debt for the first 20 countries in the scheme, hardly any of the debt has yet been cancelled. As eligible countries qualify for the scheme, the cost of the 100 per cent. policy will grow, but it appears that it will be set against DFID's accounts and that the increase in aid that the Chancellor announced may be eaten up by the growing cost of debt relief. In that case, there is an even stronger argument for the proportion of national income that is spent on ODA to approach the 0.7 per cent. UN target at a much faster rate. Otherwise, I suspect that we will not be getting what we thought we were getting.

I hope that the Under-Secretary—I assume that he will make the winding-up speech—will tell us what the true level of overseas aid will be minus the debt relief sums, if they are to be included. I have tabled questions to the Treasury on the subject and it has sent me the usual

response: that it will reply as soon as possible. I have yet to receive a reply, but we have a right to know by exactly how much the aid budget is being increased and whether it will continue to include money for debt relief.

Clare Short: The hon. Lady makes an important point that concerns not only the UK, but the whole international system. About half the debt of the 42 countries in question is owed to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other multilateral institutions, while the other half is export credit debt to countries such as ours. Once the countries get into the HIPC process, they will stop paying, so relief is provided to more countries than just those that have completed the process. When the export credit debt is written off—that is happening, and the process is acting as leverage for a lot of good reform—it then counts towards ODA-GNP targets.

My Department's budget is the figures that we can see, and that money is not being spent on the debt relief. In the UK and everywhere else, when the debt is written off, it counts towards the ODA-GNP target. I hope that those comments are helpful, as they explain how the international system works. The ODA-GNP targets grow as debt is written off.

Dr. Tonge: I am not completely convinced. I accept the Secretary of State's explanation, but I still think that a bit of double accounting—it used to be called creative accounting in local government—is going on. I think that we are being told that more is being done than is actually happening, and that the overseas aid increase is not as big as it seems because other considerations are being taken into account. As the Secretary of State knows, I would defend her and the Department to the death if necessary for the work that they do. *[Laughter.]* How about that? However, I would not defend the Treasury, the Foreign Office or the Department of Trade and Industry. I am always watching very carefully what those bounders are up to, because they are always trying to pull the wool over our eyes and I think that the Department for International Development sometimes requires a bit of support. I shall leave that subject hanging in the air in the hope of getting a satisfactory response, perhaps from the Treasury, in future weeks.

The millennium goals are mentioned extensively in the report. We all know that they relate to reducing poverty, provision of primary education for all, and maternal and child mortality. I suspect that most hon. Members would assume that with my medical background, I would want desperately to deal with health issues. I do not. I am still hooked on the Prime Minister's concept of education, education, education. There is nothing quite like it in the whole world, and the fact that we are pushing towards primary education for everyone by 2015 is commendable. It is difficult to decide on the most important factor in development, and we have had endless arguments in the Chamber about what should come first, but education runs through all of them.

Some 120 million children of primary school age are still without proper education. I think that 53 per cent. of girls—and 74 per cent. of those living in south Asia and sub-Saharan Africa—do not go to school. One of the most touching sights in the developing world, especially in Africa, is the droves of little children in pristine uniforms marching to school out of their straw huts, shanty residences or wherever they live. The sight of them leaving happily and proudly is such a contrast with that of our children creeping like snails unwillingly to school. It is very refreshing to visit the country and see their enthusiasm.

In Bangladesh, one can see tiny children as well as older ones working in boiling heat all day to make bricks, but then having the energy to go joyfully into a schoolroom until sunset, so that they can learn something. Indeed, having done all that hard work, they believe that they are privileged to be able to do so. We must never forget how marvellous education is.

Africa has the lowest average primary school completion rate in the world. We know that many children drop out of school because of family commitments or the need for extra income. Of the 70 developing countries that have already built enough schools to educate all their children, only 27 retain 100 per cent. of children in school through to primary graduation. They are falling out of education rapidly; adult female literacy in developing countries declined in 2000 from 39 to 31 per cent.

I want to turn now, as the Secretary of State will expect, to a matter that concerns me hugely. She knows that I have recently returned from a visit to Sudan with the all-party group on Sudan. I hope that all its members will concur with what I shall say. There has been only one decade of peace in that country. Almost one in five children in the south die before they are five, but only about one in three children countrywide go to school. The adult literacy rate is less than 15 per cent. in conflict zones and it is rare to find anyone in southern Sudan who can read or write.

Some donors, including our Government, feel that education is development and that development cannot occur in conflict situations. I want briefly to run through the reasons why I think that we should try to reverse that policy. Education is considered to be long-term development, but UNICEF says that education must play a part in every emergency. It certainly does so when refugee camps are set up; there is always a school tent for the children. Surely the Department for International Development's definition of emergency assistance could be widened to include education. A large resource input would not be necessary. Southern Sudan is not asking for schoolrooms; its schoolrooms are big trees in the countryside.

Clare Short *rose—*

Dr. Tonge: Perhaps the right hon. Lady could wait until I have given all my reasons.

Southern Sudan does not need big schoolrooms; it simply needs a few teachers—and more money to train them—who can move around with the population, which frequently has to move, as well as some chalk, slates, blackboards and a few books. We are talking about very basic resources. It does not need many resources. A better educated population, especially women, can help towards the peace process in southern Sudan. The more people are educated there, the more they will be able to recognise the risks of continuing conflict. Education should be seen as a basic resource.

Clare Short *rose—*

Dr. Tonge: I want to make a couple of other points before I give way.

[Dr. Tonge]

UNICEF has said that educational activities—including those involving parents and members of the community—play an important part in building the community. We know how much civil society has suffered in southern Sudan and how much it needs educated people who can help to rebuild it. The people themselves say that education is what they want most, apart from peace. They want their children to go to school. If we are to prevent conflict and try to broker peace, we must concentrate more on education.

The kind of help and facilities that the people are asking for could travel with the population. We must remember that 80 per cent. of southern Sudan is at peace most of the time; the conflict has not been in the entire region all the time. It moves around, and the people there say that the facilities that they need could move around with the population. I shall now give way to the Secretary of State.

Clare Short: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. The answer to her question is yes, the humanitarian support for displaced and refugee children should always include education. The quality of the humanitarian effort in Sudan has been very poor. Until recently, 90 per cent. of the support was spent on aeroplanes, and only a tiny amount of the quite big expenditure was getting through to the people. After my visit, I sent one of our humanitarian advisers to get a commitment from the Government and from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in the south that they would allow us to work with them to enhance the quality of the humanitarian effort. That includes getting children into school, although not yet as part of the rebuilding of the state—that will come after peace—but as part of the enhanced humanitarian support that will get displaced and refugee children into school. We will be working on that.

Dr. Tonge: That is excellent news. I hope that all the members of the all-party group who went to Sudan will have heard that; we shall come knocking on the Secretary of State's door asking for details very soon.

Like the hon. Member for Leeds, West, I am increasingly of the opinion that, although those countries need aid for education, health and clean water, they need trade and investment more than anything. If we look at the countries that have made progress, they are those that have trade and investment. I therefore endorse what the hon. Gentleman said. The Secretary of State mentioned the World Trade Organisation. We must strengthen that organisation instead of constantly denigrating it. People in this country should realise that, if the WTO were strengthened and had more representation from developing countries, it could be such a force for good in the world. Developing countries desperately need trade.

I shall refer quickly to commodity prices, which continue to cause instability in countries that depend on such income. Coffee is the perfect example, and problems are looming again in that respect: the price of coffee has fallen by 70 per cent. since 1997. I remind the House that a fall in coffee prices was one of the factors that triggered the Rwandan genocide. Trade issues must be watched carefully, because they can trigger much worse events in the world.

At the G8 summit in June, the Government must propose tariff and quota-free access to all exports from the least developed countries by 2005. We must make progress on that. The everything but arms initiative, which the hon. Member for Meriden mentioned, must be expanded to include tariff and quota-free rice, sugar and bananas from the least developed countries. We have to give on these matters. The common agricultural policy, which is fast becoming a sick joke because of the time it is taking to reform it, has to be revised and agreed by EU leaders.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to the hon. Lady—with whom I enjoyed a happy week in Sudan—for giving way. My intervention is not on Sudan, however, but on the CAP. It has to be reformed. I think that everyone in the Chamber who is concerned about international development agrees on the impact that it has on the agriculture of developing countries, in terms of export subsidy and so on. What evidence does the hon. Lady have that it will be reformed?

Dr. Tonge: The hon. Gentleman asks a very good question. I have no evidence, except that Minister after Minister—including the Prime Minister—in this Government and the last one have always said that it would be reformed. This is a matter of the utmost urgency. If the European Union is to expand—my party and I hope that it will—we must reform the CAP. Those two events go together, and we simply have to get on with it. The only evidence I have, however, is what people say. The hon. Gentleman suggests that that is all talk and no action, and I agree with him that that seems to be the case at the moment.

Foreign direct investment in developing countries increased from $24 billion in 1990 to $184 billion in 1999. It dropped, however, to $167 billion in 2000, and only 6 per cent. of that capital ended up in the poorest parts of the world. Most private capital goes to Latin America, eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. It worries me that the Commonwealth Development Corporation was the only organisation that would go into areas where there were civil wars or undemocratic Governments. The CDC dealt with that kind of situation. No company wanting a 25 per cent. return on its activities will go into an unstable situation. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) wants to expand on that, if he is lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a matter that we are concerned about.

Multinationals sometimes invest in developing countries, although their investment does not always reduce the poverty there. Irresponsible investment and employment practices can contribute to poverty and economic insecurity. I should not have to remind the House of all the campaigns that have gone on over the years against multinationals because of their activities in developing countries. The problem is that they are still not subject to regulation on an international scale.

The OECD guidelines are good, worthy and beautiful, but there is nothing to make the multinationals adhere to them. I have recently been made aware of an organisation called the UK National Contact Point for the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. It is an organisation to which people can complain if they think

that a multinational is behaving badly somewhere in the world. I understand, however, that no submissions have been made to it so far.

We need those OECD guidelines to be legally binding, please. Then multinationals could not compete with one another for bad practice, but they would have to compete for good. I feel quite optimistic about that matter, as companies have taken on board a lot of the messages from the demonstrations and all the fuss that the NGOs have made about their activities and world trade.

Many multinationals are thinking about all that or are at least publishing glossy brochures that show the wonderful things that they are doing in the countries where they operate. That is a great leap forward. Companies such as Rio Tinto are much better and are taking that agenda on, but the guidelines must be legally binding. That is the only way to achieve corporate social responsibility in the long run.

The House has been very indulgent. I have touched on only a few issues, and there are many others that I could mention. The report tells us many things, but it does not provide a genuine feeling as to whether the millennium goals will be achieved. I guess that we could not hope for that. I still fear that HIV/AIDS and continuing civil wars will prevent the world from making great progress in the next 20 years, although I hope that I am wrong. I am particularly worried about the consequences of HIV.

Nevertheless, I congratulate the Department on the work that it does. Its civil servants must surely be the most dedicated and successful at Westminster. I am also pleased by the extraordinary number of Members in the Chamber. It is a credit to the Department, the Secretary of State and the Minister that so many are here. At first, I wondered whether Members were avoiding the local elections, but perhaps I am being too cruel. I congratulate Members very much on their attendance, as it shows how seriously the issue is being taken and how extremely important it is.

3.32 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I apologise to the House, as I am unable to be present for the winding-up speeches. I must attend a constituency event to which I had agreed before the debate was timetabled.

I, too, congratulate the Secretary of State on her departmental report. I shall concentrate on two core issues, which should be prominent in any discussion on international development. The first is partnership. As expressed in the New Partnership for Africa's Development initiative, partnership for development is invaluable. Following last week's meeting in Dakar, it continues to gain momentum and, as a home-grown African initiative, it deserves our full support.

Inherent in the idea of partnership is equal relations. It is time to move from the hierarchical relations based on who gives and who receives aid. We all understand that aid is essential, but it is a drop in the ocean in terms of real and sustained development across the world. Only through fair trade can countries create economic prosperity.

Interestingly, a debate on European Union, British and American relations is taking place in Westminster Hall. It is always difficult when two debates that may cover the same subject are going on at the same time. We in Europe and north America must open our markets to emerging economies as they are opening theirs to us. As the Secretary of State, the hon. Members for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said, continuing high EU farming subsidies are a major barrier to fairer trade for African horticultural exporters. And so say all of us in the Chamber.

For that reason, it is imperative that developing countries make every effort to use their muscle at World Trade Organisation meetings and other trade-related conferences. For all the bad press that the WTO receives, it is still one of the few international organisations that is run on a one member, one vote system. As such, it is more democratic than the United Nations or the World Bank can ever claim to be.

Encouraging and facilitating the growth of less powerful voices in such arenas should be part of the Department's mandate, and discussions in which real partnership can be forged through negotiations must also be encouraged. I echo the points made by the hon. Member for Richmond Park about the need to enshrine in law the guidelines for multinationals. Also, I very much welcome the WTO negotiations on the so-called Singapore issues of investment and competition, which are due to start next year.

However, we must think more deeply about which industries can produce the sustainable development that so many countries require. Export orientation certainly provides a good route map, but it must be coupled with diversification. Mono-economies are vulnerable and, in many cases, unsustainable. It is imperative that the growth of industries such as mining is coupled with a corporate social responsibility agenda.

In Ghana, for example, to say that foreign exchange is like gold dust is a truism—gold is indeed the Government's major source of foreign exchange and an absolute necessity. Yet many mining corporations in some countries have left environmental and social problems that will take decades to rectify. I welcome next month's mining, minerals and sustainable development conference in Canada, which offers an unprecedented opportunity to change the culture of the mining industry for the better.

On my recent visit to Ghana, I was impressed by the efforts of Ashanti Goldfields in the Wassa West area of western Ghana, in co-operation with the local community, to return land used for mining to sustainable agricultural use. I hope that NGOs such as the Third World Network take up the invitation to discuss with Ashanti Goldfields their concerns about mining operations in western Ghana. I believe that many are unfounded, and it is extremely important that local NGOs take up the opportunities offered by multinationals operating in their countries—especially those, I have to say, in which the Ghanaian Government have a golden share—and get those matters dealt with.

Given that the resources of all the multilateral banks combined are dwarfed by those of the private sector, it is important that an investment-friendly environment is created to encourage businesses to invest in emerging economies. Interestingly, Unilever's best investment area in the world is Africa, where it achieves an overall rate of return of more than 35 per cent. on capital employed. However, economic and, indeed, political stability are

[Mr. Tony Colman]

precursors of such investment, and international donors can help to create the right climate for long-term private sector interest.

Trade in services is also important. Returning to Ghana, it is clear that urban water provision requires investment on a scale not possible solely through governmental channels. I hope that Christian Aid in this country listens to Ghanaian civil society in terms of some allegations that are being made. I am pleased to hear that my near neighbour, the hon. Member for Richmond Park, is visiting that country shortly. I note from the report that the Department has already helped South Africa and Guyana with arrangements similar to those proposed for Ghana.

Private sector involvement in providing essential services is necessary in many areas, but any trade in services must be fairly and transparently regulated to ensure that the best possible route to sustainable service provision is found. Partnership between Governments and the private sector is imperative to improving services for expanding populations in many developing countries.

The second major point that I want to emphasise is international responsibility. The route to sustainable development is trade rather than aid, but it is clear that many countries are not in a position successfully to integrate into the world economy. As the conclusions of the last NEPAD meeting show, many national leaders face impossible situations.

Ravaged by conflict, countries such as Sierra Leone and its less internationally popular neighbour, Liberia, cannot expect trade to solve their ills in the next few years. The people of Sierra Leone hope for free and fair elections as well as a responsible and honest leadership, but even if those elusive goals are achieved, what of the thousands of soldiers who spent their youth with a semi-automatic weapon as a companion? They must be demobilised and reintegrated. In Sierra Leone, the dedication of the United Kingdom Government provides hope for the future through funding of reintegration programmes, training of the national army and assistance to the innocent civilians who have lost everything to war.

However, across the border in Liberia the international community has had good grounds to be more cautious in providing assistance. The relative lack of outside support has allowed peace to become an even more illusive goal. Under Charles Taylor, Liberia has regressed into violence. Those who suffered at the hands of out-of-control rebels in the 1990 war forget nothing, and will not bow to a Taylor Government. The contrast between the relative success of post-conflict reconstruction in Liberia and Sierra Leone shows clearly how much international support can achieve. I ask the Secretary of State to consider support for the situation in Liberia.

It is important to outline again and again the idea of international responsibility, which should be borne in mind given the recent stunted progress at Sun City in South Africa in the InterCongolese Dialogue. Post-conflict countries require our support, through aid and technical assistance. Without such support, they have the capacity to destabilise entire regions.

Thus, the international community has a responsibility to help countries to pull themselves out of destructive and debilitating conflicts, and out of the poverty that can be both a cause and an effect of such destruction.

I had hoped that, in her opening speech, the Secretary of State would shed more light on what was discussed at World Bank-International Monetary Fund spring meetings. Perhaps the Minister will be able to elucidate those issues in his winding-up speech, which I regret I shall have to read in *Hansard*. Last week, the Chancellor expressed clearly the current high level of political will to combat poverty and instability. I welcome the open and frank discussions on the important issues of sustainable debt and expanding the HIPC initiative.

In a similar vein, the recent experience of Argentina has opened up a debate on the possibility of creating mechanisms for dealing with country bankruptcy. That is a most welcome move, and I hope that there will be further discussions leading to agreement on a way forward on this issue. I congratulate Anne Krueger, the IMF deputy managing director, for her work so far, and I look forward to concrete proposals being put to the next IMF meeting this autumn.

The G24 also proposed that the rich countries should allocate a proportion of their special drawing rights to a special development fund. There is now a high level of agreement that far greater funds are needed for development, and the use of special drawing rights may be a way forward. I hope that the Minister will be able to provide information on how the debate on that has moved. I understand that there was a 40 per cent. vote in favour of that proposal at the World Bank-IMF autumn meetings. How far have we moved to get consensus and agreement on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Marshall aid plan for development?

The other point that the Chancellor made in that excellent pamphlet was that other revenue-raising mechanisms could be used at an international level to provide further funds for development. A tax on international currency speculation was one of the most promising proposals, and could raise the enormous sums needed. More and more economists are beginning to realise that such a tax is technically and administratively feasible if collected through settlement transactions. The new settlement transaction system is going live this month. I welcome the open-minded approach taken in the UK and in Europe on this issue, and hope to see further constructive discussion.

It is imperative that the hierarchical nature of international development relations in the past is replaced with 21st century partnerships. At the same time, the international community must recognise its responsibility to countries that are unable to engage with the global economy. For that reason, aid must be focused on the least-developed countries and the poorest groups.

I commend the Secretary of State and the Chancellor on their work. They realise that we still have a long way to go to achieve effective financing of our development goals, and they are leading the way by pushing for international responsibilities to be met in a spirit of international partnership.

3.44 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I am glad that Government business managers have made time for a debate on international development. Immediately after the publication of the departmental report is obviously a good time for such a debate. The Select Committee on International Development will study the report with care.

This week has also seen the publication of the Select Committee's report on the effectiveness of European development assistance. Eight members of the Select Committee are present for this debate. Two of them have already spoken: the hon. Members for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) and for Putney (Mr. Colman) both made excellent speeches, and I agree with everything they said. I hope that outside and inside the House it will be felt that Select Committee members can collectively make useful judgments, and can individually bring useful experience to bear. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) will describe his recent experiences in Sudan, and the Select Committee yesterday heard about the moving experiences of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) in Jenin. I hope that that collective experience is of value to the House.

An enormous amount is happening in international development, any part of which could justifiably form the substance of a full day's debate. The year 2000 saw the publication of the United Nations millennium goals, which set some clear and unambiguous targets that we have to achieve between now and 2015, including halving the number of those who live on less than $1 a day, ensuring that children everywhere are able to complete a universal primary education, and halting, and hopefully reversing, the spread of HIV and AIDS. There is a total of 18 straightforward targets for the international community to achieve.

We must recognise that the pace of progress towards reaching the millennium goals is different in different parts of the world. As the Secretary of State said, China, with an annual growth rate of something like 9 per cent., will comfortably meet those targets. However, I note that the Department for International Development and the Treasury, in their recently published joint report "The Case for Aid for the Poorest Countries", acknowledge that on current trends sub-Saharan Africa will fail to meet the 2015 goals.

Chapter 4 of the departmental annual report helpfully shows how we are doing in meeting the millennium development goals, and illustrates each goal with a useful, clear graph showing progress to date and the rate of progress needed to meet the targets. Everyone can look at those diagrams, but by my calculations, on two of the targets we are well on track, on two of them we are well ahead, but on the other 14 there is still a substantial distance to go, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, as shown by the graphs on page 59.

This year, there will be three important development-related conferences. We have already had the WTO conference at Doha. It is important to recognise that Doha was not the finish but the start of what will almost certainly be a number of years of painstaking and detailed negotiations on reforming the system of world trade. It is vital that poorer nations obtain fair access to developed markets, and that the fine words and good intentions of WTO members at the outset are not overwhelmed by mercantilist self-interests in the detailed negotiations.

I should like to make two points about the Doha and world trade negotiations. Agribusiness, which means maximising the return on agriculture and primary production, is the foremost activity for many poorer countries. If they do not get greater access to developed markets for their agricultural produce, there is little prospect of their improving their standard of living.

At present, the common agricultural policy is one of the most protectionist trade regimes in the world. Indeed, not only does it make it very difficult for agricultural produce from poorer countries often to make it on to the shelves of our shops, but it encourages agricultural practices that lead to the dumping of surplus European produce in poorer countries, further undermining their farmers' ability to earn a living. When the International Development Committee was recently in Ghana, it was very noticeable that the supermarket shelves were stacked with tins of tomatoes from Italy. That is hardly necessary in a country such as Ghana, which produces excellent tomatoes of its own but which all too often lacks the investment and infrastructure to process them. However, I suspect that so many Italian tomatoes were in Ghana because, in effect, they had been dumped there by the European Union.

European Union spending on agricultural export subsidies dwarfs EU development assistance. Access to European markets, including those for key agricultural products such as sugar, rice and beef, continues to be restricted. In this week's Select Committee report on EC development assistance, we said we agree with Chris Patten that

"the most important issue that we will have to resolve as a Union and as a Commission in order to convince developing countries that we really have their interests at heart is the whole issue of CAP reform".

We unanimously observed that it is

"time that the EU backed up its warm words with good deeds and made concrete progress with removing export subsidies and improving access to the EU market."

We could also extensively debate the concern that many developing countries' efforts to deal with their HIV/AIDS crises are hampered by disagreements about intellectual property rights—another WTO issue. Theirs is a tragedy of monumental proportions. Only last week, it was estimated that HIV/AIDS is now so widespread in South Africa alone that many people there will die before the age of 40, and that in the not too distant future AIDS will cut life expectancy to 38.

I hope that there will be a positive response to two measures introduced in the Budget: the new tax credit to encourage companies to increase research into vaccines and medicines for the prevention of malaria, TB and AIDS; and the new tax relief to encourage donations of medical supplies and equipment to developing countries. Hopefully, the new tax credit will be a further incentive for the UK pharmaceutical industry to focus its attention on this important work.

Doha was followed by Monterrey, and the good news at the financing for development conference was that the United States did come forward with substantial extra money—up to $5 billion extra each year. However, I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Leeds, West that there is still more that the United States can do. We need collectively to engage with colleagues in the US Congress, and with non-governmental organisations and other development organisations in America.

However, I suspect that a much clearer commitment needs to be made at Monterrey on meeting pledges to the global health fund so that progress on health can be made. An assurance needs to be given that no developing country's national strategy for meeting the 2015 education target will fail through lack of the funding that would enable them to move forward on education.

[Tony Baldry]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer frequently mentions the UK's objective of meeting the 0.7 per cent. target, but, importantly, we have no timetable. That is perhaps understandable, as to meet the target the Chancellor would have to double current funding to DFID, but it is surely possible to establish a process and to find a form of words that demonstrate a clear commitment. For example, we could aggressively seek to meet our target of 0.7 per cent. of gross domestic product for overseas development by, say, 2012.

Although the sums for increased development that were outlined at Monterrey are welcome and represent real progress, the Budget Red Book confirms that

"they still fall short of the aid levels necessary to achieve the Millennium Development Goals . . . which the World Bank estimates will require $40 to $60 billion each year."

I should be grateful for some clarification from the Minister. On page 107, the Red Book notes that, in November 2001,

"the Chancellor proposed an International Development Trust Fund".

On Tuesday, the Select Committee took evidence from those development NGOs that had been particularly involved in the Monterrey process. None had any details about that international development trust fund. It would be helpful to have a better understanding of what the Chancellor is proposing, and how much substance the fund has to date. The Red Book suggests that the fund will lever in private sector finance. Again, it is unclear how that will be achieved. Will it constitute a private finance initiative for international development?

Rather than setting up a new mechanism such as an international development trust fund, about which people seem to have heard little, why not seek to achieve the 0.7 per cent. commitment sooner, rather than later? I draw the attention of the Secretary of State and the Minister to early-day motion 386, which was initiated by the hon. Member for Leeds, West, and which has attracted signatures from 232 Members. It simply calls on the Government to make a firm commitment to achieving the 0.7 per cent. target by 2012, and the 0.4 per cent. target by 2006. That is surely achievable, and perhaps such a straightforward commitment would be easier for everyone to understand than the setting up of yet another fund.

What is certain is that 2015 is not far away, and, according to the Treasury's own estimates, $40 billion to $60 billion a year remains a fairly substantial shortfall.

Norman Lamb: Has the hon. Gentleman been successful in achieving agreement within his own party about the essential importance of achieving the 0.7 per cent. target within a specified time scale?

Tony Baldry: My hon. Friends on the Front Bench can speak for themselves, but I do not think that any division, dissent or lack of commitment exists among Conservative Members in respect of meeting the 0.7 per cent. target. However, my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), who is winding up for the Opposition, will have heard the comments that were made, and he will doubtless respond. I would hope that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have signed the early-day motion to which I referred.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Will the hon. Gentleman bear in mind the latest recommendation of the Environmental Audit Committee, which has been examining preparations for the world summit on sustainable development? The Committee also called for a timetable for reaching the 0.7 per cent. GDP target, so across the parties, the evidence, and the pressure on the Government, is increasing.

Tony Baldry: That is a timely intervention. As I was about to say, Monterrey will be followed in September by the world summit on sustainable development—the last in the trilogy of summits, at Doha, Monterrey and Johannesburg. The Environmental Audit Committee has published an excellent report on the UK's preparations for the summit, and I hope that, through the Liaison Committee, time can be found to debate it extensively, whether here or in Westminster Hall. Perhaps it could be debated together with the report that the International Development Committee will shortly be publishing on the impact of climate change on development. I should point out to those hon. Members who have not read the Environmental Audit Committee's report on preparations for Johannesburg that it is well worth reading.

Everyone will support the Government's approach at Johannesburg, which will be to push issues such as poverty eradication and access to clean water, rather than climate change and biodiversity, for which frameworks of action have largely been agreed. Poverty remains the central threat to achieving sustainable development. A commitment to working for a sustainable planet is in no way inconsistent with a commitment to ensuring that the world's poor can access development, or to a commitment that, wherever possible, all will be done to help lift them out of poverty. Work by the Environmental Audit Committee and some evidence taken by the International Development Committee have suggested that tension exists between environmental NGOs and developmental NGOs, but I hope that there is no conflict. If poor countries are to prosper, they need sustainable development, and we must find ways to take forward that process.

Doha, Monterrey and Johannesburg are part of a continuing process and will be important in ensuring—through debates such as these, which I hope will be annual—that the international community is delivering year on year on the promises made at these conferences. We could spend a whole day debating EC development assistance. After all, a quarter of DFID's budget is channelled through the EC. The good news is that the European Community is the fourth largest donor of development aid; the bad news is that precious little of that money goes towards helping poor countries. Indeed, a shrinking share of Europe's development assistance goes to the poor.

In 2000, the proportion of EU development assistance spent in low-income countries reached a new low. None of the top 10 recipients of EU aid is a poor country. Poland receives more development from Europe than the whole of Asia and Latin America combined. At the moment, far too little of Europe's development budget is being used to tackle poverty, and far too much of it is being used in pursuing the wider foreign policy objectives of other European member states. The Select Committee came to the straightforward conclusion that money earmarked for development aid should be targeted on the poorest, and that EU development aid could be deployed more effectively.

There is much more for us to debate. With regard to conflict and defence sales, we will shortly have the opportunity to debate the Export Control Bill when it returns to this House. I hope that the Government will accept the amendments on sustainable development that were passed in the other place. It would be a pity if the Government used their majority in this House to remove from the Bill the commitment to sustainable development. If they do, it is difficult to see what the Bill is about.

We have heard that India is the recipient of the largest amount of UK bilateral aid, and the country strategy paper on India shows that that is because a third of the world's poor live there. However, I hope that I am not alone in being at a loss to explain why we give substantial development aid to India—it has within its borders one third of all the world's poor, and yet we are about to grant export licences to the same country for defence equipment worth £1 billion. That £1 billion is equivalent to 10 years' worth of UK bilateral aid to India at the same level. In effect, we are removing from the Government of India the obligation to pay for the defence equipment themselves, as they are able to use the bilateral aid money for that purpose.

Of course, I realise that other factors, such as jobs and employment, must be taken into consideration. However, the provisions on sustainable development in the Export Control Bill need to be firm commitments. Otherwise, many people will feel that it is a rather weasel-worded Bill.

Mr. Robathan: On that issue, does my hon. Friend agree that the enormously expensive development of nuclear weapons by India—God knows how much it has cost—sits rather ill with the fact that that country receives aid from us, and from other countries?

Tony Baldry: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry this week in which I raised very similar matters, but I shall not try the patience of the House by repeating my comments today.

On debt relief, Select Committee members saw for ourselves in Ghana—which has now achieved HIPC status—the enormous benefit that can be achieved by reducing debt and thus helping to reduce poverty. The sums involved are not insignificant: so far 26 countries receive debt relief worth $62 billion under the HIPC initiative, but debt relief must lead to a sustainable exit from indebtedness.

I am sure that the Secretary of State for International Development and the Minister have seen early-day motion 736, which was initiated by the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown). It has been signed by 321 hon. Members, and I doubt whether any such motion has attracted so many signatures. It calls for the acceleration of debt cancellation under the HIPC process, and I hope very much that the Government will bear it in mind.

I shall conclude with two brief points, the first of which has to do with Africa. At one end of the scale, a number of large multinational organisations such as Ashanti Goldfields or Shell are doing very well in Africa, and, at the other end of the scale, huge numbers of traders continue the entrepreneurial trading that they have conducted for centuries. Between those two groups, however, there is a huge "missing middle" of small and medium-sized businesses.

It was depressing to be told by the representatives of the World Bank in Ghana—which is a good example of an African economy—that the quickest way to make money was to import goods and shift them as speedily as possible. That is how entrepreneurial people make money in Ghana. When DFID next reviews its country strategy plans, I hope that, where appropriate, it might consider what further support and help can be given to the private sector, to the encouragement of enterprise and, in particular, to the development of medium-sized businesses in developing nations.

My final point has been firmly underlined by the NEPAD initiative, and concerns a matter raised already by the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby. It is that, if development is to work, it has to be a partnership. The NEPAD conclusions refer to mutual interests, shared commitments and binding agreements. The phrase "good governance" is not simply some slogan: there has to be proper democratic accountability for countries to succeed. We need to move on beyond the systems that exist in too many developing countries where, it strikes me, governance is still a matter of patronage from the top and petitioning from the bottom, rather than of democratic accountability, of Governments accounting to elected politicians, and of those politicians in turn accounting to their constituents.

As the Secretary of State noted, if Africa is to move forward, Nigeria has to move forward. Those of us who went to Nigeria saw only too clearly that that country has to convince the rest of the world that it is bearing down on corruption and that it is determined to take forward good governance.

In conclusion, I find the statistics on development almost overwhelming sometimes. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) said that something like 120 million children still lack primary education. I find it difficult to visualise 120 million children, so when I go overseas now I take photographs—of children, elderly people, and women at work—and put them on the kitchen wall at home. The photographs remind me that the people in them are individuals who deserve our support.

The photograph on the front cover of the Department's annual report is very telling. It shows a woman working with others to hew out a future for herself. What we are involved in is not a matter of millions or billions of people, but comes down to showing solidarity with and support for every single woman who wants a better life for herself, her family and her children.

4.7 pm

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): I shall not speak for too long, as not much time is left for all the hon. Members who wish to contribute. However, I should like to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her Department on their efforts to address the problem of poverty in the world, as well as on the informative report that they have produced. I am pleased to be able to contribute to today's debate as a member of the Select Committee on International Development.

Successes or failures are perhaps harder to quantify in international development than in the work of any other Department, as they depend on so many factors beyond the Department's control. However, the Department has invested huge sums of money in many of the world's poor and developing countries to tackle the issues of education, health and poverty.

[Mr. Piara S. Khabra]

Mention has been made of India. I come from India, and retain an interest in it. It is a huge country, with enormous resources. The money being given to India is being used properly to reduce poverty, and I do not agree with my Select Committee colleague the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) that the Government should not consider supplying arms to the country.

Results in reducing poverty across the globe cannot be achieved by one Department in one country. They can be achieved only through partnerships between developed and developing nations, and between Governments and their peoples. Events in the past year have shown that we live in an increasingly integrated world where suffering cannot be ignored, even if it is far away. Failure to address poverty and disenchantment in a single country can have repercussions across the globe.

The Department for International Development has clearly worked hard in the past 12 months and there are a number of achievements with which it should be pleased. One is in the area of sustainable development, which the Brundtland commission defined as

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The topic is particularly relevant this year as countries prepare for a United Nations summit on the issue in Johannesburg in September. I am pleased with the conclusions reached through the Department's work with the OECD Development Assistance Committee and the UN that good poverty reduction strategies should contain the elements necessary for strategic planning for sustainable development. Unfortunately, as was pointed out in a report published last December by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, progress towards the goals laid out in Rio de Janeiro at the conference on environment and development has been slower than expected. Indeed, the report suggests that in some respects, conditions are worse than they were 10 years ago.

I am not pleased with the attitude of the present United States Administration, who have shown a disregard for environmental concerns. As the United States is the major power of the industrialised world—and also the largest consumer of resources—I would have expected better leadership from it.

The poor quality of many people's living environment results in the deaths of millions each year. To take just one example, the World Health Organisation estimates that about 2.1 million people—the vast majority of whom live in developing countries—die annually from indoor air pollution. One reason for the continuing problems is undoubtedly the failure of many developing nations—and developed nations, for that matter—to integrate sustainable development fully into Government policy. Instead, it is often treated as a stand-alone issue and passed to a separate environmental department. We need to work with developing countries to ensure that sustainable development is treated seriously by all sectors of government.

Another area that DFID has addressed, and which seems particularly appropriate to mention today, on Africa malaria day, is disease. Several hundred million people annually continue to be infected with malaria, which results in nearly 300 million clinical cases and 1 million deaths a year. The deterioration in health structures, migration, poverty and the emergence of drug-resistant parasites has meant that the problem is actually getting worse in some countries.

It is estimated that economic growth in African countries where the disease is endemic has been slowed by up to 1.3 per cent. this year. I am pleased, therefore, that the UK played a leading role last year in securing a commitment from the G8 countries to a global fund to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

The Department has also tried to address the dreadful problem of HIV/AIDS. Last year it published its strategy for its contribution to tackling the disease, which has a devastating effect on people in many countries. I have been to countries in Africa with a parliamentary delegation, and we saw the devastating effects of the disease on the lives of many people—on their life expectancy, current development and future well-being.

During the 1990s, life expectancy declined by 6.3 years in the nine countries hardest hit, and there are currently about 36 million adults and children living with HIV/AIDS. The situation is exacerbated by two factors. The first is the refusal of many leaders—often for cultural or political reasons—to accept that there is a problem. One example of that, I am afraid, is India, where officials have frequently played down the problem. Similarly, South Africa's president has also failed to accept the international consensus on HIV/AIDS.

It is noteworthy that in the 1980s, when HIV hit Thailand, its Government prepared an aggressive campaign to provide information to the groups most at risk. Thailand spends more than 60 cents per person on HIV, whereas India spends a little less than 6 cents. Mr. Sarkar of the United Nations AIDS programme for south Asia has expressed his concern that the epidemic in India has not peaked and is unlikely to stabilise, because of a lack of education and intervention.

The second problem is the slightly simplistic approach taken by many to the problem. I believe that the message about HIV has been hampered by the focus on drugs patents, specifically for drugs to treat the disease. It is a simple fact that even if the drugs were provided free, Governments could not afford to distribute them, especially in a country the size of India. Also, the drugs must be taken properly. Some have to be refrigerated, which is often not possible, some have to be taken at certain times, and some with eight glasses of fresh water a day and at regular intervals. Some drugs can make people very ill.

For those reasons, many sufferers cannot continue their course of drugs; they start taking them and then stop. Starting and stopping is particularly dangerous, because it allows HIV the opportunity to adapt and become resistant, thus making many current treatments useless in the future. A recent study in San Francisco, with all its medical sophistication and experience, has predicted that by 2005 nearly half of all HIV patients in the city will no longer respond to their current treatment.

The emphasis on drugs in developing countries has shifted attention away from prevention and has left ill-informed populations with the impression that there is a cure—in which case, why should they change their habits? It is important to educate people. It is essential that DFID works with Governments around the world to

address the issue, and that heads of state in developing nations recognise the problem and take the necessary action. Failure to do so will be nothing short of devastating.

The Department appears to have achieved much in the past year; we should not forget the untying of aid. It is encouraging to note that peer review of the Department by the OECD Development Assistance Committee has welcomed many of the changes made since 1997. It says that the UK's approach demonstrates the value that bilateral aid agencies can add through contributions to international policy debates and by monitoring the implementation of international undertakings.

We can achieve a great deal and make a real difference to people's lives if we work together. We cannot do it on our own. The report is good, and we must continue to consider the problems faced by the international community.

4.20 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra), my colleague on the International Development Committee. As he knows, I share his concern about the impact of AIDS on the developing world. I am glad that he raised it.

During the past four years, as a member of the Committee, I have had the good fortune—usually—to visit many countries in Africa, including, among others, Rwanda, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Swaziland. Over the past nine months, I have visited Eritrea, to see mine clearance; Congo, with the all-party group on the great lakes region and genocide prevention; and Ghana and Nigeria, with the Select Committee. Only two weeks ago, I visited Sudan, with the all-party group led by my colleague, the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson).

I want to talk specifically about African development and to concentrate on the Congo, Sudan and Nigeria. I recommend to everyone in the House, and to those who accuse us of swanning off around the world, that they do not include any of those countries on their list of holiday destinations. I want to examine how the situation in those countries can shed light on NEPAD—the New Partnership for Africa's Development—and whether it supports President Mbeki's proclamation of the African renaissance that he wants to see in the new millennium.

I visited the Congo last August. Congolese people described the country as the heart of Africa. Many people will know of Joseph Conrad's powerful story, "Heart of Darkness", which was set in the Congo. As the Secretary of State mentioned, the country is the same size as western Europe. During the past three years, it has experienced an appalling civil war. That followed the ghastly legacy of Mobutu, which dates back to the cold war, Lumumba and the Belgian colonisation and all that involved.

The country is divided into three areas: the west is controlled from Kinshasa by the Kabila regime; the north-east is ruled by a client government of Uganda; while the south-east is controlled by a client government of Rwanda. None of those ruling groups has any legitimacy. The idea that Kabila should be president of the Congo because his adopted father—murdered a few years ago in suspicious circumstances—was the president lacks credibility; it certainly has no democratic legitimacy.

As many people know, the Rwandans and the Ugandans have legitimate security concerns in the Congo, as well as some less legitimate interests in mineral exploitation. We were told that about 800 sq km of virgin rain forest has been logged out in the area where the Ugandan army is operating. I do not know whether that is true.

In addition, the Zimbabweans appear to be looting diamonds in the south of the country. There were Angolans and Namibians in the country, but I am not certain whether they have pulled out. There are about 4,000 UN troops in the country—not a tremendous presence in a country the size of western Europe.

There is a list of problems. For example, there is an obvious absence of any form of education or health system in large parts of the country. There is grinding poverty and starvation. There are many internally displaced people, with all the difficulties that that entails. More than 2.5 million people have died during the past three years, because of the war and from starvation.

The country is fertile, however. It is rich in minerals and there is fantastic rain forest, which is a resource and a joy, yet there are dreadful problems and the situation does not appear to be improving. As a member of an African NGO said to us: "How beats the heart of Africa?" Not well.

Ten days ago I was in Sudan. Geographically, it is the biggest country in Africa. The south, which we visited, is fertile and the country has oil revenues, but a civil war has raged there for 35 of the past 46 years. About 2 million people have died during the past 19 years. There are 4 million internally displaced people. Slavery is practised by the Baggara—tribes on horseback. That is unbelievable in the 21st century. In the south, the Baggara have been acting as militia for the Government, and they may still be doing so.

There is a northern Government, based in Khartoum, who can be described briefly as a Muslim, Arab Government although the definition is not quite that simple. They have declared a jihad on their own people in the south, who are, in essence, black Africans whose religion is Christian or animist. In both the south and the north, there is appalling poverty; we saw only a tiny bit of it in a week, but we heard of worse things. In the south, I saw poverty such as I have never seen—it was extremely striking. Operation Lifeline Sudan will cost about $160 million this year. Thrown into that melting pot is the fact that between 1991 and 1996, Sudan was the home of Osama bin Laden, with all that that entailed.

The third country that I want to consider is Nigeria. It has the largest population in Africa: between one in four and one in five black Africans live there. The population is about 125 million, and one estimate is that it will probably grow to 141 million by the end of the decade. Corruption is endemic. As the Secretary of State acknowledged, two thirds of the population live in appalling poverty on less than a dollar a day, in an oil-rich country. The revenue from oil alone is $18 billion a year.

The rate of infection from HIV is about 5.8 per cent., yet 95 per cent. of the population use no form of contraception at all. As we left Abuja airport—which is something else—we saw that Abacha's photograph was

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

still displayed. Abacha was so evil that the Select Committee has interviewed representatives of the Nigerian Government, who have demanded the return of the stolen money from UK banks. General Babangida—for many years the military dictator—continues to live in Nigeria in great luxury.

We met the independent commission on corrupt practices—a charming retired judge and his team. I am sure that they are well-meaning. They boasted that during the past six years they had indicted six people, two of whom were border policemen who had accepted a bribe from American travellers who wanted to enter the country. This was the same country where a former military dictator was living in enormous luxury with money looted from his country.

We passed through many checkpoints. At one, I saw a lorry driver throwing money to the police. Later that day, in Kaduna, I accosted a senator and asked him about the incident. He said that the lorry driver was probably just being nice.

Our consideration of NEPAD should start in the heart of Africa, in the largest country, and in the country with the largest population. Yesterday, the Select Committee interviewed representatives from the UNHCR, who pointed out that NEPAD made no mention of refugees and internationally displaced people. The UNHCR provided us with a document that stated:

"The issue of forced displacement has not featured explicitly in the discussions . . . of NEPAD."

That is a matter of concern as there are so many displaced people around Africa owing to the conflicts there.

NEPAD is of course about development, but it identifies two priorities—peace and security, and governance—as conditions for sustainable development, with all that the two concepts entail. That is sensible, and I am sure that all hon. Members wish NEPAD well. However, action is required, not words, and we need to see evidence of good results, not just statements of good intent.

I am sure that the Secretary of State and her Department would largely agree with what I am saying—generally they have been doing a pretty good job on this and on other matters—so I am not raising a partisan issue. I support the Government in their efforts. I was particularly encouraged by the Secretary of State's comments about looking at the windows for peace in Sudan, Congo and Angola. I am delighted by her optimism, but not 100 per cent. convinced.

We must ask what, if anything, can be done. It is not easy, and none of us would pretend that it is; I certainly do not claim to have solutions. Nevertheless, it is worth considering what can be done in Congo. I saw the Rwandan ambassador yesterday; I think that she is a good person. There is a great security problem in Rwanda. Those hon. Members who have visited the country with the Select Committee on International Development—two or three of those present have done so—know of the awful genocide and what the Interahamwe, who are now in Congo, meant for the Rwandan people.

The international community must ask much more loudly what Zimbabwe is doing in the Congo and what role it is playing in the civil war, financially or otherwise. The Lusaka accords can work—they have a great deal of support—but more pressure must be applied to make them work and to bring about proper inter-Congolese dialogue, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), but seems to have stalled. The international community can help, but it must speak with one voice. When our Belgian counterparts held the presidency of the Commission last year, they tried to broker a deal that recognised the Kabila regime as that which governed the whole of Congo. On what grounds—le fils de papa? It is not good enough, and I appeal to the Government to do yet more.

On Sudan, I applaud the Government. The Secretary of State's visit in January this year, the appointment of former ambassador Goulty as her special representative, and the work of the United States in appointing Senator Danforth, were positive developments, but more is needed. I did not leave Sudan terribly encouraged by what I had seen. IGAD—the Intergovernmental Authority on Development—has the basis of an agreement, but it needs further pressure and support from us, from America, from the United Nations and from countries such as Egypt. Egypt views Sudan as part of what would have been called, during the cold war, its sphere of influence. It is for the Sudanese to determine what happens in Sudan, not for the Egyptians. I commend the Government for what they have done in Sudan, but urge them to do more.

Mr. Drew: As one of the famous four who went to Sudan, I am keen to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say and entirely concur. Does he agree that part of the complexity of the problem is that as many peace formulas are being suggested as there are nations in Africa and, indeed, nations outside Africa, all of which have their own opinions? We need a co-ordinated effort between the north and the south to ensure that peace is secured at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Robathan: I do not want to be drawn too far down that road, because my views on how serious both parties are about achieving peace in Sudan may not assist in doing so.

As we all know, the world has enough problems at the moment. In Sudan there is talk in the press of setting up camps to train mujaheddin to fight in Palestine and/or Afghanistan. That should bring home to us that this is not an isolated issue. The Sudanese Government under President al-Bashir came to power in 1989 with the National Islamic Front, and I believe that we had sanctions against Sudan from 1991 to 1996. Since then, the National Islamic Front has been transformed from a military dictatorship into a civilian Government, still under President al-Bashir and with almost exactly the same members, apart from Turabi. They have no more legitimacy now than they did when they seized power in 1989, neither do they have any more of a democratic mandate or any more justice on their side.

International pressure could bring about a greater chance of peace and greater agreement. The people of the south are determined to have self-determination—that may be another word for independence; who can tell?—and want a referendum. The Sudanese Government agreed to that at Asmara in 1998, and it should be held. The south is set on self-determination, but the northern Government are less than keen on granting it.

I turn again to Nigeria, where I fear that a time bomb is waiting to explode. There is galloping population growth, AIDS, an amazing juxtaposition of poverty and riches, governors not in the least interested in the governed, pressure on land, reports of 4,000 people killed in riots over Sharia law, and violence. It was apparent to me that on the streets there was violence of a kind that is not normally seen elsewhere. In one little street one afternoon I saw people attacking one another. Nigeria is so important, and the people of that enormous country must take responsibility themselves. President Obasanjo speaks the right language, but he is not taking the necessary action.

I remind the Minister of a letter that he sent me this week about a company that I have mentioned before—Julius Berger, a German construction company that has cornered the market in construction sites around Nigeria, not least an enormous modern stadium that is being built in Abuja, and makes the dome look cheap and well organised. It is a byword for corruption on the streets of Abuja. I shall not go into everything that I said in my letter to the Minister, but in his reply he says that he is not aware of any allegations concerning the company. I point him in the direction of the Nigerian press, which contains clear allegations, if not proof, about the matter. It took my researcher, who is rather good at such things, about five minutes to run them off the internet. People on the streets of Abuja and in our high commission are aware of those allegations.

In his letter, the Minister says that if I have specific allegations I can contact the anti-corruption commission in Abuja. While we were there, we talked to a delightful and well-meaning retired judge. I mentioned General Babangida and asked how a man who had looted his country could live in such luxury, holding court, in Nigeria. He said that nobody had come forward with allegations about that. I said that I could show him a book by Karl Meier called "This House has Fallen", which contains a long list of allegations. Up spoke a rather grave person from civil society who said, "The point is, Your Honour, if you make an allegation about this, you are likely to disappear the next day." So not many people are willing to put themselves forwards as witnesses in court. I think that we all understand that. I say to the Government that if we, as a friend of, and donor to, Nigeria do not pursue these allegations with our European partners such as Germany, we will not be doing Nigeria any good.

I have spoken for long enough, and although I wanted to concentrate on Africa, I have not discussed in any depth AIDS, the ghastly black death that is stalking the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, and I have hardly dwelt on poverty. I am an optimist by nature, but it is difficult to be optimistic when one has seen some of the things that we on the Select Committee have seen. Certainly there is cause for optimism in some countries, which the Secretary of State mentioned. In many ways, Rwanda and Uganda are beacons of hope, but it is a pity that they are both involved in the war in the Congo. There is peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia, although as the Secretary of State so rightly said, what on earth were they fighting about in the first place?

We need to look at the state of that poor benighted continent. I have picked two items from today's media. The first says that Zimbabwe is threatening its 12,000 Asian traders. Is not this where we were in 1971 or 1972 with President Amin? Have we learned nothing in 30 years? The second is a report on the BBC this morning about the state of starvation in Malawi. I do not know a great deal about Malawi, but I do know that there are serious allegations of corruption there. It is desperately sad when a country that is fertile ends up with starvation.

I commend DFID for its strong stand, but I urge it to be a little stronger on the question of good governance and corruption. We do no favours to Africans in Nigeria or anywhere else if we keep quiet, if we are diplomatic and if we pull our punches. We need to tell the truth. The world has problems enough in the middle east and Afghanistan. The global village is a dreadful cliché, but it is true that there is a link between Osama bin Laden, the mujaheddin and whatever else one wants to mention. Let us support NEPAD and wish Africa well, but let us not use wishy-washy words and pretend that things are going well when they ain't. The scale of the problem of governance needs to be understood. The kleptocrats who run much of Africa need to know, as they drive in their Mercedes cars past the peasants who have no shoes, that the world will not support such behaviour.

More than anything, Africans and African Governments must take responsibility for themselves. "The Case for Aid for the Poorest Countries" says:

> "Without serious action by poor country governments to address valid governance concerns, there will be no breakthrough on building support for increased aid, and limited development progress."

The Department's annual report, published yesterday, says:

> "Aid works only when developing countries themselves drive the reform agenda."

The Government are absolutely right, and I wish them well. We need to show ourselves to be serious, as the African Governments must show themselves to be serious, about working towards just peace, conflict prevention, good governance and reforms, and then our development aid can be so much more effective in meeting the huge challenges in Africa.

4.43 pm

Hugh Bayley (City of York): The frighteningly high vote won by Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of the French presidential election has sent shockwaves across Europe, and it should concern particularly those of us who are interested in international development. We need to ask why so many people in France—it could be as many in this country—rally behind a racist xenophobe who simply does not realise that, in this globalising world, each of us in Europe is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) made clear, linked with others in the world, and our livelihoods and prosperity are interdependent.

What happened in France ought to remind us all that both time and distance play terrible tricks on memory. It is 60 years since the first French Jews were deported to Auschwitz on 27 March 1942. Saturday 4 May, the day before the second round of the French presidential election, will be the 60th anniversary of the day when the first Jews were gassed in Auschwitz. Every single voter in France should reflect on that on the day before they cast their vote. Everybody in France should remember that 83,000 French citizens were sent to the death camps—an episode that Jean-Marie Le Pen describes as a footnote to history.

[Hugh Bayley]

Here in this country—in Burnley, Bexley, Enfield and everywhere else that the British National party has candidates in elections in the same week—we need to reflect on where fascist ideology leads. We need to address the political issues that lie beneath what is happening in many countries in Europe, such as the social deprivation and the divisions that allow extremism to grow.

It is not only time—the passing of 60 years—that allows a memory to fade; it is also distance, which allows us to forget, or not to notice, human rights abuse, hunger and disease in other parts of the world. If we, the rich world, do not address injustice and the causes of poverty in developing countries, not only do we fail in our moral duty, but we allow conditions in which extremism in those countries will grow. We know from last autumn that that can have appalling consequences, both for people in developing countries and for us in the developed world.

That is why we need to break through the blocks in our collective memory, and why the financing for development conference in Monterrey is so important. The Zedillo report, commissioned by the United Nations, estimated that if we are to achieve the millennium development goals by 2015, we will need collectively to invest in aid some $50 billion more than we do now every year until 2015.

Real progress was made at Monterrey. The EU, under pressure from our Government, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for International Development, agreed to increase its share of GNP devoted to development assistance from 0.32 to 0.39 per cent. by 2006. That will contribute an additional $7 billion a year in aid. In addition, the United States agreed an extra $5 billion a year in aid for each year from 2004 until 2006. That shows the importance—this point might have been better made in this afternoon's debate in Westminster Hall—of engaging with our ally, the United States of America, and of seeking its help in terms of working for important political goals from Europe. I see the fingerprints of our Prime Minister's conversations with President Bush—if I am not mixing the metaphor too much—in that decision by the United States President.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Clearly, the sums agreed at Monterrey and under the comprehensive spending review are significant and important. Nevertheless, does the hon. Gentleman recall the Secretary of State's intervention on the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) when, as I understand it, she confirmed that debt relief was included in the figure as a percentage of GDP? Although such sums show increasing progress in this country, we cannot say that we have met our UN targets until we hit 0.7 per cent. in overseas aid.

Hugh Bayley: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. He could have been reading the next line of my speech. I thank him for that—I need not read that particular line; it can be taken as read.

Very significant progress has been made, and it has been led by this country. However, we are nowhere near the 0.7 per cent. target, or the Zedillo target of an additional $50 billion a year. The world's current official development assistance spend is some $54 billion, and Zedillo proposes a doubling of official development assistance to some $100 billion or £105 billion a year, in each year between now and 2015, if we are to meet those goals. The Monterrey pledges by the United States and by all the member states of the European Union acting together will provide an additional $12 billion—an increase of some 20 or 25 per cent. That is a significant amount, but it is by no means enough to attain those development goals.

That was acknowledged by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Red Book that he issued on Budget day, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West pointed out. The Red Book states that, because the Monterrey pledges have not met the target set by the UN or by the World Bank,

> "The UK will continue to seek further progress, to ensure that no developing country genuinely committed to good governance, economic reform and poverty reduction will be denied the chance to achieve the Millennium Development Goals through lack of finance."

If that will not come from the pledges already made, we must ask ourselves and the Government where those additional resources will come from. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said that we should look in closer detail at the Chancellor of the Exchequer's proposal for an international development trust fund. That is a good idea and I second the proposal. As Members of the House, we should give whatever support we can to the Chancellor's proposal and, in our contact with parliamentarians from other countries, we should talk up his suggestion of a trust fund to pool resources of donor countries and to attract additional contributions from the private sector.

We should also consider the proposals made by George Soros and others to allocate additional special drawing rights to developing countries. The last time that the Bretton Woods institutions allocated additional SDRs was, I think, in 1981. Those institutions are in a position to issue further SDRs, and we should consider that seriously.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) that we should consider the Tobin tax, which is gaining greater international recognition. There are some problems, however, with seeking to generate revenue for development by taxing currency transactions. International trade might slow as a result, which could be harmful to developing countries. Furthermore, the euro zone might see a competitive advantage in placing a tax on currency transactions for those trading partners that have to exchange currencies to trade, as it would not apply within the euro zone. To put those fears at rest, if the Tobin tax were introduced, perhaps the euro zone should propose an additional contribution of its own. Nevertheless, the Tobin tax is an important proposal, and we should consider its potential for contributing to development.

If we are to bridge the Zedillo financing gap, we need to consider reforming the terms of trade. Most hon. Members touched on that. I hope that the debate gives my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State the clear and direct message that hon. Members on both sides of the House think that the development agenda needs to focus sharply on how the Doha trade round delivers for poor people in poor countries.

We know that private sector financial activity contributes far more to the GDP of even sub-Saharan Africa than aid does. We also know that the least

developed countries provide and receive a declining share of trade. The World Bank estimates that had Africa maintained the share of trade that it had in the late 1960s, its income would be higher by some $70 billion a year, and the Zedillo gap would not exist.

Trade has the potential to narrow the financing gap if there is a greater volume of trade between developed and developing countries. However, if it is to provide benefits for poor people in those countries, the terms of trade need to change. We need to focus in particular on agricultural subsidies, as the hon. Member for Banbury said, and on intellectual property rights, which have acted as a barrier to the purchase of certain medicines in developing countries.

In addition to measures such as special drawing rights and the Tobin tax, we should try to create a goal—or, better still, a financial instrument—that provides an incentive to increase aid and at the same time to lower trade barriers, so that we increase trade between the least developed countries and developed countries. The first thing to address is the need to lower export subsidies from rich countries, which cost us some $1 billion a day. Rich countries spend five times as much on export subsidies as they do on development assistance. Oxfam's report "Rigged Rules and Double Standards", published a couple of weeks ago, makes the point that export subsidies do not just cost us money, but cost developing countries about $100 billion a year, which is twice as much as they receive in aid.

We need to liberalise our economy to get rid of export subsidies, because they harm development. We also need to encourage developing countries to liberalise their economies. The Tinbergen Institute estimated for the World Bank that developing countries would stand to gain up to $155 billion a year if they further liberalised their economies, which is three times the amount they receive in aid.

Perhaps alongside the 0.7 per cent. of GDP development goal, a second development goal could aim to increase the volume of trade to least developed countries by a certain percentage by 2015. Perhaps we should even increase the level of overseas development assistance and decrease export subsidies so that by 2015, or some other date, they are in balance. If we agreed such a goal, it would provide an incentive for people involved in trade in all developed countries to address the difficult issues, such as agricultural subsidies and textile tariffs, which need to be addressed if there is to be a prospect of meeting the millennium development goals.

We should consider also not only where the money comes from but where it should go. We should be guided by the Secretary of State's excellent report, which, like other Members, I welcome. It shows that the Government have a strong record of achievement and of global leadership on international development. It shows also, with commendable clarity, where the international donor community is falling down.

Globally, although we may be moving towards achieving the millennium goals, we are not moving fast enough to achieve them by 2015. At page 59 of my right hon. Friend's report, a graph shows with great clarity that in sub-Saharan Africa we are making progress on primary education enrolment, an issue on which the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) touched, but that virtually no progress has been made on moving towards the poverty alleviation goal. It shows also that the public health measures are worse now than they were in 1990. Infant mortality in sub-Saharan Africa is worse than in 1990, and becoming worse still. The percentage of births attended by a trained and skilled health worker is also declining.

The lessons that I draw from the graphs in the report are that a greater proportion of our aid should go to sub-Saharan Africa. Other Members have mentioned the Select Committee's report on EU aid, which shows that over the past decade the proportion of aid going to low-income countries has fallen from 76 to 39 per cent. in 2000. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is as keen as any member of the Select Committee to increase the proportion of EU aid that goes to the least developed countries.

I believe that the slide away from aid to the poorest countries has been tolerated within the EU because it has not been clear enough where EU aid is going. That is because, unlike each member state, the EU itself does not report how it spends development assistance money according to the OECD's development assistance committee criteria. We in the UK know how much of our aid goes on primary health care, on clean water and on trying to meet primary education enrolment goals. People in the Netherlands, Sweden and France know the same. However, if such questions are put to Mr. Poul Nielson, the EU Development Commissioner, he has to say, "I am sorry, I don't know the answers. Our reporting systems do not provide that information."

To the EU and the Commissioner's credit, they have agreed that they should be able to answer those questions. However, the single most important reform that the EU could make in order to show that it realises that what is happening now is wrong and must change, is to create mechanisms that show where EU development assistance goes. As EU development spending will increase substantially over the next few years as a result of a deal won by my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State at the financing for development conference, it is all the more important to ensure that the increased stream of funding goes to help the poorest people in the poorest countries. If it does not, we shall not meet the millennium development goals.

I shall quickly highlight two other points. There is the need to tackle conflict prevention in Africa, which my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), having just returned from the Sudan, will want to discuss. I welcome especially the appointment of Alan Goulty as the special representative of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I met him when I went to the Sudan six years ago. He is an excellent diplomat, an Arabist through and through, and he is totally committed to the future of the Sudan. If anybody can act as a bridge and enable the peace process to move forward, it is Alan Goulty.

Secondly, on health, we had some very good analysis of the public health problems in developing countries from the independent commission on macro-economics and health, and we had two good proposals from the Chancellor in the Red Book: first, to create a tax credit for research and development of vaccines and medicines to prevent and treat malaria, TB and AIDS, which I warmly welcome; and, secondly, a relief for responsible donations of medical supplies by UK companies. Those are good initiatives, which I am delighted to see.

[Hugh Bayley]

Access to necessary and cost-effective drugs should not be discretionary. There should be a right of access to basic health care for poor people in poor countries, just as there is a right of access to health care for richer people in a country such as ours. That means that we need to amend the TRIPS agreement—the World Trade Organisation's agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights—in a way that retains the patent protection of pharmaceutical drugs in developed countries, without which pharmaceutical companies will not continue to invest in researching and developing the new drugs that we all, in the developed as well as the developing world, want, but which also extends to poorer countries the opportunity to purchase cheaper copies of patent-protected drugs.

That opportunity should be available to all countries, not just to those manufacturing copies under licence. If we fail to resolve this issue in the Doha negotiations, it will be unethical. The trials of drugs to tackle AIDS, TB and malaria must by their nature take place in Africa, where there is a large concentration of people suffering from those diseases, and it would be medically unethical to use Africa to trial drugs for use in other parts of the world and not to make those drugs available to people living in Africa.

Finally, I propose the creation of an international panel on medical ethics, from which the pharmaceutical industry should seek ethical clearance both for trials of drugs in developing countries, and for the licensing of the manufacture and distribution of pharmaceutical drugs in the developing world. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ask her health officials to examine the practicality of such a proposal, and to discuss it with Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director-General of the World Health Organisation.

5.8 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Not only did I anticipate what the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) would say with reference to the 0.7 per cent. target; he anticipated what I would say with regard to TRIPS and the health needs of developing countries.

On behalf of Plaid Cymru and the Scottish national party, I put on record our welcome for the debate, which we hope will become an annual event. We are pleased to have the opportunity to take part in it, but I have one small suggestion to make. The Order Paper should refer to the annual report as the relevant document for the debate. It would be useful for other hon. Members to realise that this was an opportunity to hear what the Government have been doing during the past year.

The debate has been well attended, considering that local government elections are taking place somewhere or other, though not in Wales. Those participating, however, tend to be the usual suspects. Although the standard of debate has been very high, I am sure that if we had an opportunity to widen the forum, other Members might be called to speak.

Mr. Robathan: We might not get called.

Mr. Thomas: Well, that might happen, but let us hope that other Members at least come along to intervene and ask questions about the report and that the debate becomes an annual event.

The debate is also worth while because this is the Global Campaign for Education's week of action, which reminds us about the central goal of ensuring that its action plan on free primary education for all should be decided by the end of this year. I hope that the Minister will say in his winding-up speech whether he thinks that that action plan is on track to be agreed by the end of this year. However, I want to confine my remarks to the TRIPS regime and GATS and to some of the difficulties that we need to address to deliver health care to developing countries.

There is obviously a disproportionate burden of death and illness in developing countries, especially because of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Some 2.4 million people have died of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. A further 25.3 million people in the region are HIV positive, of whom only 25,000 receive the drugs that could revolutionise their treatment. Many of those drugs are still under patent.

Under the TRIPS agreement, many countries that presently produce generic drugs, such as India, will need to abandon that production under a new system of patent protection by 2005. We have to review how the new system progresses. It is clear that generic drugs are much cheaper because there is a competitive market and no research and development costs. A triple combination treatment for HIV/AIDS costs $930 per person per year, whereas a generic version of that treatment is available for $250 per person per year. Nevertheless, we have to take into account the fact that per capita spending on health in Africa is about $10 per person per year, so there is still a huge gap to overcome.

I had an opportunity to see the health interaction between this developed country and developing countries this week, when the Nigerian Minister of Health, Professor Nwosu, visited a company in my constituency. The company, Micropharm, produces snake venom antidotes using sheep. We have a few sheep in Wales, but not so many snakes.

Mr. Robathan: There are snakes, too.

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman may know that, in Wales, people from Aberdare, as I am, are known as snakes.

The sheep are not threatened and I am not talking about animal experimentation; they are simply used to produce the antibodies to the snake venom. Those antibodies are exported to developing countries, especially those in Africa. In Nigeria, 1,000 deaths a year are caused by the carpet viper. Micropharm produces the antidote to that snake's venom in my constituency.

Incidentally, Micropharm has a wonderful stock line. A bit like the Trotters' van, it says, "New York, London, Ffostrasol." That is a wonderful way to bring home to us all the international aspects of things that happen in our constituencies. I want to put on record my thanks to Professor John Landon, who was responsible for establishing that company and who works in those three towns, which are, of course, in three countries.

One of the difficulties is how to get our best technology and medical understanding into developing countries to help them. TRIPS is obviously designed to help by protecting patent rights to encourage companies to undertake research and development and to supply the

resulting products to developing countries, where they will presumably be bought by money from the developed countries' overseas aid budgets. I suppose that that could be called a virtuous circle.

There are some difficulties with TRIPS however and some exemptions to the way that it works. I understand that an exemption can be made in national emergencies. I think that the United States Government used that exemption after the events of 11 September to increase the production of anthrax vaccine for its domestic market. One of the key issues that we need to consider is how we can ensure the domestic availability of medicines under the new TRIPS regime.

After 2005, developing countries that do not have a domestic capability for developing generic medicines will no longer be able to buy those generic drugs. That is my central concern. Countries that produce them now, such as India, will have to come under the TRIPS agreement by 2005. That leaves other developing countries to develop generic medicines for their own domestic markets, but I am not convinced that they will have developed the necessary capacity to do so by 2005 or even by 2016, which is the latest possible date for the least developed countries.

The problem was recognised at the WTO meeting in Doha in November where there was a declaration on TRIPS and public health. That declaration agreed that the primacy of public health over intellectual property rights should be protected and agreed the rights of Governments to use public health safeguards within TRIPS. The Doha declaration said:

"We recognise that WTO members with insufficient or no manufacturing capacities in the pharmaceutical sector could face difficulties in making effective use of compulsory licensing under the TRIPS Agreement. We instruct the Council for TRIPS to find an expeditious solution to this problem and to report to the General Council before the end of 2002."

The problem has been recognised and there is an instruction to find a solution to it.

I have received a suggestion from Oxfam as a possible solution to the problem. It is the removal of TRIPS restrictions on exports of public health-related products. Under article 30, the TRIPS agreement could be amended or interpreted in such a way as to allow countries to export generic versions to countries that cannot manufacture them themselves. That would be a simple way of overcoming the possibly temporary, but nevertheless real, difficulty that TRIPS in its present form may present for some developing countries. I understand that the European Commission in its own paper has more or less gone along those lines. The African Group has also called for a similar approach.

Hugh Bayley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's approach. It will be necessary also to build in some mechanism that stops what the pharmaceutical industry would call parallel trade—the selling back of drugs from poor countries where they are available at low prices to rich countries. If that happened, pharmaceutical companies would not make the profits to pay for the research and development of drugs that we all want. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is an important nut to crack as well?

Mr. Thomas: I agree completely. It is important to avoid that. It would lead to exploitation on all sides and would not help developing countries at the end of the day. I understand that the UK Government have set up an independent commission to look at TRIPS. No doubt it will examine those issues. We look forward to a report on that and possibly even a further opportunity to debate these matters on the Floor of the House.

TRIPS does not just affect health; it affects access to knowledge, software and so on. It is important to emphasise, as all hon. Members have done, that if we are to achieve health improvements in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, it comes down to money. With TRIPS or any other agreement, it comes down to how much money we can release into development in those sub-Saharan countries. That, in turn, comes down to getting our 0.7 per cent. target and a timetable to achieve it on the Government's agenda. It may be on the agenda, but it has not yet been agreed.

Related to TRIPS is the General Agreement on Trade in Services. One side of the health coin is the provision of medicines and the other is the provision of public services, such as clean water and sanitation. There are some concerns with the current GATS negotiations, and I shall touch on them briefly. We have perhaps not yet had the opportunity in Parliament fully to scrutinise GATS. I am not aware of a debate having taken place in Westminster Hall or on the Floor of the House, yet there seems to be increasing pressure within the GATS regime. In theory, liberalisation does not necessarily lead to privatisation, so GATS should be at the heart of the way in which developing countries improve their economies. We have as much obligation to lower our trade barriers as those countries do to operate in an open and liberalised market, but that could lead to increasing emphasis on the privatisation of public services and we could exclude developing countries from the virtuous circle that we have achieved in this country.

I am slightly concerned that the United Kingdom has missed a trick in GATS. Given our increasing use of private health companies and the private finance initiative to meet our needs, it could be argued that GATS will start to affect our own public services. Whether or not one accepts that argument—the Government obviously do not—we need a debate in the House on GATS. It is also clear from the report of the International Development Committee and an early-day motion signed by 262 MPs that we need an independent assessment of the way in which GATS affects services in this country and, more importantly, services in developing countries.

Finally, we must complete the circle. In a recent inspiring speech to the London School of Economics, Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General, talked about the road to sustainable development from Doha via Monterrey to Johannesburg which is bringing together trade, development and environmental issues in a unified package to support sustainable development and maximise our contribution to it. I want to draw the attention of the House to three key recommendations in the report of the Select Committee on Environmental Audit on which I serve. First, the world summit on sustainable development provides the best opportunity to establish a framework for integrating trade and sustainable development agendas. Although the Environmental Audit Committee does not agree, corporate social responsibility should be on the Johannesburg agenda, and we should work towards an international agreement on it. The Johannesburg summit should be the key reference point for future negotiations on TRIPS, GATS and so on.

[Mr. Thomas]

Secondly, we need a better evaluation of the UN's commitment to the summit, as some countries are not pulling their weight. In particular, are we doing enough in the European Union to allow all countries fully to participate in the summit and have their voices heard? Finally, we must ensure that agreements on financing development, particularly those made in Monterrey, are linked to action plans agreed in Johannesburg. If we do not do so, Johannesburg will be just another talking shop. Whatever Rio's faults, our understanding of the environment is much clearer thanks to that summit than it was 10 years ago. In 10 years' time, this country's understanding of development issues and the alleviation of poverty should be as clear as our understanding of the environment post-Rio. We have an opportunity to begin that process in Johannesburg, but our understanding must be linked to serious action plans.

5.23 pm

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am relieved that another annual report has not come out while I have been waiting to speak; however, it is a joy to have an opportunity to contribute to our debate.

I want to talk about a crucial issue that many people have mentioned—trade. The theme of my contribution to the globalisation and anti-globalisation debate is the issue of when we need more freedom and when we need more regulation. The territory is incredibly complicated: some people say they are for globalisation without qualification and others say they are against it without qualification, but both groups are wrong. I praise the Secretary of State and the Department for the report; the complexities of the issues that it tackles make them the most intellectually taxing that anyone has to deal with.

I raise the issue of trade because I fear that we are simply not doing enough on many aspects of trade and are not reducing poverty as much as we could because we are not sufficiently focused on trade. I use the word "trade" in a very broad sense, to cover any exchange relationships between the developed and developing worlds. I shall speak mainly about Africa, because I am afraid that it has become my obsession, as it has for many others.

Sub-Saharan Africa now accounts for only 1.3 per cent. of world trade—one third of its share at the beginning of the 1980s. It is falling behind, and the faults lie in the countries themselves and in our part of the world. While they are falling behind, we and they are stimulating terrorism, poverty, the collapse of the rule of law and so on. In the words of Mike Moore, director general of the World Trade Organisation,

"poverty is a time bomb lodged against the heart of liberty".

In passing, I should like to praise Mike Moore. If ever a person received a hospital pass, he did so by taking over the WTO just before Seattle. If there was ever an inheritance that one would not have wanted, that was it. However, we passed through the years and arrived at Doha. Everyone will find limitations to Doha, but the organisation was a stable one and progress could be made. If the WTO had been destroyed, it would have been a major setback for development in the world. Even now, trade in developing countries generates more than 30 times as much revenue per capita through exports as those countries receive in aid. In the words of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry after Doha,

"it has been estimated that halving protection in agriculture, industrial goods and services could boost developing countries' incomes by around 150 billion dollars a year—three times the value of all aid budgets put together."

As I said, I am interpreting the concept of trade very broadly to include all the economic interchanges between rich and poor nations. For example, it includes the trade in people. I do not have the slightest doubt that we exploit the developing world in terms of its people. We may put in some funds for primary education, but we then rake off enormous benefits from those countries' talented people. As my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) will recall, we were told in Ghana and Nigeria that there were more Ghanaian doctors around New York than in Ghana. The number of Indian scientists in the United States is colossal. Many developing countries hate to see their brightest and best go to American universities because they do not come home. The United States is not only the least generous of the G7 countries in terms of its aid assistance, which is often tied and provided on political rather than humanitarian grounds, but is the most extractive from the developing world in people terms.

We are rightly putting a lot of emphasis on universal basic education, but that will not pay off as much as we would want if we, the Americans and other developed countries pick off the brightest and best in what resembles a modern version of the 11-plus, whereby we put in the primary education but many of the brightest and best do not serve their country. They must have individual liberty, but it is worrying that one of the consequences of providing what we call aid is that we then help ourselves. In people terms, that happens a lot.

We know that that is the case because we are concerned in this country about how we are seeking to make good our shortage of teachers, nurses and scientists by taking a disproportionate number from the developing world. I think that we should have an analysis of the balance of trade in people. DFID was working on such a project some time ago, but I wonder whether there has been any real analysis of the account with regard to what we put in to help people and what we take out in terms of people.

Another aspect of trade is the trade in money. A great deal is said about the need to have foreign direct investment going into developing countries, but how can that work if the locals, and others, ship it out to money markets around the world in greater quantities than are coming in? I welcome the fact that some of the Nigerian Abacha money is to go back to Nigeria. Let us take that case as the most glaring, foul example. The Nigerian Government were seeking to reclaim £4 billion that had been taken out of Nigeria by one family. DFID's worldwide budget is £3.5 billion. One Nigerian family took £500 million more out of Nigeria than this country put into the developing world. Money is being extracted on that scale.

This is where the issue of regulation comes in. That we have allowed successive Nigerian Presidents, as well as Mobutu, Mugabe, Milosevic and Saddam Hussein, to get richer while we criticise them is simply scandalous. Similarly, huge amounts of Russian money have left the country and been recycled while Russia gets poorer. I am told that about 9,000 Russian firms are registered on the island of Cyprus. Movement of money is happening on

that scale. Until 11 September, we were incredibly dilatory about all this. Afterwards—I remember the announcement—it was suddenly discovered that a large number of bureaux de change in this country were involved in money laundering. I just wonder how long that had really been known, without being acted on.

I hope that the return of the Abacha money is a sign of better things to come, but I am not sure. On our visit to Nigeria—we were the first Select Committee to go there following the return of democracy—I could find no one who knew what was happening to the oil revenues. In theory, it had been the military who had been stealing them. As I went around I asked people, "Can we see the accounts?" This ought to be a simple process: Shell extracts oil; it has a value; some of the revenue will go to Shell and some to Nigeria. Yet it is impossible to get the answer to the question of where those oil revenues are going. In theory, if democracy and transparency have taken over, we should be able to see lots of schools and clinics opening, and lots of benefit to the Nigerian people. I can only conclude, because no one could point any of those things out to us, that the "food chain" remains pretty well undisturbed. Abacha and Abubakar may have gone, but the corruption carries on. That is simply not good enough.

The issue of oil revenues takes me on to other areas in which the rules of the WTO are simply irrelevant. These include diamond smuggling and timber harvesting. We have been extremely slow to realise the importance of setting up proper regulation and policing systems, and poorer countries have been plundered of their natural resources. Sierra Leone and Angola, for example, became totally ungovernable. Countries that were literally sitting on diamond mines or oil fields were plunged into poverty.

A small London-based NGO, Global Witness, found out more about the diamond issue in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and about how the forests of Cambodia were being plundered until they were virtually extinct, than all the intelligence resources of the world's Governments could find out. We must act on that information. I praise Global Witness for its achievements; I believe that it now has some ideas about how we could tackle corruption more effectively from the British company end than we have done so far. I look forward to hearing them.

I used to think of corruption as pilfering or slippage—not very serious—but I now think that corruption in many so-called developing countries will prevent any growth at all. Its eradication is crucial to any progress and there must be more regulation. That requirement is reflected in part by the fact that the number of tax havens has grown astronomically in recent years.

We used to be able to reel off the tax havens—the Cayman Islands, Jersey, Guernsey and so on—but now the books show that there are tax havens everywhere. That, in part, is also down to the Americans, as they have simulated free trade and there is a lack of regulation. However, following 11 September, we must come together and get the Americans on our side over development. As the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said, a lot of us are being invited to America to talk to Congressmen and Senators. The whole business of tax havens must be tackled.

To me, trade also involves firms' trading practices and their impact on the welfare of citizens. That is another aspect that we do not consider enough. How much avoidable death, sickness and poverty does the developed world thrust on the developing world through its trade practices? Let me give an example that is close to my heart and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West. My constituency has a major problem with the legacy of asbestos. Only a couple of years ago, all forms of it were banned in Europe, although it has been known for decades that asbestos kills. The same firms that we have banned from selling in Europe are operating and killing in the developing world by forcing people to work without protection.

If there was ever a case of corporate manslaughter, that must be it, so I was delighted recently when former Cape Asbestos workers in South Africa received compensation in our courts. However, we still allow that form of free trade to persist. That is not acceptable, and we need more regulation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) said, we must also tackle the practice of dumping out-of-date drugs and giving them to people who do not know how to use them, which causes more harm than good.

A number of Members have referred to AIDS, which is dramatically reducing life expectancy in Africa. We must face up to what the free market is doing: large, unrestricted sums of private money go into research on keeping prosperous Americans and Europeans alive, because that is profitable for the pharmaceutical companies, but hardly any private money and only limited sums of public money go on research into a vaccine that would prevent poor Africans from getting the disease in the first place.

It is obvious that there ought to be better protection for women, who must gamble on men being responsible, which has always been a pretty dodgy thing to do.

Dr. Tonge: Hear, hear.

Tony Worthington: That is obviously the hon. Lady's experience. The serious point is that the money available for research into microbicides, which are a barrier to women catching HIV from their partner, is extremely limited. There must be much more regulation and much more direction of money in that area, because liberal trading alone simply will not work.

Another area in which our trading policies are not working is sustainable development, which we are not adequately pursuing, and because of that we are promoting future poverty rather than development. It sickens me that, having emptied the seas around Britain, our fleets are now emptying Africa's seas. We should listen to the Namibians about the fishing practices of the Spaniards—it is like going back 10 years to the fishing practices of the Spaniards in this country. They must be regulated, and should not be left to free trade.

We say that sustainable development is a major part of our policy across government. The only problem is that the Government cannot find any case in which damage to sustainable development was sufficient to prevent an arms-related export. I am waiting for an answer to a parliamentary question, which the Secretary of State says she has not seen, on whether arms sales to Africa, apart from South Africa, have gone up. At the end of last year, we managed to achieve the feat of wiping out much of Tanzania's debt with one policy initiative, and increasing its debt with another, through the sale of an inadequate, expensive and inappropriate air traffic control system.

[Tony Worthington]

Trade is immensely important, but we need to interpret it much more widely than we customarily do if we are to get a handle on it. I am in favour of freer trade, but it must be ethically steered. If free trade is allowed to run unregulated, the rich and the bully win. The wrong regulations can be equally devastating.

The European Union is full of people who, from the days of Willy Brandt and "North-South: A Programme for Survival", swear that they are in favour of development and ending poverty, but nevertheless created that abomination called the common agricultural policy, which favours rich farmers in rich countries. Food surpluses are dumped in the third world, and until recently there were tariffs against the poorest farmers in the poorest countries. We impose on poor farmers the obligation that they should not have barriers to our goods if they are to receive poverty reduction assistance from the World Bank.

Last year, we did not even have the boldness to give free access to developing world sugar under the everything but arms initiative. That had to be phased in, although its impact would be minimal. I like what Oxfam says in its admirable document "Rigged Rules and Double Standards". It has constructed an index of double standards, and the European Union wins by a short head from the United States, although that was before the US raised its steel tariffs, so perhaps it has edged ahead.

I have spent some time on the matters that we usually think of as involving trade. Over the past few years, I have become convinced that many countries in Africa are nowhere near an economic breakthrough. There have been some success stories, as the Secretary of State said. I would add horticulture in east Africa, the diamond industry in Botswana and the Customs regime in Mozambique, but they are too few and far between. Often, no progress seems to have been made at all.

I am sure that many of the conversations that members of the Select Committee had in Ghana and Nigeria about economic development could have been had at any time in the past 50 years. Cocoa growers receive a pittance for their cocoa beans, and take massive cuts when commodity prices fall. The big chocolate firms do not allow them to go into value-added territory, and they are faced with big tariffs on any value-added goods that they have.

I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West was with us when we went to a cable maker in Ghana. It mined the aluminium in Ghana, which was sent to Belgium to be processed and then sent back to Ghana to be converted into cable. The wastefulness and exploitation of that process is wrong.

If I dare, I shall say a little about the CDC. I hope that I shall not incur the Secretary of State's wrath. I have listened to the debate on the CDC, and I think that there is probably some common ground. I am sure that the Secretary of State is familiar with the concerns, shared by many hon. Members, about the direction in which the CDC is going. It may be doing well in new areas such as extending the use of mobile phones, call centres, and investing in banks. Such measures may well be sensible and may generate wealth, and it is true that it is slightly patronising to argue that the CDC should be concerned only with the primary industry of growing crops. However, as it moves into such new areas, we should remember that it is no longer involved in farming and agriculture, in which far too little is happening.

I want to return to an issue that we discussed in Westminster Hall. We frequently hear that some 80 or 90 per cent. of the populations of developing countries depend on the soil for their livelihoods. Those populations are doubling every 25 to 30 years, but few of those countries are achieving a growth rate that will exceed such increases. Regardless of profit, we must make the land more productive, so that people in the countryside can be fed and can maintain decent livelihoods, because the cities cannot cope. We must improve the life of people in the countryside, and hopefully we can also improve exports.

However, I did not sense that many of the countries I visited have an agricultural policy that uses the land to its full potential. In some countries, it is appallingly difficult to establish such a policy. Because of inheritance rules, land is repeatedly divided up, and for all manner of cultural reasons land policy is very difficult to change. Northern environmentalists resist putting our science to work because they insist that developing world farmers have all the wisdom—despite the fact that, without change, there will be deepening poverty, huge infant mortality rates and the perpetuation of squalor. In addition, one can predict desertification, an even greater lack of access to water, and the elimination of forests.

I am simply raising with the Secretary of State my concerns about the neglect of agriculture. It is true that there are success stories. Interestingly, in 15 years Vietnam has changed from being a net importer of rice to being the world's second largest exporter, but in terms of a command structure its culture is perhaps very different from Africa's.

The annual report contains little on macro-agricultural policy. Even the lengthy and very good Oxfam report on rigged rules and double standards contains nothing on agricultural policy, or on how the people will be fed and exports created.

It is argued that if one removes the European tariffs, everything will be all right, but it will not. On our visits abroad, we have examined whether there is a connection between tariffs and what can be grown. The Chairman of the International Development Committee mentioned the tomato surplus in Ghana. He will agree, however, that even if the tariffs had been right, no one in Ghana could have argued in a systematic and business-like way that that surplus was connected with any form of export market.

Much work needs to be done on agriculture. It has been neglected, and we should examine it much more fully.

5.49 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I have followed the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) on a number of occasions, and I always end up agreeing with him on most topics. A while back, with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, we spent a week going around Nigeria before the civilians took over. We were trying to impart some spirit of democracy and integrity, but I got the impression that politics in Africa more closely resembled piracy. We have to keep trying, but sometimes the feeling is that one is banging one's head against a brick wall. We can only do our best, but the debate has shown that the difficulties are very substantial.

One in five people in the world lives in abject poverty, and 1.2 billion people live on less than a dollar a day. We are part of a global community, so for us to take an interest in the rest of the world, and in improving standards, is a matter not only of morality but of self-interest.

We take for granted such things as clean running water—but if we could achieve no more than the provision of clean water in the third world and the developing world, we would have taken a great step forward.

Another matter to emerge from the debate is the need for sensible contraception. This may be slightly more controversial as a subject, but sensible contraception—especially the provision of condoms—in the developing world would be helpful, given the population growth. Indeed, the AIDS problem would have been diminished had we managed to put as much effort into convincing people in Africa of the benefits of condoms as we have into dealing with the aftermath of unsafe sex.

Today's debate is on a worthy subject, and it is being held on the day when the annual report from the Department for International Development and a report from the Select Committee on International Development are published. The House is full of experts on international development, all of whom want to debate these very important issues.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie was right to focus on trade. I believe that it is probably more important to get the world economic cake growing, and to enable countries in the third world to take advantage of an expanding trading environment, than it is to pursue many of the aid programmes that have been introduced.

As has been noted, Africa produces many primary products. The next stage for the countries in Africa is to process those products themselves. The House has heard this afternoon about the barriers that have been erected against Ghanaian chocolate, so one wonders how much chance those African countries have of breaking into the trade cycle.

All of us shop in supermarkets such as Tesco and Sainsbury's, and I am always amazed by how many products from all corners of the globe—such as wine from New Zealand or Chile, and apples or other goods from other places—are available. However, until we get African goods into the supermarkets so that salaried people can return value to the producing countries, we will not be able to raise the basic standards in those countries. The World Trade Organisation and the general agreement on tariffs and trade are therefore extremely important.

Over the past 20 years there has been a trend away from supplying aid through Governments to supplying it through NGOs. Also, big aid packages have given way to much smaller packages. Corruption is endemic in parts of the globe, so it is sometimes better to bypass the governmental structures and deal with people in villages and local communities.

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Many failed states in Africa, such as Nigeria, have wrecked Government systems. If we do not help to rebuild the systems in those countries, we will never get their economies to function properly, and we will not be able to provide health care for everyone. We need to help countries with crumbled public institutions to build decent, modern state systems, so that they can have decent economies and take advantage of trading opportunities.

Mr. Syms: The Secretary of State makes a good point. We certainly have to do our best to raise standards in those countries.

The commitment to providing primary school education for all is important, and we must also ensure that girls as well as boys benefit. That would at least allow the intellectual capital of the countries involved to develop.

A lot of good things are happening, and there are many initiatives, but we must ensure that they are followed through, and that we measure the progress being made. As has been noted in the debate, Britain is pretty good at measuring or tracking what is going on, whereas the EU is not quite so good.

I still find it difficult to criticise the EU for giving money to Poland or Hungary. At the beginning of the debate the Secretary of State referred to the straits of Gibraltar. As Spain and North Africa are very close, with only 20 miles between them, we have to take an interest. The Oder river is on the other side of Europe and, given the transition and the shock of the change from a communist to a free-market system in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, it is inevitable that the EU will take an interest. It is in our interest to do so. If the transformation in eastern Europe goes well, Europe will become more prosperous, with bigger markets and more citizens. Providing that we get the politics right, Africa will have the opportunity to buy into that.

Given the relative position of South Korea and Ghana 40 years ago, it is interesting to note what South Korea has achieved since then. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie referred to Vietnam, and I wonder whether the Asians might be the best people to impart what they know to Africa rather than us in the west. There seems to be a certain ethos, a way of doing things, in Asia that can take countries from poverty and drive them, in the Confucian tradition, towards a degree of success, as China has succeeded in doing.

Tony Baldry: Does my hon. Friend agree that we do not know very much about why some states succeed and others fail? Perhaps we should do more work on finding out why some succeed so well.

Mr. Syms: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Comparative case studies would be useful. Some states in Asia have managed to succeed and go from poverty to relative wealth within a generation, without necessarily having civil wars. They have not all been democracies—indeed, Asia contains countries with many types of government.

The hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) made a good point about failed states, particularly those with debt problems. Argentina's debt is causing real stress there. *The Economist* has made the point that there is no bankruptcy or receivership pathway for countries as there is for individual businesses. The international community must think more about how countries can overcome their problems. When debts overwhelm countries, even quite prosperous or potentially prosperous ones such as Argentina, it can be a dislocating process.

[Mr. Syms]

I should like to pay tribute to the work of the British Council. Information is very important. When I was in Nigeria and went to the British Council in Kano, we saw people there devouring British newspapers, even though they were sometimes months old. I am not sure what Nigerians would make of Sven-Goran Eriksson or the goings-on in this country. Nevertheless, there is an appetite for the information that newspapers and books can provide that cannot necessarily be had elsewhere in Nigeria.

The internet also has a role in disseminating information to Africa. To give an example, a firm in my constituency called Cotton Net Ltd., whose managing director is Bruce Evans, wanted to have an internet trading site. In 1999, *The Daily Telegraph* advertised what it described as an e-dream competition. The company entered, along with 1,000 other entries, and went through various processes. C14 Net, a company in the United States quoted on NASDAQ, was involved in the competition. Cotton Net won the competition and received a letter of intent saying that £1 million would be invested in the company, but then the dotcom crash happened and no money arrived.

Cotton Net had the very good idea of trading the cotton produced by many small farmers in eastern Europe. It has taken some trade, which it can do at a lower commission than many wholesalers. However, the company is struggling, so if anyone has any bright ideas to enable Cotton Net in Poole to trade in cotton, Bruce Evans would appreciate it. Getting the products to the markets is a real problem in many parts of Africa.

We are making progress, although it is sometimes painfully slow. We must get the negotiations on trade right so that we all become richer. We must ensure that aid is properly scrutinised and produces the right outcome. We all know that we must do much more about debt.

We live in a big wide world, and we need the consent of everyone in the world for things to go well. We have heard much about rogue states and terrorism, and we know that aircraft can travel to this country in only a few hours. It is important that our fellow human beings have a decent standard of living and proper government. We are making progress and I hope that it will continue. I hope that more people will invest in Africa—but there are problems when we hear about nothing but famines, wars, coups and looting. However, we must travel hopefully and I am sure that one day, when we debate this subject we shall find that we have made much more progress.

6 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I shall be brief—partly because I have almost lost my voice, so I may have to abandon my speech after a while. This has been a superb debate on our most vital policy area and our most successful Department. I am delighted to have the opportunity to take part in it.

There has been some discussion of the relationship between international issues and Members' constituency interests, and of how we can balance the two in our casework. My response is that they are wholly interlinked. For example, I visited Sudan a few weeks ago, not only because I was interested in the country but because Sudanese people live in my constituency. They visit me and ask, "What are you doing about the situation in Sudan?" Visiting Sudan and taking an interest in international development are part of my constituency casework—we should all acknowledge that connection.

I nipped out for a cup of tea earlier and unfortunately ended up reading a page of the *Evening Standard* about a couple of racists who are standing in the elections next week. After that, it was good to come back to the Chamber and hear Members on both sides of the House reaffirming their common humanity and their common interest in such a profoundly important subject.

The aid budget needs to be increased dramatically. There has been enormous progress from the 0.26 per cent. inherited by the Government in 1997 to the present 0.39 per cent. We need to go further, however. That would be a most powerful affirmation both of the central importance to the Government of the aid policy and of the success of the Department for International Development.

Massive challenges face us across the world. Many of them are set out in the honest and straightforward report issued by the Department. However, people should not despair about the problems. Indeed, no one in the House or in this country has the right to feel despair, given the circumstances that face people in other parts of the world. We can draw great comfort from the HIPC initiative, from our constituents' support for debt relief, and from the way in which countries such as Uganda and Mozambique have magnificently used the opportunities afforded them to invest in health and primary education to develop their societies.

We can draw great inspiration from a Prime Minister who is committed to African development and to dealing with the problems of Africa. We can also take great hope from NEPAD—itself an African initiative. We can draw great optimism from the Secretary of State's comments and the statements in the departmental report about the possibilities for peace over a great swathe of the continent—from the Atlantic to the Red sea, from Angola to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and from the Great Lakes to Sudan.

We have not spent enough time talking about the role of non-governmental organisations, which play a magnificent role in promoting policy and can be an important thorn in the side of Governments when they carry out policies on the ground. Many of us have seen them operating in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances in the most impoverished places, working to feed children and to develop health and food projects. We owe them a great deal.

My first trip to Africa was to Burundi with UNICEF in 1998. Our host was a man called Luis Zuniga, who was head of UNICEF there. A couple of years later he was murdered doing his job—visiting an internally displaced persons camp to assess the state of the children there and try to protect them.

I have also visited Angola, a country that has enormous potential and tremendous opportunities now that its war is over, although corruption remains a huge problem. Angola is potentially very wealthy, with huge oil and diamond reserves, but in its IDP camps we saw squalor worse than I want to see again. Fifty-six people were living in a tent of the size that hon. Members might take on holiday for a fortnight in France. There was little running water and no electricity, and some children were

starving or had had limbs blown off by land mines. Then, the Angolan Government used the war as an excuse; now they no longer have that excuse. They have an enormous responsibility, with the support of the international community, to get to grips with the country's massive problems and huge opportunities.

In Angola we met extraordinary young people from the Angolan youth parliament, who expressed their distress at being able to see the opportunities that were available to young people in the rest of the world, and their disgust at living in a situation that UNICEF has described as possibly the worst anywhere in the world for children growing up. The example of those young people offers real hope for the people of Angola.

A few weeks ago we visited Sudan, which is the largest country in Africa and has enormous mineral wealth. The despair of Sudan has already been well described, but everyone we met showed an urge towards and a desire for peace. We met intelligent rational people for whom peace is the intelligent rational choice.

It was clear that if the Sudanese people had peace, the country could develop tremendously on the basis of its mineral wealth. It could become an important player in NEPAD, and an important bridge between Africa and the middle east, the Muslim world and the Christian world, and the Arab world and the African world. Its potential is enormous, but hard choices will have to be made to secure peace. The new unit set up jointly by the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office under Alan Goulty has an opportunity to play an important role in peace negotiations in a country where we saw that the influence and interest of the United Kingdom was broadly welcomed.

Both sides will have to face up to the fact that at some point, which they must define, there will have to be an act of self-determination. At the very least, there will have to be a referendum, in which everyone participates, on the future of the country. There will be plenty of time to work out whether the country's future lies in separation or devolution. Sudan must also work out how to tackle all the issues of development, including economic development, and how to fulfil the needs of a proper civil society, such as basic structures for health, security and education. Both sides need to face up to the need for a referendum, and our Government, along with the surrounding countries, will have to help them to do so.

I am delighted by the Secretary of State's remarks about the importance of primary education in humanitarian development, and of assisting children who have been displaced.

Before I conclude, I want to make one constituency point. We have a small town, a very white town, in the middle of a rural area, which under the influence of the local Oxfam group declared itself the world's first "fair trade" town. Garstang is now twinned with New Koforidua in Ghana and it has built up good links with that country. One of the most inspirational experiences that I have had as an MP was organising a local produce breakfast with the previous Under-Secretary of State for International Development, who is now the Minister of State, Scotland Office. It was attended by local schoolchildren, farmers, business people and dignitaries, who all enjoyed eating bacon and eggs and talking about the relative position of farmers in Garstang and Ghana. If we can keep that sort of dialogue going, there is real hope for the future.

6.12 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): Much of what had to be said today has already been said, but it has struck a chord on all sides of the House. I congratulate all the previous speakers on having made informative and interesting contributions.

I have been impressed by the genuine concern of many hon. Members here today, and as a new member of the International Development Committee, I have already heard evidence given by the UNHCR, Action Aid and the Secretary of State, among others. Much credit must go to the Secretary of State, whose forthright approach on these issues leaves nobody in any doubt that she feels passionately about her work and the work of her Department. The annual report was published too close to this debate to allow me thoroughly to read it all, but contributions from other speakers showed that they found time for a more detailed analysis. In fact, I saw my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) reading it during last night's parliamentary party meeting.

One issue on which I should like to focus is the untying of aid, which is a welcome move. I entirely agree that DFID should continue to promote that among other Governments. The UK Government's decision is good because it is taking the lead and pushing other countries in the same direction. Tying up aid can skew development projects away from poverty-focused projects and lead to the provision of the wrong type of service and advice.

I heard what my hon. Friend said about debt relief. It was interesting to read a recent note from Jubilee Plus which mentions that the US has built up a massive external debt of $2.2 trillion, and while it pays $20 billion per annum to service that debt, poor countries are crippled by over $300 billion of debt service repayments on a debt that is almost the same as the US Government's national debt.

One of the reasons why I first got involved in politics was that I realised that the problems facing us in this country, important though they are, are often nothing compared with the plight of millions around the world, many of whom are starving. Some years ago, I was involved in supervising the delivery of aid to eastern Europe on behalf of a Scottish charity that had raised money, medical supplies and presents for children who were suffering from the effects of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor explosion. That was my first experience of seeing that inefficiency and corruption can go hand in hand, and I hope that the Secretary of State and her Department will continue to pursue and root out corruption whenever there is evidence of it among recipients, to make sure that those most in need receive what is due to them. The millennium development goals are important, and, again, all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate have subscribed to the contents of the DFID report.

There is always a fine balancing act—on the one hand, respecting a decision of a democratically elected Government to set their own priorities, while, on the other, ensuring that aid goes to the most needy. The Tanzania air traffic control system is a perfect example of that, and we hope that this Department will pursue a wise course of action in that regard.

[John Barrett]

One of the previous speakers mentioned Sudanese residents bringing the issue of Sudan to his attention. I think that I mentioned in a debate on Sudan in Westminster Hall that no constituent of mine has ever raised that issue with me; indeed, it is relatively rare that people raise third-world debt with me. It is not because they do not care. I believe that it is determined by where the news teams are. We saw pictures of the famine in Ethiopia, and that had an impact around the world. Members of the House must take responsibility to press the media to take an interest, and the Department must ensure that there are no forgotten areas of this world.

Some of the most difficult areas to deal with are those where conflict exists, whether it is in Sudan, Palestine or Afghanistan. In Palestine, we have witnessed the destruction of projects funded by EU aid. In Afghanistan, rebuilding of the country must be a priority. As the Secretary of State said, without an infrastructure, there will be no way for aid to get through, and people will continue to starve. This morning, we heard again that 3 million to 4 million people are at risk from famine in Malawi—a country where development aid was cut recently because of corruption—and emergency aid will now be required. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park has raised this issue with the Secretary of State. Once again, I am encouraged to be brief, as many items have already been dealt with.

Finally, I want to refer to the Budget Red Book. I noticed that about two pages were dedicated to international poverty reduction; interestingly, that constitutes approximately 0.7 per cent. of the document. Unfortunately, we are not making great progress towards the 0.7 per cent. target. At the current rate of progress, my researcher, who is 22, will be delighted to know that he will be able to celebrate the 0.7 per cent. target being reached just in time for his 100th birthday. Surely we must do better.

6.18 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I want to join in the tributes to the leadership shown by the Secretary of State in raising the profile of international development, and, critically, in increasing public acceptance of the case for augmenting spending in this area. In the past, there has been much misuse of development assistance and misdirection of money—it has been used for the wrong purposes and has got into the wrong hands. As a result, public acceptance has fallen significantly over the years. The Secretary of State's role in re-establishing and rebuilding the importance of this area of spending in the public's eyes has been enormously valuable.

This afternoon's debate has not focused much on the passing into law of the International Development Act 2002. In some ways, that is surprising, because the establishment of the central principle of poverty alleviation and sustainable development is of great importance. Apart from anything else, it directs attention to other areas of Government in which that same focus may not yet exist. The Government's international policy on the developing world still lacks coherence. We have established that development assistance must be devoted to the alleviation of poverty and to sustainable development, but that principle needs to apply across Government and Government policy.

Let me highlight one or two examples of how the principle has clearly not been in place in the past year and on which further work needs to be done. Many hon. Members made the case about European spending on development assistance. I will not cite all the statistics that show how out of focus European spending is; suffice it to say that it is not being spent sufficiently on the countries in most need, and that problem is getting worse. There is a reform process, but inadequate and insufficient progress is being made to ensure that the money is spent in the most deserving countries. Unless the pace of reform improves substantially, we will have to ask ourselves whether it is better for us to keep that money and spend it in accordance with the Act, so applying the core principle of the alleviation of poverty. At the moment, the way in which European money is spent on development assistance goes against the Act's core principle.

Several hon. Members mentioned the Commonwealth Development Corporation. In the recent Adjournment debate on that subject, the Minister rejected the contention that there was cause for concern about the move towards partial privatisation. Let me repeat the strong assertion that there is self-evidently a possible conflict between seeking the highest rate of return on an investment and having poverty reduction as the core principle. Other hon. Members said that CDC money, used as a pump primer in areas where commercial money will not go, plays a crucial role in developing countries. It is enormously regrettable if we are to lose that, as appears to be the case.

Like the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), I have just returned from the trip to India organised and paid for by Oxfam. I was told that the CDC man in India is busily organising investment in information technology. IT is concentrated in one or two specific high-growth areas in India. It has little impact on the rest of the country. The point was made most forcibly to me that that is not helping to alleviate poverty and that the money needs to go to parts of the country where it is much more needed.

On arms sales, I agree with the Secretary of State that developing countries need internal security. Of course they need armed forces so that they can defend themselves. Is it right, however, that arms exports to Africa from this country were worth £52 million in 1999, £125 million in 2000 and are anticipated to be worth £200 million next year, according to the Campaign Against the Arms Trade? They are paid for, inevitably, by increasing debt in countries where we often have to write off that very debt. In addition, there were reports this week of sales of military aircraft to India that are capable of conversion to carry nuclear bombs. Given the fragility of relations between India and Pakistan, is that wise? Is it compatible with the thrust of the Department's work?

On Tanzania, the point has been made many times that selling an air traffic control system for military use to one of the poorest countries in the world goes against the principles of the Act. It is extraordinary that that export licence was granted. There should be a full inquiry into how that happened.

There is also the United Kingdom's involvement in the manufacture of and trade in cluster bombs, and their use. We must question whether such involvement is contrary to the core principles that are set out in the International Development Act 2002. There are 14,000 unexploded bomblets scattered round Afghanistan, and the impact on civilians following conflict is massive. The situation

prevents them from returning to agriculture. It prevents children from playing as they would normally do in peaceful times. If we are to have the same coherent focus on developing countries, there must be international agreement on the use of cluster bombs and on the obligations of countries that use them following conflict to clear up the mess that they create.

In terms of creating coherence and consistency in policy, there is the issue of trade, which is highlighted in chapter 2 of the report and mentioned by many Members this afternoon. I support the work of the Department in working with the Department of Trade and Industry to increase opportunities for developing countries to trade. It is clear that the Doha agreement is a step in the right direction.

I was struck by the fact that India makes up 20 per cent. of the world's population and yet has a share of only 1 per cent. of the world's trade. There must be more equitable trading rules. The EU is one of the worst offenders, as the Oxfam report has demonstrated.

I was struck in India also by the massive challenge for the country itself in breaking down internal barriers to create a single market. There are incredible queues of lorries between states within the country, each charging its own tariffs on entry. India needs to create a common tax system throughout the country. There is a massive need for labour law reform. It is essential also to tackle the endemic corruption that riddles the country.

Without those internal changes, there will not be the necessary internal investment. That will prevent India from participating in international trade. There is an obligation on both the developed world and the developing world to take a great deal of action to ensure that international trade increases.

I turn to the effectiveness of spending within the budget of the Department for International Development. I welcome the Department's acceptance of a clear strong link between good governance, proper management of public finances and the achievement of development targets. Chapter 3 of the report refers to the recognition of the huge scope for improvement in public financial management in the 25 heavily indebted poor countries. That improvement still needs to be made. I welcome the Department's recognition of the increasing link between the giving of assistance and achieving improvements in governance and financial management. The New Partnership for Africa's Development initiative, where Africa is taking responsibility itself for improving governance and obtaining assistance in return for those improvements, is a case in point.

In India, I saw the Department working in four states, choosing the states where there is most evidence of a move towards good governance, and where reformers are in charge and making a real difference. It was good to see the Department working with reformers to ensure that our money went to good effect.

Close scrutiny of how the Department's money is being spent is vital. Since my return from India, I have received an e-mail from India referring to the fact that the Department's HIV/AIDS work in conjunction with state governance in two states, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, is effectively subcontracted to a private company, Dalal Engineers Ltd., a name that hardly suggests that the company has massive experience in HIV/AIDS work. That may be working well, but I should appreciate it if the Minister could investigate the matter and let me know whether the money is being effectively used.

I warmly welcome the increasing budget for aid, although I am disappointed that the Government have not been more ambitious. The extra money creates new challenges to ensure that it is spent effectively by the Department. It has been suggested to me that there is a shortage of ideas for good quality projects, and there is a danger of a poor return on money if it is simply pumped into the system. More money means more pressure on staff to ensure effective use, so transparent evaluation of the work of the Department is essential.

DFID has an internal evaluation unit, and the Department's website includes a section on evaluation. yet reports on evaluation go up only to 1997. There is nothing thereafter. Are those evaluation reports continuing? It is essential that they are available on the internet for the public to see.

I conclude by acknowledging that the Department has made massive progress in the past year. However, we must all realise that there is an enormous burden on both the developing world and the developed world to continue the process of reform and to ensure that all the money is spent on the alleviation of poverty.

6.31 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): I shall be brief, as I realise that we are coming to the end of the debate.

I commend the Department and particularly the Secretary of State, who is no longer present, for the work that they are doing. However, much is not being done in the most efficient and effective way. The Government's duty is to ensure that every penny that we spend on international development is spent wisely, sensibly and to the best effect.

From what I have read in the reports issued this week, I believe that the money that we are giving to the European Union is not being spent in the wisest possible way. The time has come to change that policy. We should consider restoring to ourselves control over the money that we spend on international development. We have a duty to help those in the poorer countries as much as we can, but that is not done by handing the money over to Brussels to spend in a way that is not as efficient as the way in which we would spend it.

I am wearing a poppy and rosemary, not because it is Remembrance day in the United Kingdom, but because today is ANZAC day. I was privileged to attend a service at Westminster abbey this morning to commemorate ANZAC day. It brought home to me the close relationship that the United Kingdom has with the countries of the Commonwealth, particularly Australia and New Zealand. I know that those two countries have proud records on international development aid.

I strongly urge the Government to focus on co-operating with Australia, New Zealand, Canada and, as other hon. Members said earlier, the United States of America—countries with which we have a common heritage and a common understanding—to promote international development in countries where good governance exists. It is throwing money down the drain to give it to countries where it will be squandered and used least effectively for the very people whom we most

[Mr. Andrew Rosindell]

wish to help. I concur with my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), who is on record as saying that European Union aid is "failing the poor". That is not the only area where the EU is failing.

We have a duty and a moral responsibility to restore the control of international development funds to our own Government, and to spend that money in a way that will help the poorest in the world. That means controlling the funds ourselves and co-operating with our friends in the Commonwealth, but not handing that power over to the European Union.

6.34 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): As this is my first and, quite possibly, only outing at the Dispatch Box, it is a great pleasure to be called on to summarise a debate on a subject that enjoys such general agreement on both sides of the House. The only significant clash has been, once again, over the former Commonwealth Development Corporation, and I hope to have time to return to that a little later.

I should like to think that some of the remarks from those on the Opposition Benches made during the Westminster Hall debate on the CDC on 10 April encouraged the Government to make more time available to debate international development, and all hon. Members present today have benefited from this debate.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) drew on his detailed knowledge of extremely primitive conditions in African villages. He made an excellent analogy between a snooker game and the way in which selfish protectionism can cost jobs at home on the rebound from blocking jobs abroad in poor countries.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, was in reflective mood. She posed some serious questions about whether giving aid is merely to fight a losing battle, but resolved such doubts by an overriding sense of moral obligation. Her fears that we are sometimes told that more is being done than really is being done, because debt repayments are left out of the equation, struck a chord on both sides of the House—if not her reference to "bounders" in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department of Trade and Industry.

The hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) stressed fair trade, the provision of basic services via foreign investment and the need to reintegrate ex-militias into civil society in all too many damaged poor states.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), who is Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development, applied his encyclopaedic knowledge to many aspects of international development, not least the dumping of excess EU produce on poor countries as a result of the unreformed CAP, the scourge of AIDS, the long-term political goal of democratisation and the need to keep sight of what all the policies, pledges and statistics really mean in individual human terms.

AIDS was the main topic taken up by the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra). He explained, with great seriousness, that arguments about patents for anti-AIDS drugs largely missed the point that it would often still be too expensive to distribute them, even if they were given free to poor countries, and that interrupted courses of treatment help to cause the virus to mutate and become much more resistant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) painted a depressing portrait of squalor, disease, corruption and intimidation in major unsettled African states, and referred to the prospect of terrorist training camps in Sudan, the timebomb ticking in Nigeria and the decline in Zimbabwe caused primarily by the absence of anything approaching democracy and good governance. It was a powerful indictment of some of the problems that are largely beyond the reach of mere financial aid.

The hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley)—another member of the Select Committee—showed his considerable expertise on the way in which trade trends adversely affect the welfare of the least developed countries. He made a plea for the liberalisation of economies on both sides of the development divide and mentioned the support for political extremism in France. He may be interested to know that Aloïs Brunner, the man who organised the war-time deportation of the French Jews to Auschwitz—a terrible event, to which the hon. Gentleman referred—was sheltered for many years by the Syrian regime and may still be alive in Damascus even today. That is a salutary reminder of the morality and values of some Governments with whom we still have to deal.

The theme of trade liberalisation was taken up by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), but I trust that he will forgive me for saying that my abiding memory of his speech will be what he told us about the role of Welsh enterprise and Welsh sheep in producing anti-snakebite serum for the developing world.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) stressed that sub-Saharan Africa is falling seriously behind and set out a worrying list of problems with his characteristic blend of thoughtfulness and thoroughness. As in Westminster Hall on 10 April, he expressed concern about the new direction of the CDC.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) pointed out that what we used to call the "second world" countries of eastern Europe will inevitably rank high in the priorities of EU states. He highlighted the problems of ordinary business men in reaching potential markets in Africa.

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) rightly praised the calibre of today's debate and spoke movingly about the privations that he witnessed in Angola and the need for an end to strife in the Sudan.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell), who has shown a consistent interest in international development, brought his usual robust approach to the subject of international development and the European Union in general. The hon. Members for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) and for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) made valuable contributions, although they were inevitably foreshortened by pressure of time. One of them previously intervened to ask whether the Opposition had ever committed themselves to the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of GNP to be devoted to aid and had ever given a timetable for achieving that. The answer is yes to the first and no to the second question. Neither the Government nor the Opposition have ever given a time frame for that great task to which we are all

committed. The Liberal Democrats would be foolish to try to do so in advance of taking power, which I hope will be long in coming.

My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), the shadow Secretary of State, covered six topics of primary concern. At the outset, she pressed powerfully the question of the CDC and brought out the problem, which was first aired when the Bill was going through in 1999, about the potential conflict between the CDC and DFID as providers of aid to underdeveloped countries. That conflict was denied at the time but, unfortunately, seems to exist now.

My hon. Friend drew attention to aid via the EU and the way in which distortion is taking place: even as the Government creditably put emphasis on providing aid to the right countries, the EU is falling massively behind and, indeed, reversing the priorities. In the report published yesterday, the Government proudly point out that their main donations are to sub-Saharan Africa, south Asia, and east Asia and the Pacific. The European Community, however, has been developing a strategy that has shown diminishing support for those priority areas and an ever-higher proportion of support going to what might be called the near abroad—the countries in the middle range of development, not the poorest countries, which should be our main concern.

My hon. Friend also touched on the BAE deal in Tanzania, her experiences in India, the problems of fair trade and, in particular, the question of debt. She is greatly concerned, as are others, that aid that is given with one hand should not be negated by the removal of a country's wealth in debt repayments by the other.

The Secretary of State gave what can be described only as a sombre review of life on a dollar a day, or at most two dollars a day. She said that terrible poverty in an age of excellent communications is a recipe for conflict, bitterness and hatred. She referred to the danger of Africa becoming a failed continent and pointed out that it was on the basis of failed states that terrorist regimes take root and prosper. That put me in mind of what was said in the first report from the Select Committee this Session about the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The report states:

"We hope the Government's response to this report will address the issue of failing states, how they are monitored and what level of preparedness the international system can maintain to respond to problems in these failing states."

The Government's response has merely been to acknowledge the importance of that and to say:

"DFID is working in the OECD Development Assistance Committee study to identify best practice in how to promote change and reduce poverty in failed states and how to ensure that the international community remains sufficiently engaged with such states."

When the Minister replies I hope that he will expand on that and explain a little more precisely what the Government are doing to head off the potential of failed states leading to terrorist development.

Finally, the CDC issue was examined in great depth in the Westminster Hall debate on 10 April. It has been pointed out that, apart from the Minister himself, everyone who spoke in that debate was unhappy, dissatisfied and seriously alarmed about the CDC's change in direction. In his closing remarks in that debate, the Minister said:

"The CDC plays an important role and it is right that there should be scrutiny, but we must crack the fundamental problem—private capital does not want to invest in the poorest countries."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 10 April 2002; Vol. 382, c. 21WH.]

If that really is the Minister's view, he must admit that the Government have taken a wrong turning with the CDC. The sooner they revisit mistaken action in connection with that important organisation, the sooner we will achieve unanimity, not on almost all the issues that have been debated today, but on every one of them.

6.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): I welcome the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) to the Dispatch Box. I understand that he is taking a lead from the Government, who believe that Whips should be able to speak from the Front Bench, a view that has been subject to criticism. However, it is good to see at last bipartisan support for an erosion of the principle for which I might coin the phrase "the silence of the Whips".

The hon. Gentleman provoked me to make just one party political point, but I promise to make no more during my speech. He referred to the Conservatives' commitment to the 0.7 per cent. target; when the Conservative Government were elected in 1979, they inherited a figure of 0.55 per cent, but when they left office in 1997, they bequeathed to us a figure of 0.26 per cent. We must do better.

Dr. Lewis: The Minister should bear it in mind that figures given as percentages often have a lot do with the state of the economy rather than the amounts donated—*[Interruption.]*

Hilary Benn: I shall try again, but the House has indicated with its response that it is not persuaded by that argument.

Mr. Robathan *rose—*

Hilary Benn: Will the hon. Gentleman bear with me a moment?

We have had another excellent debate. Like almost every contributor, I, too, hope that it can become an annual event. If we have done nothing else today, we have at least honoured the prayer of the Speaker's Chaplain, who every day in the Chamber asks us all to keep in mind our responsibility

"to seek to improve the condition of all mankind."

Never in human history has it been more important that we should do so. I do not risk contradiction if I say that hon. Members on both sides of the House have all contributed something of value to our deliberations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) talked about the fair trade breakfast to which he invited my predecessor. If he made me an offer now, my stomach would command me to accept.

Clare Short: It is bacon and eggs.

Hilary Benn: As a vegetarian, I would not eat the bacon, but I would have the egg.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) described the Government as the usual suspects, which is rather unfair. However, there are more of the usual suspects attending and taking part in international development debates because more Members recognise

[Hilary Benn]

the importance of the subject. The hon. Gentleman kindly mentioned the international Commission on Intellectual Property Rights set up by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I also draw his attention to the committee chaired by my right hon. Friend which works with pharmaceutical companies and tries to address the question of access to medicines. I for one would certainly welcome a debate on GATS; crying wolf on GATS—I am referring more generally to people's comments—does not assist informed discussion.

A number of Members referred to the CDC. I do not propose to rehearse our recent debate in Westminster Hall, but I shall make a plea for some perspective on the CDC, which still holds 80 per cent. of its agricultural portfolio. In 1999 to 2000, it made £100 million worth of new investments in agribusiness. To listen to some Members this evening, one would think that it had stopped making such investments altogether. It remains a unique investment institution. As I said in our Westminster Hall debate, I defy any Member to name another worldwide investment institution 70 per cent. of whose new investments have to benefit poorer countries, and 50 per cent. of whose investments are made in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. The CDC fulfilled, indeed exceeded, both those targets in the year that has just ended.

On agriculture more generally, let us not forget that world food production has doubled in the past 40 years. Rural livelihoods remain extremely important to DFID. The CDC is not the sum total of the work that we do to support agriculture. The work of our rural livelihoods department is central. In terms of population growth, hon. Members will know that the biggest growth in the next generation in developing countries will be in the number of people living in towns and cities. Almost all the population growth will occur in that respect.

On the world summit for sustainable development, the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) referred to water and sanitation. What we need now in relation to the world summit is practical outcomes. After the success of Doha and financing for development, we need to get beyond some of the jargon and deal with the practicalities. Issues on which we could make practical progress include illegal logging, in terms of which the link between forestry and livelihood is important, and improved water and sanitation, which is important not least because installing a water pump in a village is a very good way of enabling girls to go to school as it means that they will not have to spend a large part of the day fetching and carrying water—a burden that falls especially to girls. I was astonished to discover that in the past 10 years, more children have died of diarrhoeal diseases in the world than all the people who have died in conflicts worldwide since the end of the second world war. That statistic, if no other, shows the importance of making progress. It probably explains why Mahatma Gandhi said:

"Sanitation is more important than independence."

The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) took us on a tour of Africa, which I greatly enjoyed. He asked some very sharp and pertinent questions about governance. I shall respond to his further letter about Nigeria. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) described the personal motivation that had brought him into politics—a motivation that is central to what has brought so many hon. Members into the debate.

The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) asked a very important question about India, in relation to the visit that she has just made. She asked how we spread the reform that we can see in some states, and which DFID is supporting, to all the states. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) made the very important point that some countries need to do a lot more to tackle HIV/AIDS. The hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) spoke with passion about EU aid. I welcome the Select Committee report—another excellent report that is keeping the pressure up. We all share the view that we need to do better.

I can tell my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that in her opening contribution, as ever, she provided us with vision not only in the sense of inspiration, but in terms of urging us all the time to look ahead at the development challenge that is yet to come. If there is one quality in particular that I admire about her, it is her ability to make every opportunity in this House a chance to engage in a seminar about why international development matters and the steps that we need to take to enable progress to occur.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) rightly said that we must not be complacent. I do not think that there has been any complacency in this debate. One of the features of DFID is the presence in the dialogue between Ministers and civil servants of a constant questioning in which we ask, "Have we got this right? Do we need to do more? Do we need to reflect and change our policy?"

If we can make this debate an annual state of the world debate, we will have an opportunity to return to the arguments that have been advanced today and see who was right and what progress has been made. What strikes me most forcibly about all the contributions is the extent to which the theme of interdependence has glued them all together. What we now choose to call globalisation is in truth a process that has been going on for hundreds of years, although it has been gathering pace in the past century. It is, after all, nothing more than human beings' astonishing capacity to interact with the physical resources of the earth to create technologies that have transformed the existence of some of the people who live on the planet and which have the capacity to do the same for many others if we get this challenge right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) made a plea, which I echo, for a more informed debate about globalisation. All the questions that it raises—its impact on the poor, its effect on people's sense of culture and identity, the pace of change and the feeling in some quarters that we can no longer influence events—lead to confusion in some areas. That is best exemplified in a banner that may be apocryphal, but was seen in a demonstration. Emblazoned on it were the following words: "Worldwide Coalition Against Globalisation." There is much to reflect on in those words. My hon. Friend and neighbour, the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), in his outstanding contribution, talked about a conversation at a snooker table. That exemplified perfectly the fact that these matters are not quite as simple as some people choose to present them on certain occasions.

The biggest danger we face is that cynicism, despair and hopelessness should overcome what we need to do. The most important thing is to reinforce our optimism, based on a sense of realism about the progress that we

have been able to make, and this debate has provided us with the opportunity to do that. That is why the UN human development report published last summer was able to state that

"the impressive gains of the past 30 years demonstrate the possibility of eradicating poverty".

That matters, but we need to redouble our efforts, for all the reasons to which hon. Members have referred. The question is—how?

Aid matters, because it makes a difference. It helps children to get into primary school, for example. The quantity of aid also matters, and the Government's record on that speaks for itself. The way in which aid is given matters, in terms of untying debt relief. I should say to my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) that Burkina Faso was the first HIPC country recently to receive additional relief to compensate for lower commodity prices, and representatives at the spring meetings agreed to review debt sustainability under HIPC at their next meeting in the autumn.

The quality of aid and of governance matter, not least because we have to show our electorate—when we are having the argument about aid—why it is worth putting these resources in. Also, we understand much better now that the governance and legal system of a country, the commitment of its Government to poverty reduction, the effectiveness of its civil service and its civil society, and the health of its democracy all have as great a contribution to make to creating the conditions in which poverty eradication can occur as all the aid that we are likely to give.

The local ownership of the process also matters. We cannot go in as the ex-colonial power and knock on the door, saying, "Hello, we've come to develop your country." There has to be a partnership. The question that the hon. Member for Meriden asked about how to match good donors with good recipients goes to the heart of the honest dialogue that we are trying to build in our relationship with the countries with which we work.

References have been made to trade and to economic development. It was the same process of economic development that enabled this country to move from where we were 300 years ago—with very poor life expectancy, lots of children unable to go to school, and people in very poor health—to where we are today, for all the arguments about the state of our public services. The countries that have not yet had that opportunity wish only to do what we have done, because they know what progress that development will be able to deliver.

My final comments relate to the point I made earlier about confidence, and the need to counter cynicism and despair. They relate, in essence, to the way in which our democracy works, and to what I said about the feeling that we lack influence. The reasons why we need to counter that cynicism and despair were put forward most forcefully by my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) when he referred to the French election result, which is very much in our minds. We can never drop our guard against an ideology that seeks to deny our interdependence and to despise what makes us different. We reject that ideology because we have to embrace that difference. We have no choice, but we do so willingly because we recognise our common humanity.

This is an argument that we have to win in people's minds. I am reminded of the wonderful words of the UNESCO declaration:

"Since wars began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men . . . that . . . peace must be constructed."

That is the challenge. When people say to politicians that politics never make a difference, I say that that is not true. We can find no better illustration of that than the Government's achievements on international development. This is politics working, and there is no greater cause that politics can serve in the years to come than trying to rid the world of poverty.

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PETITION

Council Services (Dorset)

7 pm

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I have the pleasure of presenting a petition signed by almost 1,000 parents, grandparents and other residents of South Dorset. They express their concern about Government funding for local council services. In particular, they do not understand why the standard spending assessment values the education of a Dorset child at £100 less than that of a child in neighbouring Hampshire. They urge that the review of grant support by the Government address that imbalance.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons.

The petition of residents of South Dorset

Declares that the services provided by district councils affect the quality of life of local residents and deserve to be properly supported; that Dorset's schools in particular deserve to be fairly funded; that local authority funding has been based on a flawed system for far too long; that any new system of local authority funding should reflect the fixed costs which all councils have, and the particular needs of local residents; and that small shire districts risk being disadvantaged by the proposed new system of grant support to local authorities.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to ensure that the new system of grant support to local authorities does not disadvantage small shire districts, and provides a fair funding settlement for Dorset's schools.

And the Petitioners remain.

To lie upon the Table.

Foot and Mouth

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

7.1 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Northumberland was the first county to have a foot and mouth-infected farm, on 23 February 2001, and the last to be declared free of the disease, which did not happen until January 2002. Three quarters of the county's farms were put under restriction, more than 300 were culled out and 230,000 animals were slaughtered. More than 130,000 carcases were buried on one site at the village of Widdrington and 4,000 were burned beside the sand dunes at the nearby beach at Druridge bay.

Farm-related businesses, tourism businesses and other activities throughout much of Northumberland were severely damaged by the effects of the restrictions. It is therefore hardly surprising that there was a universal demand in Northumberland for a public inquiry into the outbreak and much anger when the Government refused to set one up. The county council, largely as a consequence of that refusal and the scale of the damage in Northumberland, set up its own inquiry under the thorough and effective chairmanship of Professor Michael Dower.

However, neither that inquiry nor the three informal ones set up by the Government could summon witnesses on oath so as to get at the truth of the many allegations made about the origins, spreading and handling of the outbreak. That remains a glaring omission. It is also a matter of great regret that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, although it submitted a memorandum to the inquiry and answered written questions, refused to attend or to allow either Ministers or officials to be questioned in person. Had it done so, the inquiry would have benefited and DEFRA would have learned something from the atmosphere of the proceedings that, at times, provided a moving and distressing testimony from those who suffered so badly from the outbreak.

So thorough is the inquiry's report and so numerous its conclusions that I can highlight only a limited number of key points. I intend to concentrate on the lessons to be learned and what still needs to be done to put right some of the damage. The Minister's reply must spell out action that will now be taken.

One lesson should have been learned from the Duke of Northumberland's report on the 1967 outbreak, but it was ignored. The recent inquiry concluded that there was no effective system of overall management for the first five weeks of the 2001 outbreak. It criticised the failure of the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to set up a command centre immediately and its refusal to join the Gold command centre set up initially by Northumbria police. We paid a high price for that failure.

Even after the control centre in Newcastle was set up, communications with farmers, agencies and the public remained poor, and the command structure is described as overcentralised and "apparently chaotic". There was a failure to communicate with local authorities, especially the environmental health authority, Castle Morpeth borough council. The report says that DEFRA

"cannot shelter behind its contractor"

on this matter. It continues:

"A government department should well know that District Councils have a leading statutory responsibility for the control of air pollution."

The inquiry also concludes that substantially more animals were slaughtered than was necessary, and that far more of the culled animals should have been buried on or near the farms. It calls on DEFRA to work with the industry and local authorities to ensure better arrangements for biosecurity. It also calls for contingency plans that are updated every three years, and a clear identification of who will do what in any future such situation, with the training of staff who are likely to be drafted in to do the work.

The report recommends that a handbook of guidance should be ready at any time, and accurate information about farms and available vets should be in the hands of the command centre from the beginning. A blue-box system, which was used effectively in the later stages of the outbreak in the Hexham area, should be developed and used from the beginning. As the report says:

"the outbreak provided, in its two phases, an object lesson in how not to achieve, and then how to achieve, the standards of security required during a FMD outbreak."

It says that the state veterinary service has been "dangerously reduced" and should be re-strengthened. That view will be echoed by many farmers.

The inquiry details how extensive the damage was to farms that were not culled out, but which could not move livestock. The report argues for compensation for farmers whose cattle lost value owing to movement restrictions and going over 30 months, and for recompense for damage caused in the course of handling the outbreak. It makes extensive recommendations about help for businesses and communities, including the extension of the rate relief scheme for businesses that have suffered loss. It calls for a range of measures to support the recovery of the livestock industry, and to assist farmers to diversify, including extending the countryside stewardship scheme to wider areas.

Tourism was badly damaged, and the report calls for a well-funded programme under the Tourism Development Act 1969. For businesses generally, the report calls for a stepping up of business link services, the enhancement of the IT infrastructure in the county, and the development of vocational and entrepreneurial skills. It points out that a way must be found to channel help to affected parts of the county that are outside the areas qualifying for regional assistance.

I want to refer in particular to the Widdrington and Cresswell areas, where the mass burning and burial were concentrated. They were chosen to suffer this devastating blow because they had already suffered industrial pollution. That is a terrible injustice, and a shocking admission by the Environment Agency representative who attended the inquiry. The report urges the Government, through their regional office and One NorthEast, to join the county council in the discussions with those communities aimed at agreeing a programme for early action to improve the environment and to advance the regeneration of the area.

At the moment, the area is being considered only for European-backed programmes for which it was already eligible before the foot and mouth outbreak. There is still no sign of the additional compensation that the people of

the area deserve because of what they have suffered, much of which could have been avoided. One project that could bring real community benefit and will need some Government support is a plan to bring natural gas to all the communities affected that do not have a gas supply. The total cost of that will be less than £0.5 million, and it will need some form of Government support.

I am not impressed by the way in which applications from small business in those areas are being dealt with. I want the Minister to give his personal attention to the case of my constituent, who opened a café near to the beach at Cresswell just before the cattle burning at Druridge bay began, when the road was closed. I put his case to the Minister in July 2001, and after a great deal of pressure—the Department was about six months behind with its correspondence—he replied in late September suggesting that my constituent put in a claim to the dedicated claims unit that the Department had established. That resulted in a letter from the largest firm of commercial solicitors in the country, saying that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had not closed the road—it had been closed by the county council.

I tabled a parliamentary question that established that the Department had asked the county council to close the road. The expensive firm of solicitors later pointed out that it had drafted the answer to my question—perhaps the Minister has been contracting out the drafting of answers to parliamentary questions. What he did not know when he answered that question was that, on the second occasion when the road was closed in August, a DEFRA official had put the tape across the road, and no member of the county council staff was present. Yet still the Department is using casuistry and expensive solicitors to insist that it had nothing to do with any of this, and to disclaim any responsibility at all. What kind of attitude is that? It is deplorable, and does not reflect the tone of the Minister's earlier reply to me, which suggested that the claims unit would be the appropriate means by which to examine the very serious damage that was done to that business.

In the time available, it is possible to touch on only some of the conclusions and very little of the detailed argument in the report. I recognise that extremely hard work was done in very difficult circumstances by many civil servants, Army personnel, local authority staff, police, contractors, farmers, farm workers and members of local communities. What a distressing time they had, and how grim some of that work was. They deserve a great deal of credit for the tremendous effort and long hours they put in.

The clear overall impression in the report, however, is that the situation could have been handled a lot better and more effectively, with less slaughter, less consequential damage, less spreading of infection, and less of a breakdown in tourism and other businesses. Do the Government accept all the recommendations in the report that are relevant to central Government? Do they reject any of the recommendations? Do they intend to ignore any of them? What are Ministers doing to bring help to those whom the report identifies as in need of and deserving help, including those in the Widdrington area?

I secured an initial response from the Minister by way of a written question, and this debate enables him to respond at greater length. In his short reply to my written question, he said:

"The Northumberland inquiry report also outlines a medium term recovery plan for rural Northumberland to be developed within the policy framework of the Rural Action Plan produced by One North East. We have assured the leader of Northumberland county council that DEFRA stands ready to play its part alongside the other players, public, private and voluntary, which need to work together if such a plan is to be successful."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 1061W.]

Well, the other players are getting their act together. One of our leading regional charities has offered funds to the village community near Widdrington to help it set up projects that will secure help for the area. One or two other charitable organisations are also involved. The county council is determinedly playing its part, as are the other local authorities.

Will the Secretary of State agree to meet a delegation from Northumberland county council to discuss the way forward? I welcome the Minister's interest, but in this case the Secretary of State should take a personal interest in the matter, given the severe damage and the need for a lead from DEFRA. I recognise that many other Government Departments are involved, but we need a lead. Northumberland is playing its part, and, as the report proposes, it is planning a major rural conference to take forward a recovery plan. Northumberland will be the feature county at this year's royal show, at Stoneleigh. Now, it is the Government's turn to offer their response. Many parts of government will be involved, but DEFRA must take the lead. It was the Department most fully involved, and it must bear the responsibility—including for most of the things that went wrong during the inquiry. Given that it is responsible for rural areas, we look to it to take the lead in helping the county to recover from that devastating blow.

7.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this debate, and on raising issues that are of particular importance to Northumberland. Of course DEFRA recognises that Northumberland was hit very hard during the foot and mouth disease outbreak. I shall try to respond to some of the points that the right hon. Gentleman raised, and as he requested I shall spell out the aspects of the report that we recognise and accept. However, there are one or two parts of the report that we do not accept, as I shall make clear.

One aspect that we do not accept is the invitation to join the Gold command centre. We have no record of any such invitation, and we are not aware to whom it was sent. That may be a small point, but it needs correcting. We also reject the argument that we did not respond immediately by setting up a command centre. A centre was set up in the early stages, and I shall give the details in a moment.

I am not quite clear about the claims of excessive slaughter, which do not seem to be backed up by evidence. There may have been a misunderstanding, and I shall deal with that in a moment.

The right hon. Gentleman rightly gave a number of examples of how elements of the rural economy—such as tourism and other rural businesses—have been hit by the

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

foot and mouth outbreak. A number of agencies and Government bodies were involved in the recovery operation, including the tourist board, Business Link, Northumberland county council, One NorthEast and the national parks. There is no doubt that the matter should be approached in a joined-up integrated manner. The strongest point of contact for that is the Government office for the north-east, where DEFRA is represented. The Department's role is to try to co-ordinate things.

I understand that the supply of natural gas is important to rural areas. I represent a rural area, and some years ago that question took on great importance in my constituency. However, gas supply is a matter not for DEFRA alone but for British Gas as well.

The right hon. Gentleman gave detailed examples of some of the cases that he has dealt with. I shall look carefully at those examples. I hope that he will give me details of the cases that he feels have not been addressed properly, and I shall ensure that they are investigated.

I now turn to the recovery programme. Obviously, I cannot speak for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in connection with the right hon. Gentleman's request that she meet a delegation, but it might be appropriate for his constituents if he were to seek a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs. My right hon. Friend is responsible for co-ordinating the rural recovery, and I should be pleased to speak to him to see whether such a meeting could be arranged. I am sure that he would be sympathetic to any such request.

I appreciate the tributes paid by the right hon. Gentleman to all those who worked during the foot and mouth epidemic in Northumberland. That includes the county council and other local authority employees involved, who worked very hard. DEFRA staff—the vets, office personnel and other workers—are also worthy of recognition. Many DEFRA staff had no connection with animal health or foot and mouth because they were working in other divisions, yet they responded to our calls for volunteers. They were transferred from all the different divisions of the Department, which used to be known as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and were allocated to Northumberland, where they were asked to fight and defeat the disease.

The logistical operation was enormous, and I freely confess that the Department paid a price for it. One problem was the disruption to correspondence, for which I apologise. That was not satisfactory, and I am glad that we are now back on track after rectifying the problem, and that hon. Members can again receive the service to which they are entitled. We certainly intend to provide it.

We agree that there is a need for lessons to be learned, and that local inquiries have a role to play in that respect. The right hon. Gentleman will know that we have set up the Royal Society inquiry, under Professor Sir Brian Follett. He is looking at the question of disease control, although it is inevitable that the inquiry will concentrate on foot and mouth, because it is so topical and its consequences are so far reaching. The other inquiry is the "Lessons Learned" inquiry under Dr. Iain Anderson, who will make recommendations on how the Government should handle any major animal disease outbreak in the future.

We are committed to those inquiries, and I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the policy commission on farming and food has already reported. Local inquiries, such as that instituted by Northumberland county council, provide useful local perspective. Their efforts will feed into the work of the national inquiries, and I am sure that the experiences and evidence recounted by people will be very valuable.

We made it clear from the beginning that DEFRA was happy to assist Professor Dower by sending comments on issues that were likely to be of interest to the inquiry. We answered in detail two sets of questions from the inquiry team. However, given our commitment to assist the national inquiries and the need to finish the work of dealing with the disease, it is not possible for us to send staff and Ministers to all the local inquiries in the country.

There have been many county council inquiries. Ministers and staff are also involved in parliamentary inquiries such as the EU inquiry. In contrast with the previous Government, Ministers have attended the EU temporary committee and answered questions in a public forum. I have no objections to doing so; it is part of the democratic process. We have also had to deal with the National Audit Office inquiry and Select Committee inquiries. Those are part of the parliamentary process, as is this Adjournment debate. Ministers are open to public scrutiny all the time, but we cannot take on the whole range of local inquiries and give them the kind of attendance to which parliamentary inquiries, which have a prior claim, are entitled.

We do not accept all the report's findings. It was critical of the very hard work done by my Department and previously by MAFF. It should have been fairer in recognising the commitment and hard work that our people put into controlling the disease. The report also did not recognise that the disease control centre was created at Newcastle as soon as the first case was confirmed in Northumberland.

Mr. Beith: Confirmed.

Mr. Morley: Yes, confirmed. That gradually came online throughout March, not at the end of the month.

I had the opportunity to talk to Professor Dower in Strasbourg, so I am not saying anything behind his back or making an unfair criticism. Professor Dower knows my views on the issues. I made it clear to him that we disagreed that there had been greater scope for on-farm burial. We followed the advice of the Environment Agency very closely. Part of the problem of on-farm burial is that we have moved on from the original Duke of Northumberland inquiry because of taking into account water tables and potential pollution.

What we have now that we did not have in 1967 is BSE in cattle. We preferred older cattle not to be buried on farm but in properly managed, supervised and run disposal sites. Professor Dower said that we could line pits on farm, but the costs of digging properly lined pits on farm are enormous, not to mention the logistics. The delays that that would have caused for carcase disposal would have been unacceptable. It would have been unacceptable in Northumberland.

Mr. Beith: The Minister's argument might be slightly more compelling if there were any experience of

successfully running large-scale burials in a way that was not devastating to local communities. The Minister does not need the report to tell him that there were numerous examples of vehicles containing carcases leaking over large areas of countryside. After the animals were burned, the ash had to be removed at a later stage in a way that was not initially anticipated. There was not the experience to manage the two sites properly, and that became clear as things progressed.

Mr. Morley: Even with those examples there is a misunderstanding. People talk about the ash having to be cleared, but it was always intended that it would be removed later. It is not as if something went wrong; that was part of the disposal and recovery programme. It was already part of the proposals. I do not doubt that there were cases of leaking vehicles, because we pursued these complaints, but there were only a few. Generally speaking, the lorries were sealed. The sites are properly monitored and engineered and will continue to be monitored for some time to ensure that pollution is not a problem and that they are being managed like proper landfill sites. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman of that.

As for the claim that animals were killed unnecessarily, Professor Dower seemed to be under the impression that there was a 3 km cull in Northumberland. There was never a 3 km cull in Northumberland—he is mistaken. There was certainly a contiguous cull in the county, but that is not the same as 3 km cull. The only place where there was a 3 km cull was Cumbria. Professor Dower and his committee may have been labouring under a misapprehension. The most important issue is whether the disease was brought under control—and it was.

That is not to say that there may not be alternative ways of dealing with such an epidemic in the future. We certainly do not rule that out. We are not saying that a culling programme is the only way. We have already made it clear in our interim contingency plan that we would not consider pyres for the disposal of animals. Our top three priorities would be rendering, commercial incineration or landfill. We do not want to go back to using funeral pyres. We accept that.

We also accept the points made about blue-box biosecurity controls. Professor Dower's report strongly commended them, and I am pleased about that. However, we must remember that the outbreak was like no other outbreak; it was probably the world's worst outbreak of foot and mouth. No other country had experienced such a scale or spread. The original 1967 Duke of Northumberland report was not adequate to guide the response for a very different outbreak on a much larger scale and with a much wider spread.

One of the lessons that we learned in the course of dealing with the outbreak was that biosecurity was a key issue: 80 per cent. of the spread of foot and mouth disease was within 1 to 3 km of the original outbreak. Eighty per cent. of that spread was local; it involved animal-to-animal contact, movement of animals, movement of machinery, movement of vehicles and movement of people. It became clear that biosecurity was crucial. We were pleased that members of the NFU and its president shared platforms with us to try to drive home the message that biosecurity was important.

The blue-box zones, successful though they were, were extremely resource-intensive, as I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would acknowledge. At the height of the outbreak, when we were dealing with hundreds and hundreds of cases, it was simply not possible to make the resource commitment on blue boxes that we were able to give as the number of cases fell. There is no doubt that the strategy was successful and that we need to take that approach in future.

We have certainly already learned lessons. They guided our interim contingency plan. Indeed, many aspects of that plan coincide with the recommendations of the Northumberland county council report. We are already picking up those points and responding to them.

We realise that contingency planning will also include the provision of suitable facilities for the disposal of carcases in any future outbreak. It will need to take into account issues such as the effect on tourism of pyres, public health and nuisance problems in respect of burn and mass burial sites and the major environmental management tasks that need to be addressed in relation to those sites.

The arrangements will be subject to full consultation in advance to try to avoid the problems that arose at sites such as Widdrington—the right hon. Gentleman will be aware of those. It is very difficult to deal with all those problems in the middle of a major epidemic when time is everything. In those circumstances, it is not possible to hold the amount of consultation that would normally be desirable—we realise that.

We can certainly consult on the contingency plans, including the interim one, which is out for consultation now. There will also be responses to the Royal Society report and the Anderson report. Those responses will also guide our future contingency plans, which will be redrafted accordingly. We will make the plans available for public consultation, so that people are aware of our proposals and can have an input.

The Northumberland county council report is helpful in that it gives a local view, and it will be taken into account by Dr. Iain Anderson in his findings. We have already responded to some of the suggestions in the report that we agree with, and I have outlined some that we do not agree with. They are mistaken and do not take into account the changing circumstances. If there are particular points that the right hon. Gentleman would like me to consider regarding the impact on his constituents, I am willing to do so, and I shall carefully consider what he has said tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 26 April 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Local Communities

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

9.33 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): This debate is about the Government's determination to improve the quality of life in communities up and down the country. On one level, improved quality of life means personal prosperity and better life chances, such as health, skills, education and job opportunities. However, having a better quality of life in one's own home is not enough if people are afraid when they open their front doors.

I want to focus on the quality of life as it relates to people's experience of the areas in which they live and the contribution that the quality of the urban environment makes to that—in particular, what happens on the streets and in our town centres. What people think about their area is fundamental to their confidence and sense of well-being. It is also fundamental to the regeneration and renewal of our towns, cities and villages, to their economic success and well-being, to their social success and to the sense of pride that people have in their communities.

The Government are determined to achieve three key objectives: to make local communities cleaner, to make them safer and to give people a sense of ownership of their surroundings so that they feel they have some control over what happens in the streets around their homes. The objective of creating cleaner environments and communities is not just a matter of aesthetics; there are broader strategic goals in ensuring that our streets are free of litter, graffiti and vandalism. Cleaner streets create communities that are more secure and more stable. They also play a major role in the quality of life and the ability of a town or city to attract the inward investment that creates new jobs and gives people the chance to achieve personal prosperity.

Conversely, rundown streets, public squares and parks that are abandoned to muggers and drug dealers, and unkempt shopping centres and estates littered with abandoned cars are familiar scenes in too many areas. They foster criminality and antisocial behaviour and actively deter investment and confidence in our towns and cities. Public squalor undermines private affluence. As a leading criminologist, Professor George Kelling, wrote:

> "Vandalism can occur anywhere once communal barriers—the sense of mutual regard and the obligations of civility—are lowered by actions that seem to signal that 'no one cares.'"

The Government recognise that and I am pleased that much excellent work is taking place around the country, so making the public realm cleaner and safer and thereby contributing to the quality of life of those communities on both a social and an economic level.

We have taken action to deal with litter collection, one of the most basic of street services. Earlier this month, we doubled the fines that wardens can issue for littering offences. Litter encourages other environmental crimes, such as graffiti and fly tipping. Taken together, those problems make many residents uncomfortable and ashamed about the areas they live in and fearful of walking the streets at night. They also open the way to wider crime problems and often remind people of other problems in the area, in particular drug abuse. I am sure many hon. Members will have heard constituents talk about litter in general before focusing on the problem of needles and drug paraphernalia in their area, including the fears that that generates.

We are piloting schemes in which nine local authorities in different parts of the country can spend the fines that they receive from littering offences on environmental enforcement services. Three other local authorities, again right across the country, will join that scheme shortly.

Abandoned cars are another bane of the urban environment. We recently set out plans to give local authorities the power to deal more effectively with that problem, and they can remove them within 24 hours with immediate effect.

We have also recognised on a positive level the benefits that a quality environment can bring to local communities and the strategic importance of a high-quality environment to provide an impetus for regeneration and renewal. The Government established an urban green spaces taskforce that I chaired. It is due to report next month. There has also been a cross-cutting review of public open spaces, chaired by my colleague Lord Falconer, which will also make proposals to improve the quality of the public realm.

We are already seeing how towns and cities at a local level are seizing the initiative on those fronts. In particular, they are taking action to ensure that our parks and green spaces are not urban wastelands, but add benefit and value to the local community. For example, the regeneration proposals for Eastside in Birmingham will successfully incorporate new green spaces. A new city park will cover an area that mostly comprises abandoned and rundown warehouses. There will be improved access and circulation space in the new development, which will be linked with plans for a new residential development. We aim to get people and money circulating in an area that is very run down.

On a smaller scale, Groundwork, through the Barclays SiteSavers programme, has turned an area of disused land attached to Tewkesbury adult learning centre into an attractive garden and wildlife area that is accessible for people with disabilities—one of many excellent examples of the scheme turning derelict sites, which can be a haven for criminality, into community assets. I see that the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) is in his place, and I hope that he knows the scheme and appreciates its value.

One of the big issues of public concern is community safety. The management of the public realm and the local environment is crucial in that regard. Our second key

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objective is therefore to make local communities safer. Fear of crime, as we all know, can have a pernicious effect on people's confidence and their quality of life. We can improve people's quality of life substantially by making them feel safer, and we can actually make them safer through better management of streets and public areas. That type of work needs to go hand in hand with the work done by the local police force.

We are working to improve street lighting to increase safety and allay people's fears about walking along the streets after dark, and we have recently agreed with local authorities to undertake a national condition survey to help compile a national inventory of lighting. Public-private partnership schemes for street lighting are under way in some areas, including Manchester, Walsall and Sunderland. The £170 million CCTV camera fund and the Home Office's safer communities initiative—worth £20 million in 2002–03—will also help to make neighbourhoods safer.

In addition to these initiatives, designing development better from the outset can help reduce fear of crime, make crime harder to commit and increase the risk of detection. Designing out crime is an increasingly important and relevant issue, and we had have two Adjournment debates on the subject already in Westminster Hall. If hon. Members want a concrete example of how it has helped to turn a community around, they can consider the Northview estate redevelopment in Swanley, Kent. In the last two years, burglary has fallen by 73 per cent. and violent crime has gone down by 64 per cent. Community spirit has grown and tenants are transferring back to the estate. There are many ways in which the Government, and my Department in particular, are helping to foster good design through guidance, planning statements and our detailed work with the building industry.

A further good example of the way we are encouraging the designing out of crime is provided by our home zones schemes. These have been extremely popular and have been taken up by communities up and down the country. They transform the way in which residents can use their local streets. The road space is shared between drivers of motor vehicles and other road users, and planned, designed and built or rebuilt carefully to make sure that local people can maximise use—older people who want good, level pavements with street furniture, children who want play spaces, and drivers who want decent car parking close to their front doors. They also make sure that community safety issues are tackled—good-quality fencing, secure entrances and the ending of rat runs, and making sure that people have an environment that they can manage, but also one that they can enjoy.

In January this year, I announced the 61 successful bids—from 57 local authorities up and down the country—for home zones funding from the £30 million challenge fund announced by the Prime Minister last year. There was intense competition for the funds—a sign that the scheme had struck a real chord with local communities. One of our pilot home zones schemes in the New England area of Peterborough is already showing good results. That area includes a large amount of Victorian terraces and more modern semi-detached housing. About 1,450 households are to be involved in a phased traffic management programme that will cut down on rat running and help to reduce crime. Indeed, similar schemes in other parts of the country are remodelling areas where there is old terraced housing and where straight streets become rat runs for cars.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I heard my hon. Friend's reference to the home zones fund and other matters. When she visited some of the mining communities a few months ago, including Shirebrook in my area, she will have seen not just abandoned cars but houses abandoned by people who are little more than Rachmahs of this modern age. Promises were made that money would be available to make sure that we redevelop some of those old colliery villages to improve the quality of life. Can she say anything further on that today?

Ms Keeble: Specifically for my hon. Friend's area, we agreed financing for work to be done to redevelop the area through the Meaden valley partnership. I have continued to have discussions with people involved to make sure that the work is progressing, and I understand that they have done extremely well in producing the plans, in getting the partners involved and in sorting out the finances so that those particular areas—including that in my hon. Friend's constituency—can be dealt with. He will also know that, separately from his area, which has been a model of regeneration and of how partners can be pulled together, the Government have announced their intention to consider market renewal in a number of areas of low demand. We made an announcement on that some time ago.

The type of issues that my hon. Friend drew to my attention on my visit are exactly the reasons why we must make sure that there are jobs, that the built environment is dealt with, and that people do not have derelict houses and rundown streets. I found the problems staggering when I went round the streets with my hon. Friend and spoke to people about what it is like to live in some of those areas. Work is under way, and I assure him that I follow through closely what is happening with the Meaden valley partnership to make sure that there is progress. I am grateful to him for raising that point.

We can tackle crime partly through housing and streetscape and the issues raised by my hon. Friend, but also through pulling together the community, as well as working with the police. We need to get residents, local businesses and agencies fully involved in the fight against crime so that crime prevention and reduction are not solely matters for the police. One way of doing that is through the neighbourhood and street wardens schemes. The Government have allocated some £43.5 million for those initiatives to tackle the whole range of safety and environmental issues, and 120 schemes are going live across the country this year, including one in Bolsover, as my hon. Friend may be aware. They are helping to care for and manage the physical appearance of our streets and open spaces, as well as reducing crime and fear of crime, and deterring antisocial behaviour.

Neighbourhood wardens can be the eyes and ears of the police, the local authority and the community. They act as a visual deterrent, and their presence on the streets can reassure local residents. Wardens are involved in activities such as security surveys, property marking, neighbourhood watch schemes and providing victim support. They are already helping to build community confidence and foster

social inclusion in 85 areas across England and Wales. In a very short time, they have established themselves as key public services.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): On that point, are not the people that my hon. Friend is describing exactly the kind of support officers that the Government envisage introducing through the Police Reform Bill? Is it not all the more regrettable, therefore, that last night the unelected Lords decided to try to remove from the Bill those very proposals for strengthening our communities?

Ms Keeble: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. He is right to suggest that there is a relationship between the wardens and the support officers who are intended to work with the police, although they are not exactly the same. Wardens have proved a remarkable success, and they have done spectacular work to tackle crime and turn communities around, more than justifying their appointment. Having spent a great deal of time visiting and talking to wardens and those who work with them, I know that in most of the places where they work particularly well they work closely with the police, and each group very well understands the role of the other. It is a great shame that they have been depicted as being in conflict with the police.

Let us consider some of the success stories. In Darlington, since wardens began patrolling in May 2000, the number of burglaries has dropped by 17 per cent. Wardens in Manchester, working very closely with the police as part of a package of anti-crime measures, have helped to cut crime by a third. If we are to tackle crime, it is important that we look carefully at the lessons to be learned from such initiatives.

Having spent time talking to wardens and people in the local communities and seeing the detailed work that wardens do, I know that they have achieved improvements that come under the banner of "community safety", to which values and quantities cannot easily be attached. For example, in east Manchester, where I spent time walking around with the wardens late at night, I saw that they have helped to make it possible for old people to go out in winter to evening activities. The wardens will take people from their homes to bingo or to the social club, and escort them home afterwards, which the police are unable to do. Such action is important because it makes people feel secure and allows them to go out on the streets. In a sense, it enables the community to police itself. I also spoke to an old person in another part of the country who said that when she saw the uniformed wardens outside, she felt safer and much more confident about going out, just to do simple things like shopping.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): May I respond to the point about enabling communities, which is crucial to the debate? As someone who worked as a professional involved in the built environment, I am aware of the criticism that architects, engineers and those involved in physical infrastructure works have not taken any heed of communities. The failure to engage with and listen to communities, and in particular what happened on the estate where young Damilola Taylor died, is an indictment of us as a society. We must begin by understanding that the built environment is a fundamental part of how society works. Quality can be determined only by the end users of that environment—those who live in the communities.

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the need to make sure that housing estates and streets are built to be safe from the outset, and about the importance of that being understood by everybody involved in planning and building. That has been the subject of great debate in the community, and my Department has produced a great deal of documentation setting out how it can be achieved.

If my hon. Friend looks at Castle Vale, a housing estate in Birmingham, which I know is not his part of the country, he will see that some of the earlier phases of its redevelopment were built to more traditional designs and have had high rates of burglaries and break-ins. The buildings are not completely secure from the front, so people can get over gates. The newer phases will implement some of the design principles promoted by the Department, so the housing will be more secure from the front. In addition, it will look extremely attractive, with gardens and open spaces in the back which people can use safely. By making something safer, one can also make it more attractive and improve the quality of the whole area.

My hon. Friend made an extremely important point about involving the community, which I shall deal with towards the end of my remarks. For the moment, I shall just say that where the fight against crime has been linked with good environmental management and community involvement, the results have been spectacular. For example, in the east Brighton new deal for communities area, where the community is involved in designing the services, crime figures are down by 15 per cent., domestic burglaries are down by 28 per cent. and vehicle crime is down by a third. That is thanks in part to a safety team that includes wardens.

In the Bradford new deal for communities area, the level of violent crime in particular is bucking the national trend with a reduction of 32 per cent. In the new deal for communities area in east Manchester, apart from the reduction in crime which I mentioned, 26 per cent. of residents said that they felt safer, and the number of people who fear being attacked fell from 86 to 55 per cent. Those are the real achievements of bold, imaginative schemes that engage sometimes cynical communities to make the streets safer. In the process of securing those material benefits, the schemes attract more investment and jobs to the area.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): We all know that if we target resources on an area, that usually has an impact on crime figures. Is the Minister confident that those initiatives are not displacing crime to neighbouring areas? She is focusing on communities that are receiving resources, but not on what is happening next door, and that is my concern.

Ms Keeble: That is a fair point, and it is a particular concern for people in areas where CCTV is being installed. The evidence in most of those areas is that many of the criminals, as well as their victims, come from the area, so tackling crime does not always displace it. To achieve a reduction in crime, one has to deal with its

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causes, and the Government's commitment to do so—to be tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime—is therefore particularly important.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): I welcome what my hon. Friend has said about wardens, and we hope to have them in Croydon. The more co-operation there is between local authorities, who administer park wardens and traffic wardens, and the police, the more we can extend the eyes and ears of the police and involve the community. If we reduce rat running, we not only make the streets safer for our children, but make it more difficult for criminals to get in and out of communities. We need also to reduce pedestrian rat running, and by thinking carefully about the design of estates, we can make it more difficult for graffiti vandals to enter and then escape quickly.

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend is right. Careful work has been done in Croydon to tackle problems of low-level street crime. That effort is essential to the development of the town as a shopping and leisure centre, and innovative work has been done to find ways to encourage good management of public areas.

Croydon has been especially successful in dealing with public transport issues. One of the big barriers to using public transport, especially buses, is fear of crime. That is why we encourage local authorities, local transport authorities and companies to improve the quality of the areas around bus stops, where people feel a particular fear of crime. The quality of the Croydon tram system is a great credit to the local authority. That sort of quality is key to making sure that people feel safe using the tram and moving around the town centre.

Many of the schemes that I have mentioned focus on residential areas, but notable successes have also been scored in town centres. Town centre management partnerships between the public and private sectors are making major urban communities safer and cleaner, and helping to regenerate local economies. In Coventry, thanks to a retail crime initiative, the introduction of a quick-clean hit squad and the greening of the city centre, there has been an increase of more than 3 per cent. in the number of visitors, together with an improved socio-demographic profile, additional spending of almost £4 million, which is a large sum, in the local economy, and private sector refits and refurbishments worth up to £3 million.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): The Minister will be aware of the initiative taken some time ago by the Labour council in Coventry to create a city centre company that is to some extent separate from the council and has the sole responsibility of concentrating on the city centre. That initiative has had a great impact on the city.

Ms Keeble: The hon. Gentleman is right. Such initiatives, which can take several different forms, have transformed many city centres. Another excellent example of regeneration work is in Newcastle, where careful work with the public and private sectors is producing a city centre that is second to none in terms of the quality of its environment. It offers high-quality paving in an attractive pedestrian mall, which is steam cleaned at night and swept constantly during the day; public art; high-quality lighting; excellent use of heritage building; and partnerships between police and the leisure industry to ensure that the clubbers' paradise is relatively safe.

Many of the schemes that I have mentioned are effective because they benefit from full and active community engagement. If we are to tackle public realm issues and make places cleaner and safer so that businesses want to invest and people want to live in them, we have to focus from the outset on the needs and aspirations of local people and ensure that they are involved in shaping and managing their local environment. Those ideas underpin all the Government's efforts through their agenda for local government and in regeneration and renewal.

First, we are making local government more open and accessible through our changes to council structures and our work on different methods of voting. Secondly, and in many ways more radically, we have introduced new structures that directly involve local people in decision taking, especially people in disadvantaged areas, which have been the scene of the greatest voter apathy and the lowest turnouts in more traditional elections.

Local strategic partnerships bring together local residents, public sector agencies, local government and the voluntary and business sectors. Through consultation and local consensus, they set the strategic aims for renewal in the area and ensure that they are achieved. Our new deal for communities boards, which include representatives from the local community and the voluntary sector, also take decisions on regeneration.

The success of the new deal for communities in engaging local people is reflected in the generally high turnout in elections for community representatives in those partnerships and boards, compared with turnout in local elections. In Sheffield, there was a 52 per cent. turnout for the new deal for communities partnership elections, compared with 26 per cent. in local elections; in Bristol, turnout for new deal for communities partnership elections was 54 per cent., and in Newcastle it was 41 per cent.

Getting local people to take responsibility and to identify their own priorities fosters civic pride and helps to improve their quality of life. Often, issues relating to the environment and maintenance of the public realm are high priorities for the community boards.

Lawrie Quinn: Does my hon. Friend agree that often the perpetrators of the blight on our built environment and the cause of the sense of lack of security felt by the wider population are under-25s and younger people? They are not inclined to participate in community activities or to vote—they feel disfranchised, as though they are not stakeholders in the brave new world my hon. Friend describes. At the risk of sounding cynical, may I put her on the spot and ask how we might re-engage, or engage for the first time, that core group? They are our future citizens, but they are also graffiti artists, public transport fare dodgers, and the cause of great fear among the older population.

Ms Keeble: If I had the answers to how to involve young people in politics and the democratic process, I would be well ahead of the game. In fact, many of the new structures have engaged a wider cross-section of the

community than has been involved before. Let me cite a few striking examples. Among other things, neighbourhood and street wardens do a lot of work in schools. They have been able to involve young people—often younger than the ones my hon. Friend describes, I admit—in local activities centred on the environment. That has been important.

The employment profile of those who have become wardens is telling. A warden in Islington said that he spent a lot of time talking to young joyriders—people who were doing a lot of the things that my hon. Friend is worried about, such as stealing bikes, driving them around the area, and then dumping or setting fire to them. When I asked him how he managed to do a job that some might describe as challenging or even dangerous, he replied that he had been a steward at the local football club for about 15 years, so he knew a thing or two about talking to young people—quite difficult young people at that.

Community warden posts seem to attract people from diverse backgrounds. That helps them to engage with the general public in maintaining the public realm. We have not analysed the profile of members of local strategic partnerships and new deal for communities boards, but in view of my hon. Friend's comments, I might undertake such an analysis. Having met board members in one or two areas, it seems to me that we have been able to engage people who might not have become involved in more conventional politics or democratic structures, in part because as board members they deal directly with neighbourhood concerns about which everyone feels strongly.

I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I shall see whether we can carry out some sort of study of the profile of people who stand for new deal for communities boards and similar posts, to learn whether we are managing to engage with a wider than usual range of people.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Is not one of the reasons why many 16 to 18-year-olds are not interested in politics that they do not have the vote? Perhaps the Government should consider lowering the voting age.

Ms Keeble: That is a debate for another day. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) was talking about 18 to 25-year-olds, but we can talk about the full age range. I shall examine the profile of those on the new deal for communities boards to ascertain whether we are managing to engage with a wider community. That would be helpful in evaluating the success of the schemes.

There is also an issue about the involvement of the business community.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Perhaps the reason why some young people do not participate in elections is that they are cynical about the actions of their local council and the way in which they are treated. The Lib Dems in Sheffield have recently cut the youth service budget once again, which will have an effect on the community. That is something that we should consider. At the same time, they have given £1 million to their publicity budget, presumably to help get themselves re-elected. They have also given all the senior officers on the council a £30,000 pay increase. Perhaps actions of that sort breed cynicism and explain some young people's approach to politics.

Ms Keeble: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. We must ensure that we do not alienate young people by sometimes looking in two directions at once, which might be part of the problem in Sheffield.

It is important to recognise that community involvement does not mean the involvement of the residential community alone. The Government's business improvement districts, a programme announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last year, will enable authorities and businesses to work together to deliver cleaner streets, better pedestrian environments, new green spaces and improved security. The role of the business community involves looking after the environment of town centres and becoming involved in the wider regeneration debate, not only by investment but by support, advice and mentoring, as well as all the other things that the business community is extremely well equipped to do. Its role has been very important.

The Government believe that everyone has the right to a high-quality living environment. People have the right to walk the streets without fear of crime or without encountering litter, graffiti, abandoned cars and drug paraphernalia or without running the gauntlet of antisocial behaviour. They have a right to a public realm that enhances private comfort, stimulates community pride and boosts local economies.

We are taking action to ensure that our towns, cities and villages have cleaner and safer environments, and to ensure also that local communities have that sense of ownership and pride that is the best defence against urban decay. This approach will make our towns and cities places where businesses choose to invest and where people choose to live.

We still have much to do but we have made a start. There are now lower crime rates in some of our most disadvantaged areas; there are more people living in some city centres, thus stemming the flight to the suburbs; there is better management of our public realm; and in some instances, there are truly inspiring developments in town centres. Above all, there is a better quality of life for local communities.

10.14 am

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): We believe that, judging by the Government's atrocious record on such issues since they came into power, this debate should have been entitled "The Decline in Quality of Life since 1997". The timing of the debate is yet another feeble attempt by the Government to create a platform for Labour party press releases prior to the local elections next Thursday.

True to form, the Minister has this morning issued a press release, which we believe is a clear and serious breach of the guidance for civil servants during local elections. I shall quote from that guidance, which states:

"It is important therefore that civil servants take particular care during this period"—

that is, the run-up to local elections—

"to ensure that they conduct themselves in accordance with the Civil Service Code . . . Particular care should be exercised in relation to the announcement of sensitive decisions with a local dimension . . .

particular care should be taken over official support, and the use of public resources, including publicity, for Ministerial announcements which have a bearing on matters relevant to the local elections".

Ms Keeble: That slur on the press office of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is outrageous. Staff prepared the press release as professional press officers, and they have acted in a completely proper way. It is disgraceful to imply that they have in any way breached any code for civil servants during this period.

Mr. Moss: I am not accusing civil servants. I am accusing the Minister. Presumably she decides which press releases go out and which do not.

The guidance continues:

"The period of sensitivity preceding Local Elections is not fixed in relation to any particular date, but the general convention is that particular care should be taken in the three weeks preceding the elections".

In this case, that is from 11 April 2002. That was endorsed in a reply by the Prime Minister to a written question from the hon. Member—

Geraint Davies: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that at a time when people are concerned about graffiti and street crime, for example, and everyone is talking about them, the Government should suspend all activity in the run-up to local elections? Is that not completely ridiculous?

Mr. Moss: The hon. Gentleman displays the fact that he is completely ridiculous. If he reads the guidance, he will find that what I have read out is exactly what it states. The Government will still be in power, whatever the outcome of local elections. It is incumbent on the Government, with all their resources, not to involve themselves in publicity and press releases about local issues—yet that is exactly what the Minister has done

Geraint Davies: My constituents would certainly want me to continue the fight against graffiti and local crime, and to improve the quality of life, irrespective of elections—and also irrespective of the silly things that the hon. Gentleman is saying.

Mr. Moss: The hon. Gentleman should remain in his seat. Yet again he has missed the point. I am arguing that the Minister issued a press release as a member of the Government. What the hon. Gentleman does in his constituency is up to him. That does not breach the code. However, the press release issued today certainly does. The Minister should give the House an explanation when she winds up.

All we heard in the Minister's—

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moss: No, I am moving on.

All we heard in the Minister's contribution was the usual list of Government initiatives, schemes and interventions, many of which have been announced over and over again. Of themselves, these do not deliver on quality of life. The key is to measure—

Mr. McCabe: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) to refer so extensively to a press release that the rest of us have not seen? Would it not be appropriate to read it out?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): The press release to which the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire has referred is a public document. Therefore he is in order in referring to it.

Mr. Moss: If the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) wants to see the press release—I do not intend to read it out because that would take far too much time—he can go behind the Chair, collect it from the Opposition Whip and read it himself.

The key is to measure outcomes, and on that basis, the Government's record since 1997 has been woeful. The national health service is far worse with longer waiting lists and increasing litigation against a declining service. Our transport system is entirely inadequate. There is increasing congestion on our roads, and the rail system has become worse under Labour. Crime is still the No. 1 issue in many of our communities, and the electorate no longer believe Government statistics on crime.

Under Labour, despite soaring taxes, our streets are becoming more dirty and dangerous. Precious green spaces are under threat. Our rural economy is in tatters and there is no end in sight to the misery endured by our rural and farming communities.

Under Labour, council taxes have increased by more than three times the rate of inflation, with little or no improvement in services in many local authority areas. Only Conservative councils are delivering value for money, public services and the cleaning up of our streets.

Despite the Minister's platitudes, violent crime is soaring throughout the country. Before the 1997 election, Labour promised to be tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime. However, under Labour, there have been 500 fewer police officers in England since 1997 and 39 per cent. fewer special constables.

Street crime is soaring. Labour has hit the police with red tape and bureaucracy, taking police off our streets which, combined with their plans for more interference from Whitehall, has resulted in plummeting morale in the police force. The latest crime figures for the year ending 31 March 2001 show that in the past three years violence against the person has increased by 20 per cent., robbery by 42 per cent. and violent crime in total by 21 per cent. across England and Wales. A comparison between the last nine months of 2001 and 2000 shows a 26 per cent. increase in street crime across England and Wales and a 39 per cent. increase in London alone.

There are, however, enterprising initiatives to combat crime by Conservative-controlled councils. Kent county council has introduced rural community wardens in partnership with Kent police. Wardens are the eyes and ears of the police in the countryside, linked with local shops and businesses, neighbourhood watch schemes and county council services like schools and youth groups. Westminster city council has launched a city guardian initiative to reduce crime, antisocial behaviour and breaches of public safety.

Adequate street lighting is crucial to the fight against crime, particularly theft and assault. Conservative councils spend more on street lighting; they spend £66 a year per street light compared with £61 in Labour councils and only

£60 in Liberal Democrat councils—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members may scoff, but those figures were worked out under best value indicator 95 introduced by their Government. I shall come to other indicators later, but according to any indicator, Labour-controlled councils do far worse than Conservative ones.

The fact is that our streets are becoming dirtier, and there is a clear link between urban decay and crime. In a speech in Croydon before the election, the Prime Minister promised to tackle abandoned cars and urban decay, claiming that such issues were

"at the heart of the government's rights and responsibilities' agenda."

Yet our streets are becoming dirtier, thanks to the Government's incompetence and poor administration by Labour councils. Dirty streets, graffiti, fly tipping and abandoned cars are all symptoms of urban decay, which has worsened under Labour. The degradation of our neighbourhoods fuels more crime.

Geraint Davies *rose—*

Mr. Moss: A survey by William M. Mercer found that London is the dirtiest capital in Europe.

Geraint Davies: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is the hon. Gentleman in order to make derogatory remarks about Croydon without accepting an intervention from a Member representing the area?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Whether to include such an intervention in the debate is at the discretion of the Member giving the speech.

Mr. Moss: I made no derogatory remarks about Croydon whatsoever. The hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) just does not listen. I simply said that the Prime Minister had made a speech in Croydon; I made no remarks about urban decay in Croydon itself—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Moss: A survey by William M. Mercer found that London is the dirtiest capital in Europe, second only to Athens. Worldwide, London was ranked as low as 41st, a fall of six places from 2000, when it was 35th. The Government's second survey of national sustainable development indicators found that violent crime, traffic and waste problems were all worsening.

One key issue, as the Minister herself pointed out, is abandoned cars. The number of malicious vehicle fires has risen year on year, and by 68 per cent. in England since 1997—a key indicator quantifying the problem of burnt-out abandoned cars in local communities. The European Union end-of-life vehicles directive, which will come into effect in April, will mean that the cost of disposing of cars will soar. The Local Government Association estimates that it will now cost £200 to £300 to scrap a car, so most scrap yards will not accept cars without payment. The LGA says that it simply does not know how many more cars are going to be dumped in future.

Our debate on local communities should cover the new menace of fly-tipped fridges. New EU regulations on the disposal of refrigerators, which the Government signed without fully understanding the implications, have just come into effect, increasing the costs of disposal. Not only are there currently no facilities in the United Kingdom to dispose of fridges according to the new requirement, but the Government have imposed extra costs on councils that could run to more than £100 million a year. The whole debacle is down to ministerial incompetence; no doubt the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report on it will be devastating.

According to Audit Commission figures, local residents are more satisfied with waste collection services, street cleanliness and recycling facilities delivered by Conservative councils. For Members who take a keen interest in such things, I should explain that best value indicator 89 shows that residents in England whose services are provided by Conservative councils are more satisfied with the cleanliness of their streets and neighbourhoods: 68.4 per cent of residents in Conservative-controlled areas are content, compared with 56.9 per cent in Labour-controlled areas. Similarly, best value indicator 90a on waste collection shows that residents are more satisfied with waste collection services provided by Conservative councils: 86.3 per cent are satisfied, compared with 82 per cent. in Labour areas.

Mr. McCabe: Can the hon. Gentleman offer the House an explanation of why the Conservatives are so much better at dealing with rubbish?

Mr. Moss: I am talking about the best value indicators covering a range of council responsibilities, which were established by the Department and voted for in the House. I am simply demonstrating to hon. Members that all the indicators, as measured by the Audit Commission, show Conservative councils scoring better than Labour councils. That is what the hon. Gentleman does not like.

Mr. Sanders: Is it not the case that Liberal Democrat councils do better than Tory councils, which is why the hon. Gentleman has not mentioned them?

Mr. Moss: I am happy to give the figures for Liberal Democrat councils, which I omitted—*[Interruption.]* I was asked a question, and must endeavour to respond. On clean street satisfaction, Liberal Democrat councils scored 63 per cent., compared with 68 per cent. for Conservative councils; on waste collection satisfaction, Liberal Democrat councils scored 84 per cent., compared with 86 per cent. for Conservative councils; on recycling satisfaction, Liberal Democrat councils scored 66 per cent., compared with 70 per cent. for Conservative councils. Need I continue?

Mr. Sanders: No.

Mr. Moss: The hon. Gentleman has had enough; good.

To reduce graffiti and vandalism, Wandsworth borough council has expanded the use of closed circuit television and decoy sites to detect perpetrators, and is developing a voluntary code with retailers to stop the sale of spray cans and marker pens to juveniles. To tackle litter, it has doubled the number of litter bins on local streets to 1,400, all of which are emptied at least once a day.

I shall now turn to the subject of green spaces and the Green Paper. The Government are forcing local authorities to oversee the construction of millions of

[Mr. Moss]

houses against local wishes. They have established a series of rigid national housebuilding targets across the country, which are then fed down via regional housebuilding targets to local authorities. Conservatives are opposed to excessive greenfield development. That is not nimbyism; we want to protect our green spaces in the north and the south, in our urban areas and in our countryside. We would abolish regional planning guidance and housebuilding targets, and give those powers back to local councils.

As for the planning Green Paper, local residents in London and the south-east are to be robbed of their say in local planning decisions. The consultation document outlines the Labour Government's desire to strip local communities of planning powers in a number of areas. We accept that the planning system needs to be reformed, but abolishing south-eastern residents' say in local planning is a retrograde step. Local people will be robbed of their say on large developments such as new airports, incinerators, pylons, large housing estates and power stations. Labour has also given the green light to greenfield destruction on a massive scale.

Mr. Betts: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Green Paper places great emphasis on the need for full and proper consultation, and that notices stuck on lamp posts by planning authorities should not be seen as a means of consulting the local community? There is also an emphasis on the need for prior consultation before the planning process begins, to make sure that that work goes on in a more relaxed and meaningful way, and to avoid confrontation when the local community suddenly sees a planning proposal at the last minute and rejects it.

Mr. Moss: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that more and better local consultation is necessary. That is what we propose. The opposition to the planning Green Paper has not come from the Conservative Benches alone: the Confederation of British Industry and other bodies, having studied it, are beginning to have serious doubts about it.

As for transport, we have more traffic and more congestion. Just days after the 1997 general election, the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions said:

"I will have failed if in five years time there are not . . . far fewer journeys by car. It's a tall order but I urge you to hold me to it."

We certainly intend to do so. Despite record fuel taxes, traffic on British motorways has risen by 11 per cent. since 1997, and by 5 per cent. across all roads.

There is also the problem of London Underground. Before Labour was elected, it promised

"to improve the Underground . . . and guarantee value for money to taxpayers and passengers",

but delays on London Underground have almost doubled since Labour came to power. Delays have risen from 4.5 per cent. in 1997–98 to 8.4 per cent. in the last recorded period.

Mr. Syms: We spoke earlier about the press release from the Department, which mentions a 30 per cent. fall in public disturbances and street violence in a particular area of Newham. Will my hon. Friend take into account the fact that according to Metropolitan police figures in Newham over the past 12 months, street crime has gone up 21 per cent., possession of offensive weapons by 28 per cent., burglary by 12 per cent. and sexual offences by 30 per cent? The press release does not set the figure in context.

Mr. Moss: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. It seems that not only are the Government in breach of the code in terms of issuing press releases at this sensitive time, but they cannot even get their press releases accurate.

London Underground's most recent annual report revealed that the tube had failed on all seven of its performance targets. It failed to meet the required customer satisfaction standards for safety, security, information given to passengers, cleanliness of trains, the helpfulness and availability of station staff, number of train miles run, and the time taken for passengers to reach their destinations.

Not long after the 1997 election, the Prime Minister said:

"railways are not a top priority".

That is from the record of a Cabinet meeting on 8 May 1997. Punctuality and reliability have declined under Labour. The percentage of trains arriving on time has declined from 89.7 per cent. in 1997–98 to 79.1 per cent. in 2000–01. The Minister for Europe, has admitted:

"we have the worst railways in Europe. We started transport investment far too late."

Since their election, the Labour Government have spent less in terms of both public investment and public expenditure than the last Conservative Administration. Total managed expenditure on transport as a proportion of gross domestic product totalled 1 per cent. on average between 1997 and 2001, 41 per cent. less than the under last Conservative Administration, who spent 1.7 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Geraint Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there are more people travelling on the tube than ever before? We now have the Croydon tram, which is moving 18 million passengers a year, and many more people are travelling on the railways. There are difficulties, but tens of billions of pounds will go into the tube in the next few years.

Mr. Moss: The trend in increased use of the railways started under the Conservative Administration as a result of privatisation. That is what led to a substantial increase in the use of the trains.

On toll taxes—

Lawrie Quinn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moss: No, I have only a limited amount of time and I want to press on. I am moving on to toll taxes. [HON. MEMBERS: "Poll taxes?"] No, toll taxes. Ken Livingstone is looking to introduce congestion taxes in central London by 2003. Other councils in England are entering into pilot schemes for congestion taxes or workplace parking taxes.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is working on multi-modal studies examining the possibility of motorway tolls across England. That was

revealed in a consultants' report the other week. The Government's 10-year transport plan makes it clear that before introducing such taxes

"we shall need to take account of the conclusions of the multi-modal studies".

Only this morning it was leaked that the Prime Minister's transport troubleshooter, Lord Birt, is proposing the increased use of road tolls to fund expenditure in the transport sector and to reduce congestion.

We believe that toll taxes will merely divert traffic to less suitable roads, increasing congestion and pollution. Residents outside the tax zone will suffer as drivers will drive and park away from the centre of town in residential areas. In London, even Transport for London has admitted that traffic will rise by 8 per cent. in Southwark and 6 per cent. in Lambeth as a result of the diversion of traffic. Toll taxes will not lead to an overall improvement in air quality. Even Ken Livingstone admitted:

"We expect there to be no significant improvement in air quality directly as a result of congestion charging."

I now turn to the social services. It is becoming clearer with every day that Labour's mismanagement of the NHS has plunged both the care of the elderly and care homes in particular into crisis. It is clear to anyone with any common sense that a thriving care home sector is crucial to the overall well-being of the health service. There are patients lying in hospital who are fit enough to be discharged, but who remain in hospital solely because there is nowhere for them to go and no money in social service departments of local councils to care for them in their own homes.

Why is that? Under this Government, a combination of ineptitude and mismanagement has seen the closure of some 50,000 care home beds since 1997. At any one time more than 6,000 hospital beds are occupied by patients whose discharge has been delayed. The Department of Health states that 680,000 patients have their discharges delayed every year. The fact that patients remain in hospital when they could and should be elsewhere means that, through no fault of their own, they occupy precious beds that would otherwise be given to patients requiring operations. No wonder the waiting lists remain stubbornly high. Not only is there a queue to get into hospital under Labour, but Labour has brought us the queue to get out of hospital.

That speaks volumes about the Government's approach to health more generally. They will never deliver the necessary reforms because they have a deep-rooted antipathy towards private providers. They use the private sector when it suits them, both at home and abroad, but as the Chancellor's statement last week showed, they are totally wedded to a health service funded exclusively from general taxation. They talk about working with the private sector, but in care home provision there is a long-standing relationship between public and private sectors, and the Government are making a complete hash of it.

Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moss: No. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman several times already.

Despite the bleak picture, Conservative councils are delivering better quality services for lower taxes. Since 1997 the average band D annual council tax in England has risen by £287—that is, 42 per cent.—under the Labour Government. They have turned council tax into a stealth tax. Vulnerable people such as pensioners on fixed incomes have suffered the most, yet on average across different tiers Conservative councils charge £135 a year less on band D bills than Labour councils, and £159 a year less than Liberal Democrat councils.

Labour claims that the average council tax is lower in Labour councils. The fact that average council tax bills, rather than the average band D bills, tend to be lower in Labour areas has nothing to do with the spending decisions of those Labour councils. It is merely a reflection of the fact that property values tend to be lower in Labour areas. Peter Kellner has stated:

"Homes in Labour areas tended to fall into lower council tax bands and this was why the average council tax was lower. . . The proper way to judge the figures was to compare like with like—Band D figures, council by council".

He went on to state that Labour's claim

"is as misleading as it ever was . . . On this issue, Labour is wrong and Tories are right."

That is a quote from *The Sunday Times* in 1995. *[Laughter.]* It is still appropriate. Perhaps the hon. Members who are guffawing, and have been guffawing for most of the morning, would care to write to Peter Kellner to see whether he stands by his quote. The position has not changed since then.

Mr. Betts: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. Let us take two local authority areas, Labour and Conservative, that have the same average council tax. House values are likely to be slightly lower in the Labour authority area than under the Conservative authority, so band D will always be different because of the different sorts of houses. It is the average that has to be considered, as it is the amount raised from a given number of properties in an area that is the true test for comparison between councils.

Mr. Moss: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on that count. The only true measurement is achieved by comparing the same band; Peter Kellner has endorsed the view that we have taken all along.

Liberal Democrats claim that council taxes have risen faster this year in Conservative councils and at the lowest rate in Lib Dem councils. Although the Government have turned council tax into a stealth tax—they have hit the shire counties hardest—Conservative councils still charge an average of £159 less on band D bills than Liberal Democrat councils. Across every tier of local government, we deliver better local public services at a lower cost.

Conservative councillors are making life better through neighbourhood initiatives. According to Audit Commission data—best value indicator 3—Conservative councils have the highest satisfaction rate among local residents. Some 68 per cent. of residents are satisfied under Conservative councils, as opposed to 61 per cent. under Labour. In case the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) wants to leap to his feet, I must also point out that 65 per cent. are satisfied under the Liberal Democrats. People are most satisfied with the Conservatives because we tackle problems such as crime and graffiti and improve the whole range of public services—and still charge lower taxes.

It is on that basis that I recommend that people vote Conservative in preference to voting for the other parties in next Thursday's local elections.

10.41 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I welcome this debate, as I am sure hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber do, but what a contrast between the two opening speeches. We heard from my hon. Friend the Minister a constructive presentation of a range of issues. Her speech was very different from that of the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss). I say to him that I am one of those Labour Members who live in a Tory-controlled local authority area, so I see at first hand the sort of services that the Tories provide to my constituents—a point to which I shall return later. None the less, I am sure that all of us welcome the opportunity to debate the quality of life in our communities and constituencies, and the good and bad points in that regard. The debate will certainly cover many issues.

As a London Member, I represent the most densely populated part of the United Kingdom. London's population is well over 7 million and it is growing. Many people who come to the UK come to London, and many remain here as residents. Like all hon. Members, irrespective of the side of the House on which they sit, Londoners rely on the many services that make London a pleasant place in which to live and work. London is a city with many different standards, both rich and poor. Along with my hon. Friends the Members for Putney (Mr. Colman) and for Battersea (Martin Linton), I represent the London borough of Wandsworth, so I see at first hand what happens in a Tory-controlled borough, which we are often told is a flagship borough.

Before I deal with that point, I want to mention a number of other issues. Under this Government, unemployment has fallen considerably. Areas such as mine had very high youth unemployment under the Tory Government, but thankfully, due to the current Government's policies and the money that they have put in, although some youngsters are still unemployed, the number has been enormously reduced. We can see real confidence among young people when we meet them and hear them say, "Yes, it is a bit difficult, but I really believe that I'll get a job."

What concerns me in the area that I represent—I accept that this is a problem not only in London, but in many other parts of the country—is that I regularly see at my advice surgery men and some women who are in their late 40s and early 50s, but who are out of work. Many of them have great skills, but sadly, they are not the skills of today—the modern technology skills that we all know are in demand. Such people come to me and say, "I've got a lot of skill, I am middle aged, and as far as I'm concerned, I've got many years of my working life left. I want to work and not live on benefit." Although the Government have done a great deal to help such people, priority must be given to ensuring that adequate training schemes are available to help men and women in that age group to retrain, so that they can do what they want: re-enter the employment market.

We all know that so much depends on a person being in work, because their income affects their quality of life, the housing that they can afford and the social life that their families can enjoy. There is a great diversity of skills and talents, but if the community that I represent is to thrive, we cannot afford to allow people's talents to go to waste. I make that point very forcefully to my hon. Friend the Minister, because I do not believe—I am sure that none of my colleagues believes—that a person's age should determine whether he or she can find employment. That applies not only to London, but to anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Like many other cities and towns, London has ethnic communities. I represent a large Asian community, many of whose members have lived in this country for many years. In many cases, their children were born here. It is estimated that more than 30 per cent. of London's population is of an ethnic background. Such people play a major role in many aspects of life in our society and community, and their quality of life needs to be protected and developed. Good housing and community facilities are important.

Many members of the ethnic community are elderly and are entitled to expect facilities for community and cultural activities—day centres most especially. I say to the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire that in the London borough of Wandsworth, which has a large Asian population, I get no help whatever in trying to get modern day centres and luncheon clubs for the ethnic communities in my constituency. He read out a long list of services that Conservative-controlled authorities are supposed to offer to the local community, but as a local Member of Parliament, I see the lack of any constructive help on such key issues. It would have been interesting if he had commented on the difficulties that Labour Members such as my two colleagues and I, who represent the London borough of Wandsworth, experience in dealing with a Conservative-controlled authority when we try to protect services for our communities.

There are some excellent day centres in my constituency, but sadly, not enough. We tend to forget that ethnic communities have their own forms of worship and want to be able to follow them, as they have a right to do. That can be difficult when dealing with Conservative-controlled authorities such as Wandsworth.

It is important to develop and encourage business opportunities, especially for young people, who often have good ideas but find it difficult to get started. That affects the quality of life in a community. When areas are run down, shops shut and businesses close, and it affects the whole community. My hon. Friend the Minister referred to that in her opening remarks. I am therefore in favour of helping young people to set up local businesses. When I talk to them, they say that the high rents and rates that local businesses have to pay determine whether they remain in business. Perhaps that affects cities such as London more than other parts of the country.

I am currently dealing with the case of a young man who has a Chinese restaurant in my constituency. He has a 15-year lease on the property, on which he has been paying rent of £14,000 a year. The rent is up for review and he has been told that he will be asked to pay £23,500 from June this year—an increase of £9,500. He cannot possibly afford that substantial extra sum of money. The negotiations with the owner will determine whether he can remain in business. Young people talk to each other; my constituent talks to other business people in the area where he owns the restaurant. We need to consider the image of setting up in business that such cases present to young people.

I believe in encouraging young people. Many young people who live in London have an excellent education and a lot of skills, and they need encouragement to start a business. They also need the security of knowing that

they will receive a fair opportunity to develop it and will not be told after a year or so, "Sorry, you're not meeting your overheads. We will therefore have to cease loaning you money", because that means that the business will close.

Lawrie Quinn: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Enterprise Bill, which is in Committee, will go a long way towards supporting start-up businesses and tackling some of the problems of potential bankruptcy that he describes?

Mr. Cox: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. To their credit, the Government are pursuing the matter, and the measure will help the sort of case to which I referred. People face genuine difficulties in setting up businesses, but the Government are taking the matter seriously and introducing measures to help.

London has an ageing population, and the borough that I represent has approximately 40,000 retired people. The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire made almost never-ending criticisms of the Government, but they have done a great deal for retired people through their policies and benefits. I am sure that pensioners in the hon. Gentleman's constituency would agree.

We all accept that the weekly pension is important, but so is quality of life. More than 13 per cent. of London's population is over 65. When one visits day centres or goes out campaigning on issues—I am not talking only about elections that may be due in the near future—and speaks to retired people, one is soon filled with their ideas and hopes. They include a decent place in which to live. Again, it is difficult in the London borough of Wandsworth to find such places for retired people.

We need a great deal more sheltered housing that provides security and allows people to keep their independence. We need more pleasant open spaces with good provision in the areas where retired people live. Again, it is difficult to get that in the borough that I represent. In a few moments, I shall comment at length on another aspect of housing in Wandsworth because I may want the help and support of my hon. Friend the Minister.

Many hon. Members may agree with my next comments on a key aspect of the quality of life that people can enjoy. Retired people often tell me that when they go out shopping or walking, they would like to know where there are benches on which they can sit and perhaps meet their friends and have a chat. It is difficult for retired people to find benches in the areas where they live or go for a walk. Such provision would be of great benefit without costing an enormous amount of money. Lack of toilet facilities is more of an issue for local authorities than for the Government, but local residents often mention it to me. Many retired people would like more such facilities. Some might claim that those are not especially big issues, but they contribute to the quality of life for many people.

My hon. Friend the Minister rightly spoke at length about crime and a range of related matters. Sadly, under all Governments, we hear about appalling crimes in our society. It is not a political issue, and it is regrettable that the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire tried to make it one.

It being Eleven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

ITV Digital

11 am

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on ITV Digital. As the House knows, the ITV Digital administrator, Deloitte Touche, announced yesterday that it is preparing for the short-term sale of the business and its assets. This is an issue that has reverberations far beyond the boardroom of ITV Digital. It directly affects the million ITV Digital subscribers, the company's staff, its creditors, its programme suppliers and the clubs, fans and supporters of the Nationwide Football League.

The Government too, have a direct interest. We are concerned for those millions of people and hundreds of businesses who are watching closely to see whether they will be able to recover something from the sale of the company. That is why it was a great pity that ITV Digital was not able to come to a deal that was acceptable to the Football League, one of its biggest creditors. I have spent much of the last few weeks seeking to encourage all the parties to the talks on restructuring to keep the company going, to keep negotiating and to keep talking. But this week, time ran out for ITV Digital and its creditors, and now the usual commercial processes must take their course. As this is a complex and fluid situation, I want to make clear to the House my willingness to ensure that the House is updated in coming weeks.

I would like to set out for the House the next steps in what has been a confusing—and is still, in some respects, an uncertain—process. For the time being, ITV Digital subscribers are continuing to receive a service, including the free-to-view services enjoyed by all digital viewers. But the ITV Digital pay services will last only as long as the company's suppliers are willing to continue to supply their programmes and services. That will depend on negotiations currently under way between the suppliers and the administrators. It is possible that some suppliers will have no choice but to withdraw their programmes.

If and when the service for which the licences have been granted ceases to be provided, and the licensee no longer fulfils the terms of its licences, the Independent Television Commission will begin the process of revocation of the licences for the digital terrestrial multiplexes formerly used by ITV Digital. Having revoked the licences, the ITC will then re-advertise them in an accelerated process that is likely to take six weeks. In the meantime, the administrator is arranging for all existing subscribers to be kept informed of the position by on-air announcements and by personal letter. That is obviously vital. ITV Digital subscribers are innocent parties in this matter, and they deserve to be given all the advice and information possible while the administrator and others work to preserve their TV service for the future.

Looking to the end of this stage, I understand that the administrator remains confident that a sale of the business can be achieved. I have, of course, received representations from my hon. Friends the Members for Battersea (Martin Linton), for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire (Mr. Ainger), for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) and for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), and from the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth,

[Tessa Jowell]

Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), relating to their concerns for the more than 1,500 members of staff affected. We all recognise that this is an anxious and uncertain time for the staff, but they are being extremely well served by the representations of their Members of Parliament. I am confident that the free-to-air services will remain in place without disruption, and it is important to remember that about 60 per cent. of the ITV Digital subscriber base take only free-to-air services.

I shall now turn to the situation facing football. As the House will be aware, ITV Digital entered into a contract with the Nationwide Football League. The TV rights to broadcast Football League matches were reported to have been sold to ITV Digital for £315 million. I understand that the Football League has so far received £137 million from the contract, and that £178 million therefore remains outstanding. It was an important object of the negotiations in recent weeks between the Football League and ITV Digital—and, subsequently, its administrators—to reach a settlement on this matter. Clearly, the failure of ITV Digital to meet its contract with the football clubs will be a further blow for the many clubs that are already facing financial difficulties.

I welcome the fact that the chief executive of the Football Association—the governing body for the game—will bring together the various organisations with the power to help to navigate football and the clubs through this difficult time. I have obviously been in contact with the chief executives of the FA, the Premier League and the Nationwide League. The Government will offer all support to the efforts of that FA-led group. Supporters Direct, established by the Government in 1998, has already helped 31 of the 72 Football League clubs by enabling supporters to invest through supporters' trusts. We expect that Supporters Direct will take a prominent role in helping to secure the future of clubs over the coming months.

In many communities, football clubs are a powerful force for good. They are a source of local identity and of local pride. Many of them run successful programmes to get people involved in the sport and to help them to develop their talent. Many also use the sport to attract young people into education and positive involvement in the community. The anti-racist and social cohesion work through the football in the community and the playing for success schemes, run in conjunction with the Department for Education and Skills, are two powerful examples of the way in which this works in practice.

It is important to be clear that football has not asked the Government to bail it out financially, but we want to do all that we can to offer clubs support at this difficult time. As I have mentioned, I have been in regular contact with representatives of the various relevant football organisations, and we will continue to offer help to clubs in terms of support to players and staff who find themselves out of a job. Just this week, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport had a very positive discussion with the football authorities and Sport England to ensure that the resources are provided to secure the future of the football youth development programme.

I shall now outline the circumstances facing digital television in the wake of the collapse of ITV Digital. Yesterday's announcement represents the collapse of a brave commercial enterprise to launch an entirely new digital platform. The business made commercial judgments that have turned out to be unsuccessful. Of course, there is always a risk in such ventures, especially in relation to markets built on new technology. This is, however, essentially a private matter between the company and its creditors. The Government's role is to protect the wider public interest. Apart from regular contact with the companies concerned, I have been in day-by-day contact with the Independent Television Commission, whose responsibility it is to regulate the commercial broadcasters. My aim in all this has been to keep a discussion going, and to keep the parties talking about how to maintain a service for digital terrestrial viewers.

More broadly, the Government have helped to create a very good climate for digital TV in the UK. Twice the number of UK homes have access to digital television as the European average. We should be proud of that. Thanks to Government action, digital TV has grown faster in this country than the take-up of mobile phones, the internet and even colour television.

We have created an excellent regulatory framework for digital television, and ITV Digital in particular. Our digital action plan provides the route map to digital switchover by 2010, bringing together industry, broadcasters and consumers—the key players, who will make switchover happen.

All material obstacles to improving the power of transmission, and thereby the quality, have been removed, subject to the need to prevent interference with existing analogue signals.

Carlton and Granada, the owners of ITV Digital, were assisted by a rebate on the tax levy on their analogue Channel 3 licences for every household to which they provided digital services. This rebate—the digital dividend—is worth tens of millions of pounds. In addition, our settlement for the BBC licence fee has enabled the BBC to expand its output of digital television services.

As a result, digital television in the United Kingdom has grown faster than in any comparable country and is received by 40 per cent. of UK households. No country in the world has done more to nurture the digital revolution, and no country has seen such success as a result. Britain is a world leader in digital technology and digital reach.

We have very good reasons, even at this difficult time, to be positive about the future as new cheap set-top boxes come on to the market and scope increases for improved picture and reception quality. We expect to see these roll out as soon as the current uncertainty is resolved. As I have made clear, I expect that uncertainty to be resolved within a few weeks.

The hard truth is that this is a failure of a company, not a technology. New entrants will deal with a better understood technology and an established infrastructure. My contact with the industry suggests that established and new industry players want to have a go at making this proposition work. They will either go forward to the administrator or firm up their expressions of interest as part of any ITC re-tendering of the licences.

I also commend the work of the administrator, who has acted throughout with forbearance and professionalism.

In conclusion, the Government have always made it clear that the switchover process must be driven by consumer demand. In any new technology, there are

bumps on route, and this has been one. However, I agree with the Consumers Association that the most important thing is to restore certainty and predictability for customers so that they can make their own, informed choices.

It is clear that digital terrestrial television has an important role to play in the digital future. It is a natural migration path for analogue viewers who are accustomed to receiving their television services through their aerials and it is potentially universal in its availability. This platform must continue, to ensure that all viewers have a full range of options in a competitive and dynamic environment.

Digital television has the potential to bring enormous opportunities and benefits to families all over the country. Digital households enjoy a wide range of channels and a wide range of additional benefits including interactive programming, information services that provide education and entertainment and even access to the internet.

The success of DTT should not be equated with the position of one commercial operator. The fact that ITV Digital has not succeeded will not deflect the Government, consumers and the broadcasting industry from making a reality of the digital future. Digital television, and the promise it holds, is more than ITV Digital.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for her statement and for making it available to me before she delivered it to the House. I also welcome her assurance that she will continue to update Parliament in the coming weeks as this crisis evolves.

I entirely share the right hon. Lady's concern for ITV Digital subscribers—I happen to be one—the company's employees, the creditors and suppliers and, of course, the football clubs and millions of football fans.

The truth is that nobody emerges from this ghastly mess with credit. Carlton and Granada are walking away from a problem that they are partly responsible for creating, and the unrealistic expectations of the Football League leave many football clubs facing a bleak future. Above all, the Government, who must decide when their stated goal of digital switchover will occur, cannot continue shrugging off all responsibility for the crisis. Complacent self-congratulation of the sort that we have just heard about the Government's role in promoting digital television is no substitute for the actions that are urgently needed. Everybody in the industry has known for months that this crisis has been brewing, yet the Government have so far done nothing to address the problem or lay the foundations for a solution. The result of that failure is that Britain's leadership of the digital television revolution is at risk. Our chance of dominating one of the 21st century's most promising industries is in danger of being thrown away.

If digital switchover is to be achieved by 2010, or indeed by a later date, it is essential that a viable digital terrestrial television platform operates alongside the satellite and cable platforms. Only in that way can the public interest be properly served and protected. Unless a replacement for ITV Digital is found quickly, public confidence in digital terrestrial television will drain away. Indeed, the Government's slowness in tackling the problem of poor-quality digital terrestrial television reception by increasing the strength of the signal has already seriously damaged public confidence.

Furthermore, many consumers are confused about digital television. Nearly all new television sets sold this year are analogue, yet the Government have done nothing to educate the public about what is happening. Instead, they allow consumers to go on buying equipment that the Government's stated policies will render obsolete within eight years, without any warning given to the consumer at the point of sale.

The Secretary of State has been in post for more than 10 months, long enough to have thought carefully about the important issues involved. I should like her to answer some simple questions that were not addressed in her statement. First—and this is regardless of the outcome of the present negotiations—will she publish a clear timetable setting out, step by step, when and how the existing digital terrestrial television signal will be strengthened and its geographical reach increased? Secondly—again, regardless of the outcome of the present crisis—will she mount a public information campaign to ensure that all consumers understand the difference between analogue and digital television and between satellite, cable and terrestrial television and that they are aware of the implications of Government policy when it comes to the television sets that they own and those they are thinking of buying?

Thirdly, to assist the present talks to a successful outcome as quickly as possible, will the right hon. Lady make it clear whether she believes that digital terrestrial television should consist exclusively of free-to-air channels or a mixture of free-to-air and pay television? In that context, does she recognise that many people cannot and probably never will be able to access satellite or cable television for various reasons and will therefore depend on digital terrestrial television to enjoy the wider choice of channels that are available to people willing to subscribe?

Since the end of the consultation period following publication of the Government's document just before Christmas, they have been notably silent on how they will apply the rules on media and cross-media ownership. Will the right hon. Lady explain how she intends to apply those rules in finding a replacement for ITV Digital as soon as possible? Will she say whether she believes that the ITC should re-allocate the multiplexes that ITV Digital surrenders as a single package or individually? Will she say how she thinks that the process of re-allocating the multiplexes relates to the sale of ITV Digital's assets?

Will the right hon. Lady review the Government's timetable to achieve the goal of digital switchover by 2010? Does she agree that some of the potential benefits of digital television will be lost if the set-top boxes that convert sets from analogue to digital cannot accommodate a pay-television upgrade option? Does she share the concerns of some people that, if the BBC or Sky were to emerge as the dominant player in the new digital terrestrial television platform, excessive power would be concentrated in the hands of organisations whose market dominance is already considerable? Will she explain how the BBC charter and her agreement as Secretary of State with the BBC may affect the BBC's role in helping to find a solution to the present crisis?

On the future of football, fans will study the right hon. Lady's statement with interest, but in vain for anything other than warm words and expressions of sympathy. Will she confirm therefore that the Government do not intend to take any practical steps to assist football clubs, even those that may now face bankruptcy?

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

The broadcasting industry and all those who believe that the future lies with digital television will have been disappointed by today's statement—the uncertainty continues and the Government's lack of leadership and commitment remain as stark as ever.

Tessa Jowell: Let me work my way through the Opposition spokesman's questions, and provide answers. The hon. Gentleman's questions reveal an extraordinary degree of ignorance of the crisis about which he claims to be so concerned. First, most of the information that he seeks is set out in the digital action plan—the route map that identifies the roles of the Government, broadcasters, consumers and the industry between now and the point at which switchover is achieved, subject to meeting the tests that have been clearly set out. Secondly, as part of the digital action plan, the market preparation group is promoting information material for consumers, working with consumer organisations. We will be led by their judgment on when is the right to moment to launch a public information campaign.

In relation to the digital terrestrial platform, yes, the Government's position is to promote competition between platforms to develop consumer choice and therefore to enable the possibility that each platform has a combination of free-to-air and pay services. The general expectation is that, as digital television develops, each platform will develop a different identity, depending on consumer preference and consumer choice, but the intention is that DTT should be a free-to-air and a pay platform.

If the hon. Gentleman had bothered to check, he would have been able to clarify the points about the extent of light-touch regulation in relation to multiplex ownership, the regulation of which was considerably lightened by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). Multiplex ownership does not involve any restrictions in relation to cross-media or non-European ownership, so multiplex ownership is not constrained in the way that other aspects of the media are subject to media ownership rules.

The hon. Gentleman often makes the point about the transmission signal. Again, that is a pity; he betrays his ignorance. The responsibility for turning up the signal and determining the level sits with the ITC, which approves the increases, and the broadcasters, which are responsible for the transmission network. The broadcasters, rather than the Government, are responsible for the transmission network because the Government whom he supported were responsible for privatising the network under their 1996 legislation.

Having said that, the first stage of power increase has already been established, benefiting 25 per cent. of the population. Approval has now been given for broadcasters to proceed with a further increase in power to cover 50 per cent. of the population, but that involves a highly technical set of judgments given the fact that, as a Government, we decided very early on in announcing the digital switchover policy that the interests of analogue viewers had to be protected as the digital technology rolls out. So the position is clear: the signal strength has been increased. There is absolutely no regulatory obstacle to the success and survival of the digital terrestrial platform.

The hon. Gentleman's final point related to football clubs. Again, in addition to ITV Digital subscribers, there are very large numbers of innocent victims. The Government will work alongside football to provide practical help, largely through grassroots organisations and Supporters Direct, which has been very successful in establishing fans' trusts as a better way to manage clubs and in helping clubs that recently and before this crisis suffered difficulty. So I am proud of the Government's record, which is one of innovation, progressive action and, most importantly, practical action to protect the interests of consumers and football fans throughout the country, rather than that of the Opposition's uninformed carping on the sidelines.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): This is a sorry state of affairs not only for the subscribers, but for professional football and the technology industry, especially digital platforms. It is also a sorry state of affairs for those communities that have lost jobs, most notably Plymouth, . That will have an impact on the south-west economy.

In advance of this statement, several news reports in the last 24 hours have mentioned the contribution that BSkyB has made to the difficulties that ITV Digital has experienced. I should like to ask the Secretary of State when she expects the Office of Fair Trading to make a decision on the alleged behaviour of BSkyB in relation to competition law.

We have been very fortunate in some respects in having more than one digital platform in this country. I wonder whether the right hon. Lady can point to any other country in the world with two commercially viable digital platforms. I also wonder whether our expectations—or at least the time scales of those expectations—have been too optimistic thus far. Does not this episode demonstrate that the only likely success of digital television in the future is as a free-to-air platform? Will she encourage the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 to get together perhaps to consider the viability of providing such a platform? In the light of this latest information, what is her advice to anyone perhaps considering buying a digital television this weekend?

The Government have placed enormous importance on football as an engine for economic regeneration in many communities, some of which are particularly disadvantaged. For many years, many professional football teams have run at a deficit. It is often a hand-to-mouth exercise depending on one benefactor, which is not ideal. I applaud the Government's work on helping supporters' trusts to get off the ground, but they are on a small scale and money is limited. Football clubs in many communities fear that they may not appear on the fixture list next season.

The Government have a role to play, if not in funding, in acting as a broker between football clubs and television companies, and between the Nationwide Football League clubs and the Premiership. For too long, far too many of the resources available to football have been sucked up by the premier division, and now the Nationwide League clubs are in dire straits. Perhaps some of the resources in the Premiership should be directed towards the Nationwide League. The Government should have a role in trying to ensure that the money in football is more equitably distributed.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): More spending from the Liberals.

Tessa Jowell: Yes, I spotted the spending commitments.

I thank the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) for making those points. I expect the OFT to reach a conclusion on its considerations soon.

On the DTT platform, it is the Government's clear intention to maintain the policy of encouraging three platforms with competition between them—therefore, platform neutrality—to promote the range of choice for consumers. The circumstances facing ITV Digital are a good justification for that policy, which gives my constituent or the hon. Gentleman's constituent who wants to buy a digital television set this weekend the choice of two other platforms if they do not want to take a short-term risk with DTT.

On football, we will work closely with the FA-led group that is considering football's position following the collapse of ITV Digital. I welcome the leadership that football is showing, because the hon. Gentleman is right that the financial base of many clubs is unsustainable—their commitment to their players' wages bills is not matched by their income. Football recognises that problem, and must address it and the other problems that he identifies.

We shall provide support through the efforts of Supporters Direct, which was introduced by the Government and is supported by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, and by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport. It is doing excellent work to link fans more directly with the financial security and future of their clubs.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): On football, I strongly endorse my right hon. Friend's comments about the work of Supporters Direct. In this crisis that faces Nationwide League clubs, will she ensure that modest additional resources are made available to Supporters Direct to enable it to assist fans in clubs around the country that may be affected?

On the future of digital broadcasting, does she agree that the most important objective is to ensure that the digital terrestrial platform survives and thrives into the future? Without that, the overall change from analogue to digital that we hope will occur within the next few years will have no chance of success.

To assist in that, will she encourage a consortium of public service broadcasters and subscription broadcasters to come together to consider the possibilities as regards bidding for a re-advertised franchise for the multiplexes? Will she particularly encourage them not to contest head to head with satellite broadcasting, but to put forward a more modest programme of channels and programmes that are available to viewers at a more modest cost? That might become a serious financially viable proposition.

Tessa Jowell: I thank my right hon. Friend for those comments.

We will keep under close review the ability of Supporters Direct to do the job that football desperately needs it to do. Obviously, it will be closely involved in the discussions within the FA.

It is of course vital that DTT survives in future, for all the reasons that I have given.

On my right hon. Friend's final point, it is highly likely that the shape of the offering on the DTT platform will become more distinctive than it has been to date. Competition and other factors make the case for that argument. However, I am sure that he understands that it is not my role to act as a broker for potential bidders. If and when the licences are advertised and re-tendered, it is the role of the ITC, as regulator, to consider those bids within the clear regulatory framework that has been established. That healthy environment was created partly as a result of the efforts of my right hon. Friend, whose vision and commitment when he was Secretary of State established the framework for our country's digital policy.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): It is ironic that this statement takes place in the middle of a debate about local communities. As the Secretary of State rightly says, football clubs throughout the land are vital to communities, and this is a sad situation.

The Secretary of State touched on the future of football but, perhaps understandably, concentrated on the overall impact on the digital service. Will she return to football and give a few more details of how exactly she is working with the FA to try to rescue the clubs? Will that involve the renegotiation of contracts with players or trying to get commercial support for football clubs?

Tessa Jowell: The discussions with the FA, the Premier League and the Nationwide League are just beginning, so it would be premature for me to set out in detail the contribution that the Government intend to make. As I said, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport had a meeting this week to discuss the future of programmes for young people, and I have already explained the important role of Supporters Direct. We shall keep in close contact with the football authorities in the coming weeks.

It is important never to forget that football is very resilient because of the love and support of the fans of clubs all over the country. Football has faced severe financial difficulties on previous occasions—for example, following the Taylor report and the Bosman ruling—and we should have confidence that with the leadership that has been offered it will negotiate this difficulty.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Has my right hon. Friend had any formal or informal discussions with the chairman of Carlton or the chairman of Granada who, ultimately, no matter what they say, are ultimately responsible for this break of contract and lack of faith? In particular, does she find it a little bit difficult that the chairman of Granada, Charles Allen, is the chairman of the Commonwealth games, and is going round asking people to give money to promote those games while he heads a company that has reneged on its contract and done football down? I accept, of course, as many hon. Members have said, that football itself must bear some of that responsibility.

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Yes, I have met the chairmen and chief executives of Carlton and Granada as part of the series of meetings that I have had over the past weeks. Obviously, all the commercial aspects of the consequences of the decision to sell ITV Digital are now a matter between them and the administrator and, in relation to regulatory issues, the ITC.

I hope and believe that the Commonwealth games will be a great success, and Charles Allen has made a very important contribution to that. I hope that I have made it

[Tessa Jowell]

clear to the House today that I recognise the difficulties facing Carlton and Granada and the consequences of those difficulties. However, no one should doubt the part that Charles Allen will have played in delivering a successful Commonwealth games.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): The history might have been different had BSkyB been part of the original consortium, but competition law, of course, precluded it from being so. Given the changed situation, is BSkyB still precluded from having an impact on the future of ITV Digital in receivership?

In the Budget the Government cracked down on tax relief on films, because television companies were using it extensively to make programmes. The Treasury now expects to take £500 million, principally from the television industry, over the next three years. Does the Secretary of State consider that that will have any impact on the financial background of television companies and their ability to sort out this situation?

Tessa Jowell: As I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands, who bids in the event that the licences are re-advertised, or who bids for the new licences, or who buys the company are matters for the ITC and the administrator, with reference to the Competition Commission as necessary, so I have nothing to add to that. In relation to the tax changes announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the Budget, we are in discussion with Treasury Ministers about their application and in discussion with the industry, as the hon. Gentleman would expect.

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): My right hon. Friend mentioned in her statement the fact that 1,000 people in Pembrokeshire will lose their jobs unless an alternative buyer is found to operate digital pay TV. Will she please impress on the ITC the need to speed up the licence transfer process to encourage another buyer to come forward, in the hope that we can preserve those jobs? Will she, in her discussions, bear it in mind that the 1,000 jobs in west Wales and 700 jobs in Plymouth and the livelihoods of those people are far more important than the bleating of a few wealthy football chairmen, whose intransigence and stubbornness seems to have brought this situation to crisis point?

Tessa Jowell: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for her unstinting efforts on behalf of her constituents to mitigate the effects of a very difficult and uncertain time for them. That difficulty and uncertainty is likely to continue for days and possibly weeks, but I recognise what she says about the importance of a speedy resolution. For that reason, the ITC has said that if the licences have to be re-advertised and re-tendered, that will happen within an accelerated time scale of about six weeks. Obviously, everyone involved needs some certainty—not least my hon. Friend's constituents, who are wondering whether they will have a job in two weeks.

Martin Linton (Battersea): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement. As she mentioned, 150 employees at the headquarters in Battersea were made redundant on Monday, along with about 80 field staff, but there are still about 250 at the headquarters, and I spoke to some of them this morning. They are very grateful for the period of grace that they still have, and for any attempts to find a buyer or a consortium that can take over the company.

The football contract is certainly seen by everyone as a very important element in precipitating the crisis, but is my right hon. Friend aware that the company regards the fundamental issues as being technical and competitive? They are technical in the sense that, despite the Government's best efforts, the reach of the transmitters has still been much less than expected and the strength of the signal has been an enormous problem. It is about 20 times higher in Australia, even after all the efforts that have been made. The company would ascribe to those technical factors the fact that it had 1.2 million customers instead of about 2 million.

There were also competitive problems. Sky is of course required to make its platform available, but ITV has been paying more than the retail price for that and that extra cost has been a huge element in the crisis. In many other countries, such an arrangement would be regarded as predatory pricing. I understand that a complaint has been lodged with the OFT. There is also a lawsuit in the United States over the switchcard.

The Secretary of State may not be able to comment on those issues, but those to whom I spoke this morning earnestly hope that further action is taken on those that are essential to the future of the whole digital platform, not just the future of ITV Digital, and those over which the regulator and Government have power.

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend has made great efforts to explain the uncertainty felt by his constituents who are employed by ITV Digital, arising from its collapse. He also mentioned two important issues to which we have already referred, the first being the need to improve the technology by increasing signal strength. I have made the position clear on that. The second issue is the need to extend coverage so that viewers can get a picture of equally high quality whether they are watching the commercial channels or the public service broadcasting channels, particularly the BBC. The need to address those requirements is being driven by the ITC as regulator. The importance of those issues is why those regulatory and technical obstacles in a new and emerging technology have been addressed with such success.

Finally, my hon. Friend was absolutely right when he referred to the various aspects that touch on the role of the competition authority. They sit fairly and squarely with the authority and he understands that it would not be right for me to comment.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does not the Minister find it reprehensible that those television companies that in the past 20 or 30 years or more have been making money hand over fist—they have had a licence to print money—can engage in a contract and then blithely walk away when it does not suit them because they are going to lose money? What steps can we take as a Government to ensure that they foot the bill, especially in regard to the 1,700 people who are bound to lose their jobs?

In the absence of any proposals from the Tories, who just had 10 questions, or the Liberals, who had a few spending commitments but no proposals, will the Minister

consider the unthinkable? Is there any legal, financial or economic impediment to the BBC's stepping in as a rescue act, not to line the pockets of football chairmen or anyone else but to ensure that some or all of these jobs are saved?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend makes points that many people will sympathise with. However, the facts are that the demise of this commercial company is a matter for the company, its creditors and the administrator. It is the Government's role to provide assistance with the consequences, not to intervene directly in what is a commercial contract between Carlton and Granada and the Football League, or in the relationship between Carlton and Granada and the creditors of ITV Digital. However, I am sure that companies facing these circumstances and the resulting damage understand the importance of their reputation and the way in which they conduct themselves in these very difficult times.

At the moment, the BBC is clearly one of the contributors to the digital terrestrial platform, and we expect that to continue. If and when the licences are re-advertised, we hope that bids will come from a very wide range of potential providers of programme services on that platform, and the ITC will be looking for such bids.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): My right hon. Friend has rightly drawn attention to the fact that in the general sense, football clubs and football itself are at least partly the author of their own misfortunes, given the unsustainable salaries that clubs have been paying. However, in this case it was probably not unreasonable for clubs to enter into contracts beyond the end of this season, given the basis of the Football League's contract with ITV Digital. In keeping with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), whatever the legal arguments, is it not unacceptable for companies of the status of Carlton and Granada to stand idly by and watch communities in fear of the loss of their football clubs? Have not these companies at least a moral obligation? Is it right for them to reap the benefit of the digital dividend, while at the same time seeking to wash their hands of the consequences for football of the collapse of a company of which they were joint owners?

Tessa Jowell: As the Government, we have to operate within the constraints of the legal contract as it stands. My hon. Friend expresses a frustration that will be reflected by football fans and clubs up and down the country, but the fact is that the contract between ITV Digital and the Football League existed. The matter may be the subject of litigation, so it would be unwise of me—even on the Floor of the House—to say any more than the fact that it is a great pity that a resolution was not achieved, and that football is so very heavily out of pocket.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Having listened closely to the Secretary of State's statement, Members will know that discussions have taken place with the management of football clubs. Has any contact been made with the Professional Footballers Association, however, particularly given that the lion's share—a suitable phrase in English terms—of the costs associated with football are generated by the players' wage bills?

Tessa Jowell: I refer my hon. Friend to my earlier remarks about the football authorities' welcome recognition of the need to address the financial insecurity that many clubs now face. Although that insecurity was in part created by the immediate crisis arising from the failure of ITV Digital, it is more deep rooted and long standing than that. Obviously, the PFA will be an important party to any successful resolution of those discussions.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Carlton and Granada have refused to fund an orderly transfer and sale to new owners, thus pulling the plug not just on football clubs—including non-English clubs such as Cardiff City, which is in this weekend's play-offs—but on the 1,000 jobs to which my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) referred? Indeed, the loss of those jobs will also affect the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire (Mr. Ainger).

Tessa Jowell: Obviously, the more orderly the sale of the company, the better for everybody, but it is not for me to comment on the conduct of negotiations between the administrator, Carlton and Granada, and ITV Digital.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): My right hon. Friend will be aware that, if a consumer buys a holiday in good faith and the company goes bust, they get their money back. Holiday companies must hold a bond or insurance, because the regulator—the Civil Aviation Authority—requires it. Will she and her colleagues from the Department of Trade and Industry at least consider establishing a bonding regime in this fast-growing, high-risk and competitive marketplace, so that consumers who subscribe to services in good faith can have some protection from the private operators that take big risks at their expense?

Tessa Jowell: Without making a particular judgment on my hon. Friend's proposal, I can assure the House that, in the weeks ahead, all those with an interest in securing the future of the digital terrestrial platform, its consumers and employees will be looking at the lessons that can be learned from the events of the past two weeks surrounding the collapse of ITV Digital. Those lessons will be studied closely, and applied where relevant.

Local Communities

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn—[*Mr. Kemp.*]

11.57 am

Mr. Cox: We have listened to an important statement, and, given its length, I shall—in fairness to parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House who wish to participate in the debate—curtail greatly my intended speech.

In closing, I want to refer to an issue that relates to my constituency, but which is also relevant to the experiences of my hon. Friends the Members for Battersea and for Putney. I want to mention it now as I may well turn to the Minister for advice and support in the coming weeks.

London Members are fully aware that one great problem we face is that of affordable housing, whether to rent or to buy. It is a particular problem for key public workers in our constituencies. Last Friday, I met prison officers at Wandsworth prison. We talked about many issues, but in terms of the recruitment and retention of prison officers, one key issue for them is the lack of housing.

There are people in my constituency—people who were born in the borough—who need housing and who are on the housing list, but who are getting absolutely nowhere with Wandsworth council in securing the kind of accommodation that they and their families believe they are entitled to. My hon. Friends the Members for Battersea and for Putney can doubtless say the same. In fact, many of those people are living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. There is no doubt that their quality of life is suffering because of the lack of suitable housing.

I turn to my main point, on which, as I said, I may seek the Minister's help. Wandsworth council plans to sell off a piece of land of more than 1 acre at the Ernest Bevin college in my constituency, as it is surplus to needs. I understand that the council has given planning permission to build houses on that site and there are many inquiries about the land. A local housing association that I have long been associated with has told the council that it is interested in purchasing the land and that it would take people from the council housing list to be tenants of the properties that it would build.

I have been told that Wandsworth council is not interested in that offer because it wants to sell the land to a private developer. It has been apparent for years to those who live in the Tory-controlled borough how detrimental its policies are to constituents. That relates to what the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire said.

The Tory-controlled London borough of Wandsworth has no interest in providing social housing either to rent or to buy. Local people ask me as their Member of Parliament what action the council will take on the development of that land. If the local housing association is given permission to develop it, many people—possibly several hundred—would be able to live in a pleasant part of my constituency by either renting the property or paying an affordable price to purchase it. Without doubt, their quality of life, and that of their families, would improve greatly. That is why the issue is so important.

The constituency represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea has suffered more than mine from up-market housing development, which is always fully supported by the Tory-controlled council. However, I got involved in dealing with a scheme to build up-market housing in my area after plans to turn the psychiatric hospital in Tooting Bec into a shopping centre were turned down. The council instantly moved in and gave permission for developers to build the most up-market housing development imaginable. It had no concern whatever for the needs of local people.

The debate has been useful. We have been given the opportunity to cover a range of issues. Although I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to respond to my comments today, I will be in touch with her to see what help she and her Department can give me and my constituents to ensure that the views and needs of the local community on that housing development are listened to because, sadly, the Tory council in Wandsworth has not done that in recent years.

12.4 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): According to statistics published by the urban taskforce, one in four citizens of urban areas believe that their neighbourhood has got worse in recent years, whereas only one in 10 people feel that they have seen improvement. The Government have recognised that by directing funding at inner cities to try to improve them, but the scale of the task ahead and the small sums of money that have been committed have not stopped the migration from our inner cities to our suburbs and smaller towns. That has been the trend in recent years and we should pay attention to it.

The outward flow from our main conurbations has many implications for the quality of life in surrounding communities. It has priced many people out of their local housing markets and put increased pressure on greenfield sites, yet 1.3 million commercial and residential buildings stand empty, and brownfield sites are drastically under-utilised.

Not only is the land and housing supply under severe strain but, as more people move further out of cities, transport is inevitably affected as well. The increasing number of cars on our roads and passengers on our trains is not due to the fact that the roads have improved or that the trains are cheaper, but because more people need to travel and commuting time has increased. It is already 40 per cent. higher than it was 20 years ago, and now, more than ever, people are moving over to a commuter lifestyle.

It is predicted that car traffic will increase by a third in the next 20 years, and pollution, congestion and general inconvenience can only increase as a result. Progress must be made to improve urban communities to halt the exodus from the nation's larger cities and towns. At the same time, we must improve our smaller cities and towns so that they can accommodate the new growth. Although the quality of life in local communities can be improved on many fronts, one of our most important priorities is to ensure that everyone has a place to live and that housing is of the highest possible quality.

Local councils can make a difference if they are given the opportunity. As housing needs vary greatly from place to place, greater discretion should be given to local authorities to invest directly or to attract investment in housing that is appropriate for their community. In addition, they should be given the power to set greenfield development levies, which can be put towards the

reclamation of brownfield sites. By equalising the VAT charged on new build and refurbishment expenditure we can make renovation a more attractive option, and by strengthening the powers of compulsory purchase orders we can encourage the practice of putting empty buildings back into use.

It is imperative that we provide more homes, but we cannot ignore the fact that many existing homes are in dire need of maintenance and repair. Addressing that problem would improve the quality of life of countless citizens nationwide. When the Liberal Democrats took control of the London borough council of Islington, there was a £500 million backlog of housing repairs. Some estates had not been painted for 20 years. The situation is now much improved because the council has implemented a new 24-hour-a-day emergency repair service. It has also given council tenants the right to get repairs done themselves and to bill the council if it has not arranged for those repairs to be carried out in a timely manner.

Another key issue that needs to be addressed locally is safety and security in the community. When people feel unsafe walking about their own town, they cannot possibly enjoy a high quality of life. Even in areas where violent crime is not an issue, antisocial behaviour and nuisance crimes can impact severely on citizens' day-to-day lives. Clearly, more full-time police officers are needed, and the sooner the better, but there are other possibilities for dealing with smaller-scale offences. For instance, the establishment of community safety forces to co-ordinate the efforts of traffic wardens, estate and neighbourhood wardens, park superintendents and other public safety officials could help to foster a unified campaign against nuisance crimes.

Mr. McCabe: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman's last remarks. However, in view of those remarks, how does he justify the behaviour of his Liberal colleagues in the other place, who last night voted against the proposals on which he is commenting?

Mr. Sanders: I think that they were concerned with a different issue—that of giving certain powers of enforcement to those who would carry out that job. Their opinion was that the Government had not fully thought that through. In principle, the Liberal Democrats support community officers and community security forces.

We also need to bring more flexibility to the police force and to find alternative staffing options to help fill some of the gaps left by inadequate numbers of police officers. One idea is to introduce a new category of part-time community officers. That would help alleviate the pressure on full-time officers and lay the foundation for a network of named local police officers for every community.

Another option that has been successfully implemented by Liverpool city council is to rent extra police officers from the local police authority. Those extra officers have been used to reinforce the patrolling of Liverpool's busy city centre, and have had an impact on shoplifting and crime in that area. Such ideas should not be taken up by every local authority. Liberal Democrats sometimes take issue with the Government for saying that particular initiatives should be adopted everywhere—our view is that we should allow local areas to come up with the best ideas and let them flow from the grass roots rather than impose them from the top down.

Islington council has recently achieved substantial results with its new acceptable behaviour contract initiative. In this programme, 10 to 18-year-olds sign contracts promising that certain standards of behaviour will be upheld. The contracts are administered by the council's housing department and the police, and a breach of the contract can jeopardise the family's tenancy if they are residents of council or housing association accommodation. So far, ABCs—as they are known—have proven very effective in reducing teenage antisocial behaviour, as linking behaviour standards to tenancy privileges has forced parents to take action to ensure that their children are better behaved. Of the original 60 contracts signed last year, only two were breached.

The most effective way to bring about an improvement in the quality of life in local communities is to involve the people of those communities. We should let the people determine what they need and want and involve them in the management of change. This task is best suited to the lowest level of government, which is closest to the people. A blanket approach to improving the quality of life in individual communities is doomed to fail. Rather than formulate a centralised plan to address this issue, it would be much more effective to empower local government to create plans that best meet local needs.

Often, the things that make the biggest difference to people's day-to-day quality of life are those that seem relatively insignificant. I am sure that hon. Members are aware of that from their mailbags or from the people who attend their surgeries. Discarded rubbish, cyclists riding on pavements, overgrown hedgerows, faulty street lamps and broken paving stones all come into that category. Despite the fact that local government is clearly the appropriate tier to deal with many issues affecting the quality of life in communities, it is often severely hampered by underfunding, by grant regimes that do not recognise local needs, or by spending requirements and targets handed down to them by a higher authority.

The report "Towards an Urban Renaissance", released by the urban taskforce in 1999, stated:

> "Local authorities will lead the urban renaissance. They should be strengthened in powers, resources and democratic legitimacy to undertake this role in partnership with the citizens and communities they represent".

To do that, they must be given the proper fiscal tools, as well as be afforded more opportunity to use those tools as they see fit. We can protect, enhance and improve the quality of life in local communities only through powers exercised in the community, by the community and for the community. It is therefore no surprise that what the Government are attempting to do, often based on that report, is happening piecemeal. We need to free up local government completely, give it the competence to meet local government need, devolve finance-raising powers to the local level, and allow communities into the town halls to affect decisions and carry forward change together. That will give communities a sense of ownership about the improvements that they want to their quality of life to ensure that those improvements are sustainable and long-term.

12.14 pm

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): It is always a pleasure to follow a fellow seaside Member in a debate. We have unique seaside communities around the country

[Lawrie Quinn]

which, as I am sure the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) will agree, reflect in microcosm the problems that we see nationally, as we find out on a weekly basis in our constituency surgeries.

The debate is very welcome. I am honoured to represent 74 parish councils in Scarborough and Whitby, which means that there are 74 distinct communities in my constituency. Two, obviously, are particularly significant: many hon. Members will recognise the pre-eminence of Scarborough as the first ever seaside resort and recall Whitby's historical importance, particularly to the Church of England.

The two towns have quite different and distinct communities. I want to reflect in my remarks the uniqueness of each community in my constituency, and to acknowledge the differences between Newby in Scarborough and Danby in the north York moors, and between the Eastfield housing estate and Scalby, a rich suburb of Scarborough. Each has a community forum. I look forward to the Government's policies renewing, reinvigorating and revitalising the grass roots of those communities.

As many hon. Members will know, I am one of only seven chartered engineers who are honoured to attend this Chamber. Our training means that for us the word "quality" has a meaning quite different from the standard dictionary definition. We have to be able to measure quality and refer to it in terms of yardsticks, specifications and standards. When I was designing bridges, I had to adhere rigorously to a code of practice known as BS 5400, which enables engineers to design bridges with a lifespan of at least 120 years. I hope that the policies that we are now implementing to improve the quality of our life in our local communities will have an equally long-term effect, benefiting generations to come.

In earlier interventions in the debate I tried to focus on the importance of young people and of the next generation. Their participation in, and contribution to, local life dictates the quality of life experienced by the rest of society. My constituency varies from typical seafront arcade areas to countryside in the national parks which is probably some of the most beautiful in England, and that variety leads to different problems in individual communities. Sometimes my constituents feel that visitors to the area are afforded a far greater welcome than people who live in the area all year round.

The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) spoke of the importance of clean streets and of dealing with litter. I am proud to say that my local authority has regularly won a "Keep Britain Tidy" award because of the cleanliness of its streets. However, the inspectors for the award were probably looking at the "front of house" parts of the constituency—the areas to which tourists come, such as well laid-out parks and gardens. I commend Scarborough council's parks department for its excellent work.

Behind the front of house, however, we have housing estates such as Eastfield, Barrowcliff and Edgehill in Scarborough and Strenshoelh in Whitby. Those are areas of long-term decline and, for the communities, failure. In the northern end of my constituency is the picturesque little seaside village of Staithes, which is a real treat. It should be regarded as a wonderful world heritage site because of its position on the beautiful North Yorkshire coast. Behind that, however, is a housing estate that has suffered from long-term unemployment, and a failure to renew housing stock and the basic infrastructure available to the people who live there year round.

The Minister is welcome to visit any part of my constituency whenever she likes. I know that she did a great deal of work on the fishing communities regeneration initiative. Former fishing communities are starting to benefit from the Government's policies. In Staithes, £19 million is being focused on rebuilding a community of several hundred people in the terms unique to that community and linked with it.

In an intervention, I asked the Minister what importance she attached to the contribution of local people to the design and content of the built environment. I am pleased to report that this very weekend Scarborough borough council is to engage in the sort of dialogue that I want to take place throughout the country. Scarborough's community planning weekend is being held to enable the people of Scarborough—not the visitors, but the regular residents—to say how they want their community to develop.

I shall participate tomorrow, although the events start this afternoon. In addition to important issues of economic development and tourism, which are standard fare to anyone who represents a seaside community, the arts, entertainment and culture are to be considered, not only for visitors—for example, those who flood in from northern Europe to see Sir Alan Ayckbourn's latest play at the Stephen Joseph theatre—but for the people who live in the town and want to improve their lives and participate in local activities. A significant part of the time available to local people will be devoted to children, and to young people who are at that crucial age when they are trying to find their way in the world, take on citizenship and make a contribution to local society.

Such initiatives sound like acts of optimism, but the ability to take them has been hard won. It is only because of Government policy that the necessary resources have become available to us. I lobbied the Minister's predecessor, who is now the Minister for Sport, hard to get objective 2 status for my area. I am pleased to say that all but one of the wards in my constituency now have that status.

The possibility of investment and spending forces us to focus. I hope that others share my view that we should not fall into the trap of engaging the usual suspects—the highly paid consultants who trek over from Leeds or up from London and mop up vital capital investment. At the earliest opportunity we must engage in the type of work embodied in this weekend's events, which are taking place under the title, "A Vision for Scarborough". People have to be involved if they are to be able to specify the quality they want in their various and diverse communities.

Scarborough and Whitby contain a crucial group of people who should never be overlooked. I think that we stand 26th in the league table in terms of our population of over-55s. Many seaside constituencies have similar demographics. People come to our part of the world to retire, but the facilities that older people need—especially when couples move to the seaside and one partner dies a few years later—are often under great pressure. We need

to plan our health and social services provision in the light of the inevitability that that large age group will increase in number.

The Government listened to the many older people who demanded that provision be made for concessionary bus passes to improve their mobility. Scarborough and Whitby was one of 12 communities in the country that did not recognise those needs. I am proud that I participated in the passage of what became the Transport Act 2000, which resulted in older people and disabled people having that facility nationally. Great work is done for local people in both Scarborough and Whitby by action groups for disabled people. They nag, encourage and try to ensure that the council does not forget that if we make public places and facilities in a town convenient and accessible for disabled people, we shall achieve greater access for many more people within society.

As an engineer, I had often to design footbridges over railway lines. It was a common phenomenon that, as I designed to a standard that allowed people with wheelchairs and other disabled people to have access to a bridge, it gave young mums and people who were not so badly disabled but a bit slow in their movements that access too.

I welcome the statement about bus stops and public transport facilities. To make them more accessible for local people improves the quality of life considerably, and the accessibility improves the environment, too. If buses and trains can be used more easily because of better design that takes into account the views of the local community, that will be good both for people and for the budgets of bus companies and train operators. In the end, it will be better for the public purse.

Quality matters, given the perceptions and daily experiences of local people, especially those who think that the visitors who come to my constituency over a 20-week period during the summer—there are about 20 million of them—are afforded a better quality of experience than they are. Quality matters for everyone, all the time.

We now have a global media frenzy, and the internet is accessible to anyone in the world. Local people's perceptions of quality affect the perceptions of potential visitors—potential tourist customers—who are considering whether to come to places such as Scarborough and Whitby.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) referred to the pressures on London. Let us get some of the many visitors who come to places such as London away from those pressures. Let us have infrastructure available in places such as Scarborough and Whitby that will encourage them to have a different experience. Let them experience the special quality of life that we want to encourage.

We have touched on the importance of transport. I know that the Minister is aware of the importance of the A64 corridor because she has answered questions on the subject. Her departmental colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), who has responsibilities for transport, is also aware of the importance of the corridor. It brings 20 million tourists to the Yorkshire coast every year, and it is a lifeline for the rest of the community—for the manufacturers and for the people who live and work in Scarborough all the time.

I urge my hon. Friend's Department to give even more emphasis to the developments that I hope will flow from the recent study commissioned by the Highways Agency to improve the quality of life and experience for people travelling to Scarborough. People become frustrated, turn off the A64 and go down to Bridlington, and that is no good for my constituents. They want people to come all the way to Scarborough.

We have a serious problem with people waiting for social housing provision. Like all seaside towns, we have a large private tenant sector, which is a consequence of changes in the tourism industry and the move away from bed-and-breakfast accommodation. As part of Lord Falconer's planning consultation, officials are considering having discrete areas for residential accommodation and hotel and bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Huge tension can be created when people are moved into to private sector accommodation next door to high quality hotel or bed-and-breakfast accommodation. They do not live in our community or respect its values and, frankly, they cause a nuisance and make life hell for some visitors and other people in the sector. I shall stress those points to Lord Falconer in due course.

I am pleased to have been able to participate in our debate, and I hope that the Minister will pass my messages on to her colleagues in the Department. I trust that she will reply from the Dispatch Box to some of my points, particularly those concerning younger people.

12.31 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): As the third seaside Member in a row, I am pleased to be able to participate in our important debate. As a precaution, I should like to declare an interest; I am a director of a family business, as is recorded in the Register of Members' Interests. I am not likely to stray on to that, but because our debate is wide-ranging, I cannot be sure.

Assessing quality of life is extremely difficult. Several organisations undertake the task, including the United Nations, which produces a periodic survey. Not surprisingly, Norway, Australia and Canada tend to dominate the top three places, with Sweden, Belgium and the United States making the top 10; we tend to be somewhere in the middle of the table. A variety of things, ranging from cleanliness and restaurants to life expectancy, are taken into account.

Having participated in yesterday's debate on international development, I believe that we should all be aware that in many parts of the world, qualify of life is getting substantially worse; life expectancy in the African continent and the former Soviet Union, for example, is getting shorter. When quality of life in cities is assessed, Zurich tends to come top, with Vancouver close behind. Brazzaville in the Republic of the Congo comes bottom; no doubt Members will take that into account when deciding where to go on holiday.

Lawrie Quinn: They should come to Scarborough.

Mr. Syms: Indeed.

The key starting point for achieving a good quality of life in Britain is to get the economy right. Unless we generate wealth, we cannot invest in public services and our citizens will not have employment or the resources to make life choices. Generally, in the last century, we did

[Mr. Syms]

pretty well; we account for 1 per cent. of the world's population, but account for a rather higher percentage of the world's wealth. We are a small island on the edge of Europe, yet we are a major trading nation; we are an innovative nation that, by and large, works hard. Colleagues and friends who have worked in Germany have always found that the Brits there work longer hours than the Germans, who go off skiing or whatever on Friday afternoons.

In the past 20 to 25 years, our economy has become much more flexible, and the Government were lucky to inherit that legacy from the last Conservative Government. We must acknowledge and take satisfaction in the fact that Britain has done pretty well compared with other countries. It is important that the fourth largest economy continues to grow so that, one day, we can be the third largest economy and make our full contribution in the world.

All our constituents, including mine in Poole, have concerns about law and order. We see people in our surgeries who are worried about crime in their area. Between January 2000 and January 2002, the number of street crime incidents in London rose from 4,000 to 6,700. We cannot be complacent about crime; much more needs to be done about it. Dorset is not a high-crime area, but there is a great fear of crime, which any politician must address. Dorset police authority, which does an excellent job, is the 29th worst funded in the country. That requires difficult juggling by the chief constable and creates difficulties in terms of the precept levied on my constituents. Our police authority has one of the highest precepts in the country, because people demand policing. They like to see police officers on the streets. That is important to their quality of life, yet we are not resourced to provide the level of policing that people demand.

We know that it is important for quality of life that people can access health services when they want them—when they are ill. We should all reflect on the fact that waiting lists affect quality of life. Like other hon. Members, I see constituents who have been assessed as needing urgent operations, yet sometimes they are told that they must wait months. Behind the figures about which we argue in the Chamber, there are people in pain, people who cannot go to work, people whose families are concerned about them, sometimes waiting months to get treatment.

There is a particular problem at present in Dorset: some of my constituents who go to Southampton for brain surgery find that the hospital there is taking only patients who need emergency operations, because of a shortage of staff. That creates pressure and difficulty for my constituents.

The debates that we have had this week have been useful. We may disagree about the politics in relation to the future of health care and how we organise the NHS, but it is important that we have such debates. While accepting the principle that a free service is vital to most of our citizens, we should look creatively at ways of delivering health care to them. People will feel that their quality of life has been enhanced if they can access services quickly. Scotland spends 8.6 per cent. of available resources on health, which is about the European average, yet its health outcomes are worse. We must consider reform and different ways of delivering services.

As a member of the all-party group on haemophiliacs, I know that there is sometimes inequity in the delivery of health services. I shall give one example, which affects the quality of life of my constituents and many others throughout the country who are haemophiliacs. Those who happen to live in Wales and Scotland receive recombinant blood from the NHS. In England, that is provided as of right up to the age of 18.

People go to the haemophilia centre in Manchester for treatment and blood products. People from Wales get recombinant—that is, man-made—treatment; those from England do not. They get plasma-based treatment. Anyone who knows the haemophilia community well knows that its members want recombinant treatment because of the history of plasma-based products, which have caused them all sorts of difficulties, such as the infections of hepatitis C and HIV. There must be equity in the provision of health care in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland if we are to engender good quality of life for our citizens.

Educational opportunity is a further important aspect of quality of life. Poole is a beautiful place in which to work, but it is difficult to own a home there because of housing costs. We therefore have difficulty recruiting teachers. I recently went round Poole high school, which has a problem recruiting sufficient maths teachers to teach pupils at key stage 3. There are real challenges to be faced in education, which we all know is the means by which people access opportunities for the future. The Government should be aware that the problems of teacher recruitment may be impacting on the children of my constituents.

Much of the debate has focused on the leading role that local government can play in communities. By and large, Poole borough council, which is a unitary authority, does a good job, although it labours under difficult grant settlements. We have suffered under the regime that ensures that we do not get the area cost adjustment. As those of us who live in the south-west rather than the south-east know, that system means that Poole received £17 million less than it would have received if it were situated in Hampshire. That impacts on services and the ability to deliver some of the enhancements to quality of life that we have been discussing.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) mentioned the very high council tax increases. Poole has had an 11.9 per cent. increase, set against an inflation rate of 2.2 per cent. Many people on minimal fixed incomes will find the extra amount difficult to pay. Apart from the estimated cost this year of £300,000 for storing fridges under Government regulations, the Budget changes in national insurance contributions will probably add £400,000 to local government costs. Those costs are very substantial indeed.

Poole has much potential for development; it is a beautiful place with a lot of water. Earlier this year, we made a submission to the Government on building a second bridge over the harbour, and I am pleased to say that it was accepted. The project is an exciting prospect that will allow us to develop much of the waterside area in Lower Hamworthy and to redevelop the West Quay road. The building of the bridge, which may cost £14 million, will substantially improve the quality of life for constituents who live in central Poole. It will allow sensible development and improved traffic flow, and will

enable the borough to take a strategic view so that it can plan for the future. The development will also improve local transport in general.

I could make many more comments, but I am aware that a number of other hon. Members wish to speak. In conclusion, quality of life is important for my constituents. Poole is a beautiful place, but underneath the beauty, there is concern about law and order, access to the NHS, provision of top-quality education for our children and improvements in transport. Over the coming years, I shall do all that I can to campaign for a better deal for my constituents.

12.42 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I could speak at considerable length about improvements in the quality of life of my constituents. Since 1997, my constituency has received substantially increased investment in schools and hospitals. Investment in housing has doubled and we have seen reductions in unemployment and crime; indeed, Sheffield is the safest city in the country. However, I shall concentrate primarily on ways in which my constituents' quality of life is not good, although I recognise that the Government have many proposals to deal with such problems, which I strongly support. I urge quick action on them.

When I was sitting in my surgery last Saturday, as many hon. Members will have been sitting in theirs, a young couple came in, sat down and began to describe how they were regularly kept awake until 5 o'clock in the morning by their neighbours. They told me that they had been keeping a diary sheet for the past five months on the antisocial behaviour of their neighbours at the request of the local housing officer, and that environmental health officers had visited to monitor the noise levels, which were found to be unacceptable. They asked how long it would be before they could go to work the next morning without being virtually unable to keep their eyes open. The man does a very dangerous job that requires him to be alert and completely awake. Their whole quality of life has clearly been affected by what has happened.

Unfortunately, after they had given me three or four minutes of description and I had warned them that the trouble might go on for some time before they finally got some action, I found that I could tell them what was happening to them before they told me. I could do so because I had dealt with the person who was causing the problems three or four years previously, when they had caused exactly the same trouble for their then neighbour, an elderly lady. I visited her regularly and she used to sit down and cry, virtually losing control of herself, because she simply could not stand the harassment and break-ins that were blighting her life.

I chose to describe that case because, unfortunately, it involved regular and repeat perpetrators, but I could have chosen another three cases that arose in the surgery and which involved very similar problems.

As I said in a debate in the House on the Housing Bill in 1996, when I first became a councillor in Sheffield in 1976, the majority of my cases were to do with housing, but mainly with repairs and improvements. Most of my cases still involve housing, but they are now mainly about neighbour nuisance, which is unfortunately a recurrent problem for many constituents.

It sounds harsh, but local authorities and housing associations have to consider carefully whether to renew some people's tenancies. The case that I described may end with eviction, but it is no good sending people to another property where they will cause similar problems to another set of unsuspecting neighbours. Obviously, we must look after the children in those cases, but I welcome Government proposals to put registered social landlords and local authorities on a similar path. They could thus take account of each other's experiences with specific tenants, who would not simply be able to get another property with a different landlord and recreate the problems.

On the previous Saturday, I attended a meeting on the Stradbroke estate. It is a pleasant, post-war estate with Bevan houses, decent space and tree-lined roads. It is not at all a sink estate. A year ago, I was called in by the local councillor, who was fed up with getting persistent complaints from dozens of tenants about a handful of families on the estate for more than two years.

We got together the police, housing officers, the tenancy enforcement team, the local neighbourhood watch and the tenants and residents associations. In the past year, they have worked on evidence on cases that are about to come to court. I shall not go into detail in case I prejudice them, but we have agreed to twin-track procedures for antisocial behaviour orders and evictions, and to go for both when appropriate. The lesson is to get everyone—the police, housing officers, enforcement officers, tenants and residents—to work together as a team to save the estate from antisocial behaviour.

Seventeen people were prepared to come forward as witnesses. That is a lot—people are often frightened. However, at the end of the process, only four were prepared to come forward. It is easy to understand the reasons. The estate had been subjected to vandalism; people had been threatened and intimidated; break-ins and damage to cars had occurred; and motoring offences, including joyriding and dangerous driving, had been committed. People were intimidated and worried. We sat them down and talked to them, and we believe that we now have more witnesses and strong cases.

I welcome recent Home Office proposals for changes to the antisocial behaviour procedures. I especially welcome the proposal to issue interim orders so that at the first court hearing an order can be made to ban someone from an area, if appropriate, instead of waiting until the end of the process. In far too many cases, defence lawyers use deferments and delays in the court procedure while the antisocial behaviour is repeated many times.

I also welcome proposals for not granting bail in all cases. One young person on the estate has been charged 90 times with motoring offences. He knows that it does not matter if he is charged again because he goes to court, gets out on bail and commits another string of offences. The punishment will be no greater because one cannot punish someone any more for 90 offences than for 70. That is a genuine problem, and I welcome the Government's plans to tackle it.

I also welcome the proposal to allow county courts as well as magistrates courts to issue antisocial behaviour orders. When an eviction is sought, the same court can issue the antisocial behaviour order.

When my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was first appointed to his new job last year, I wrote to him and said that the procedures for obtaining antisocial behaviour orders still needed to be reviewed. People still claim that they are too bureaucratic and there are doubts about

[Mr. Clive Betts]

whether the standard of proof is too high. For example, antisocial behaviour often stops just before the case gets to court. A month or so before the hearing, a sudden lull in unacceptable activities occurs. That is not a reason for not pushing or granting the order. The fact that antisocial behaviour that has gone on for three or four months miraculously stops just before a hearing is not a reason for not pursuing or granting the order.

I am sorry to go into detail about my surgeries, but all too often they reflect the genuine problems that my constituents experience. Most of us have heard most things at our surgeries over the years.

Ms Keeble *indicated assent.*

Mr. Betts: My hon. Friend agrees with that. However, I sat in amazement when a constituent described what happened one evening when he was sitting watching television. He lives in a flat in a relatively small block. At the back, a verandah runs along from one flat to the next, which is probably a slight design fault. As he sat there, someone burst in through his back door, breaking the lock, and ran past him as he watched television, pursued by two or three other people. He went to the housing department and to the police, and after the police had made inquiries, they advised him not to lock his back door because they thought that it would get broken down anyway when these people came back. All that he could do was accept that. He did so, and one night afterwards, they came back on three occasions.

The problem was that the intruder—the boyfriend of the next-door tenant—was involved in taking drugs. He owed the drug dealers money and they pursued him. I obviously complained to the housing department and the police, and wanted to know what was going on. The housing officers invited me to walk round the estate with them and have a look. Before that happened, there had been a shooting on the estate—possibly connected to the other incidents—and a rent strike had been threatened. It became clear to me that the problems there were on a much wider scale.

I decided to go there with the housing officers and to make it a public event, so we invited the press along and took the local chief inspector and the area housing manager. We also met people from the tenants and residents associations. Fifty-odd people turned up, and many of them said to me, "We don't want to leave the estate, but we know who we want to leave. There's a handful of people causing mayhem and disruption." When we went round, we saw tenants living in properties that were boarded up—not as empty properties but to protect those living inside. That is completely unacceptable.

We quickly set up a taskforce. The police got involved again, along with the housing officers and the local tenants and residents associations. Sheffield's long tradition of good-quality tenants and residents associations dates back to the 1970s. It was strengthened by the changes that we made in the 1980s to establish them as part of the consultation arrangements. We now have increased police presence in the area and we are starting eviction processes. A clean-up is going on, security measures have been put in place, and a general attempt is being made to improve the estate and to make the environment better for people to live in.

When I talked to people on the estate, I was told that it was not the whole estate that was the problem—it is a 1970s estate, but it is in quite a nice environment—but pockets where certain individuals lived, and it was those individuals who were causing mayhem. An old lady said to me, "Why should I have to move, Mr. Betts? I've lived here for 20 years and I know my neighbours. By and large, we are happy, but our lives have been blighted."

We need a better, quicker and more effective eviction process. I therefore very much welcome the consultation document that the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has issued on tackling antisocial tenants. It is an excellent document, and we shall look at some of its proposals with interest and give them our support. In particular, I welcome the proposals to speed up eviction procedures by giving local authorities the power to establish inquiries and investigations—yes, there would be a right of appeal—before taking issues to court. The courts would be assured that the local authorities had pursued the right procedures, which would mean that the whole case would not have to be conducted in court.

I do not know whether those measures would be introduced for all tenancies—I understand that they currently apply to introductory tenancies—or whether they would be used as a first stage in the process of dealing with antisocial problems, by saying to people, "We have put you on a different status of tenancy and we can now evict you without having to have the case heard in court. We can speed up the procedures and deal with them internally." That might be a way forward, but, one way or another, I and many others will welcome the introduction of a speeded-up process of eviction in cases of substantial antisocial behaviour.

We need not only speed but certainty in the process. We need to protect witnesses who are simply too frightened to come forward. People who experience substantial harassment from their neighbours that often involves threats of violence are often the last people in the world who can face going to court and giving formal evidence. We must find ways round that, and the consultation document is excellent in that respect. We should support the proposals that it contains, and I look forward to their implementation as soon as the consultation period is complete.

I make no apology for talking about taking action against people involved in antisocial behaviour, because I feel really strongly for those on the receiving end. Of course, people must have rights, and spurious complaints are sometimes made about people. Sometimes, a dispute between two neighbours is simply six of one and half a dozen of the other.

I am amazed that people take so long to come to me and wonder how they have put up with things for so long. It is those people—often elderly, often vulnerable—whom we have a duty to protect. The procedures must be robust; the courts must be sure that the revised procedure has been followed properly, and there will be a right to judicial review. I believe that the process is correct and must be put in place as soon as possible.

Of course, we must consider measures of prevention. If mediation is appropriate, let us offer it. We should look more carefully at lettings policies; we must make sure that we do not put a young person straight out of care, with relatively few social skills, who might be noisy and a bit

disturbing, among a group of older people and then, a few weeks later, wonder why we have a problem. When people with a history of mental illness or drug-taking go back into the community, there must be a proper standard of care to support them. They must not simply be left on their own. Sometimes, they are put into a flat with a bed but with no other furniture or carpets, so the noise travels to the neighbouring flats. That is a cause of aggravation that happens all too often.

I welcome the changes to the letting system, such as the choice-based experiment taking place in my constituency. We must make sure that the points system is fair and equitable, and does not discriminate against tenants who have a good record but find it impossible to move because they can never get the number of points that will allow them choice in their housing.

Antisocial behaviour problems do not apply simply to the tenants of local authorities, registered social landlords or owner-occupiers. The private sector has its own difficulties, and I welcome the proposals to license certain private sector landlords. I wonder whether we should go further and make landlords of all kinds responsible for dealing with antisocial behaviour and giving individuals the right to sue landlords who do not fulfil that duty properly. That would be a wider power. I understand that the common law means that cases that have been taken to court have generally been lost.

The group of tenants and residents that I met on the Westfield estate said that they strongly supported the idea of neighbourhood wardens and wanted them in the area. I was surprised because I have in the past been sceptical of neighbourhood wardens. I have my reservations; I do not want to them to take on the job of the police, pushing the police out and being used as an excuse for having fewer police officers. However, the local chief inspector said that that was not the case and that, because we are getting extra police officers in Sheffield and south Yorkshire, wardens are seen not as a replacement but as an addition—as complementary. He said that he would welcome them in the area and would like to work with them.

We tend to expect too much of the police. When I go to public meetings with the police, constituents say to them, "Our big complaint is that you don't come quickly enough when we have an emergency. We dial the number and expect you within five or 10 minutes, but sometimes it takes half an hour or you do not come until the next day." We know that the police are under pressure. Then the next person will say, "We never see a police officer in our area; we don't see them on the beat. They're not around any more." We know that, by and large, police officers walking the beat do not catch criminals. That is not their function; they are there for reassurance, prevention and deterrence.

With the wardens' support, the police could carry out their response activities as well as a bit of beat-walking. In that way, there would be more people in the area wearing uniforms. They would be there for deterrent and preventive purposes, for reassurance and to give people a feeling of safety. I would welcome such a measure. I hope that more money can be found in the spending review for community wardens and that the Westfield estate will benefit. I am sure that such a measure would stop many problems in their infancy, rather than allowing them to get out of control.

I welcome the increased investment in housing, which is badly needed. There is, by and large, very good council housing in my constituency, but some houses still have no proper heating systems, with the same sink units that they had 30 years ago and the same windows that they had 50 years ago. For a bit of extra money—that money is starting to come in, with the doubling of investment that the local authority has seen since 1997—they could be even better places to live.

I want the Government to reassure me that, if the tenants in my constituency and in Sheffield generally vote against the stock transfer, for which the Liberal Democrat-controlled council is pressing although there is substantial resistance, it will not prejudice future investment in my constituents' houses. I welcome the Government's commitment to bring all public sector rented housing up to a decent standard by 2010, but it should be honoured for all tenants irrespective of whether they vote for a stock transfer.

People come back to that issue time and again because Liberal Democrat councillors are telling people that their houses will not be repaired or improved if they do not vote for a stock transfer. Those threats are wrong, and I hope that Ministers will clearly resist them and say that it is wrong to make such threats to try to force the vote in a certain direction. The vote should be fair and people should be able to make their choice without intimidation.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) said about the importance of local councils having the freedom to act in raising the quality of life of the inhabitants of their areas, but the Liberal Democrat party, which he represents, happens to be in power in Sheffield and is using those freedoms to bad effect in my constituency.

I have already referred to the cuts in the youth budget. We should be worried about such cuts. Not having enough to do is not a reason for young people to engage in antisocial behaviour, but it certainly does not help if they have no alternative to standing around on street corners. Those cuts represent a serious attack on my constituents' quality of life.

There have been substantial disturbances in another poor part of my constituency—Tinsley—but the police and the community have worked effectively to sort them out during the past six months. A facility for local people—the local recreation ground—has remained derelict for the past two or three years. We were promised that the Tinsley recreation pavilion would be restored last summer, but it remains unusable and unoccupied, as the council still has not got around to carrying out its promise.

The local advice centre that works on behalf of many poor families in the area was shut two months ago. The council took away its £32,000 grant, closed it and told people to travel two miles across an industrial valley to the nearest advice centre, despite the fact that there is no direct bus service.

The Darnall community nursery makes a valuable contribution to my constituents' quality of life, but its budget has been cut this year. The Handsworth community nursery's budget has also been cut. However, the chief council officers have received a £30,000 pay increase and the publicity budget has been boosted to £1 million to publicise the work of the ruling group. Those are ways in which the freedom for local authorities to act has been used to the detriment of my constituents.

[Mr. Betts]

I support the principle of freedom, but not what the Liberal Democrat council in Sheffield is doing with that freedom. It is destroying the quality of life of my constituents in many ways, despite the fact that it has received grant increases this year at twice the rate of inflation and a council tax increase of two and a half times the rate of inflation. The council simply has its priorities absolutely wrong.

As I said at the beginning, there are many respects in which my constituents' general quality of life has improved during the past five or six years, but there are still real problems. A handful of people cause mayhem and disruption for whole communities. I welcome the Government's proposals to deal with those matters through changes to the antisocial behaviour order arrangements and eviction procedures for tenants who behave badly.

I would tell my hon. Friend the Minister that we need speedier and more effective procedures, but the changes to those procedures need to be introduced speedily as well. We must remember that every day of delay in Parliament is a further day of misery for thousands of people not just in my constituency, but throughout the country. We must act urgently on those issues.

1.3 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). I agree with what he has said and want to deal with one or two of those issues myself.

This is an important debate because, of course, communities collectively make up the nation. I want to refer to the fact that a community is more of a spirit; of course communities are created in many ways and pubs, churches, village shops and post offices make them up, but the social interaction that takes place is also important.

I fully accept that the Government and local government have roles to play in engendering that spirit and in improving the lives of people in their local communities. However, we should remember that the social interaction that I mentioned springs from self-responsibility and from people doing things for each other, not just leaving it to the Government or local government. Too much influence from central and local government can break down communities; that is evident in many areas.

People should feel that they have stake in the community. That is a matter not only of owning their own houses, although that is important, but of taking pride in existing institutions—in the churches, pubs and shops—and in each other and in their neighbourly behaviour. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe gave many examples of how antisocial behaviour can break down communities. Ownership of communities and of the institutions and spirit within them is extremely important.

In a constitutional context, too much government can break down community spirit. Where possible, local councils should be made smaller to make them responsible and responsive. Many parts of the country have parish councils and town councils, which are more local and more responsive. Local people who sit on them often feel a sense of ownership and responsibility in doing so. Parliament should consider the role of town and parish councils. District councils, although smaller than county councils, can be remote from many of the people whom they represent—especially in areas that are larger in terms of size or population. Certainly, county councils can be remote.

I urge the Government not to go down the road of regional government. In the south-west, it matters little to people in Tewkesbury whether decisions are made in Exeter or Bristol or in London. If possible, decisions relating to Tewkesbury should be made in Tewkesbury; if not, it makes no difference whether they are made in London or in Exeter, as neither would bring local benefit to the community.

On development—house building, in other words—it is important when providing housing not just to build houses. Several places in my constituency started off as pretty villages where there was a community spirit. More houses were built, but not a balanced community, because there were no amenities to go with them. People who live in them have to go elsewhere to shop or to use leisure facilities. That does not build up community spirit: it breaks it down. Any development that has to take place—although we should question whether certain areas should be developed—should be sustainable. We hear a great deal about sustainability, but what does it mean? It means building a balanced community and having respect for it, so that people can both live and function in it. They should not just go home to sleep, and have to go elsewhere to do other things—those amenities should exist within the community.

Decisions on where to build houses should take account of towns and cities, which require regeneration. That can by done by building on brownfield sites, or by using flats above shops—and by ensuring that shops do not close in the first place, as they often do. That has the dual effect of not destroying green belt sites or greenfield sites, which are quickly being swallowed up.

We could also regenerate towns and cities by not taking so much money out of them. We should be imaginative about what used to be called enterprise zones. If there are serious problems in an area, perhaps instead of taxing people who live there and then feeding them the money back under a scheme that was designed in London the Government should take less money out of that area in the first place. It might be a revolutionary idea. Perhaps we should have tax-free zones in those areas for two or three years, to encourage enterprising people to move there to live, to set up businesses and to employ local people. On second thoughts, I do not think that it is a particularly revolutionary idea, but it is an imaginative idea, which I have had for a long time. I would like the Government to engage in that type of thinking.

Many hon. Members have spoken about the destructive effect of crime and the fear of crime on local communities. It eats away at the spirit and the performance of a community. Tolerance of crime is not an option. People who have studied what has happened in New York—I have not done so in detail—have found that the successes that they have had in that city seem to have come from the opposite of a tolerance of crime: a zero tolerance of crime.

I understand that, in that city, people can be arrested for very minor offences, but it may then be discovered that those people have committed many other offences,

and if they are charged for them they can be taken off the streets. It has long been true that, as has been said, a very high percentage of crimes in a given area are committed by a very few people, and we really cannot let those people keep disrupting communities. In my opinion, zero tolerance is the way forward, not the tolerance of crime that we seem to be accepting these days.

That brings me to the subject of drugs, because we hear reports—I do not know how accurate—that in certain areas tolerance is shown to the possession of cannabis. I declare straight away that I oppose the legalisation of cannabis, on practical as well as moral grounds, because when I speak to the police in my area, they tell me that a very high percentage of heroin addicts started off on cannabis. It is no use going down the politically correct route of saying that cannabis is okay and is the same as drink or cigarettes; it is not. It is very different, and if we are going to start tolerating crime in that way, it will be the thin end of the wedge. It is no use having antisocial behaviour orders if we are to tolerate illegal acts. That cannot be the way forward.

We all know how much crime is committed in the pursuit of money to buy drugs. We should move in the other direction; we should stamp out drug use and the drug trade because it is destroying the lives of very many people—not just those who take the drugs but those who are affected by the crimes committed by people who want to purchase them.

A great deal of crime is committed by people with little or no education. I cannot quote the statistic exactly, but between 50 and 60 per cent. of people in prison are illiterate or have very low literacy. That is not an excuse for crime, however, and we cannot say that because someone is illiterate they should not go to prison. I am not making that case; I have said that I believe in the tougher control of crime. I believe in tougher sentencing for many crimes. However, we should recognise why crime is committed—not tolerate it, but try to understand why it is committed by some people in the first place, with a view to stamping it out. If we can, we should not only provide better education for those who go to university but turn our attention to those who have an alleged education for 11 years and yet leave school without any literacy or numeracy skills. That cannot be right, and we should try to find out why it is happening.

Geraint Davies: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that about 70 per cent. of people now in prison had been permanently excluded from school? When such youngsters, who are already disruptive, are excluded from school they get about five hours' tuition a week and then roam around, stealing mobile phones and the like. They end up in prison, and within two years of being released they are back inside again. It costs £34,000 a year to keep them in prison. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the extension in September of pupil referral units, which will provide such youngsters with at least some level of concentrated education, should help the drive against criminality?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Like other hon. Members, I have discussed such issues with teachers and head teachers. However, they do point out that the inability to exclude such pupils easily enough causes great disruption to schools. That problem must be dealt with, but I recognise what the hon. Gentleman is saying. It is all right expelling pupils, but where should they then go? Should they go to another school, which they then disrupt, or should they simply hang around on the streets, where they are a nuisance to society?

Should they end up in prison? When someone ends up in prison, it is a tragedy for them, for their family, for the taxpayer, and even for the victim of the crime. We should do our utmost to prevent people from getting into the situations that lead to their committing the crimes that result in going to prison. One method is to improve education at school age. As I said, I am delighted that many people go to university and get a good education, but we also need to consider those who are slipping through the net and not getting any education at all.

A great many people are in employment these days—as my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) said, we handed the Labour Government a very sound economy, which they have not quite managed to destroy just yet—so to some extent there is a skills shortage. However, I speak with some experience when I say that the collapse of certain industries has destroyed many communities. The mining and steel industries are the obvious examples, but we should remember the textile industry, in which I worked for many years. Many people in that industry, who were low paid to start with, lost their jobs. It is very difficult for such communities to share in the general wealth of the nation, given that they started from such a low base, only for their industries to be destroyed. That has proved a terrible problem, particularly in the farming industry.

We have concentrated—probably rightly—on many of the problems in towns and inner cities, but I want to touch on those affecting rural areas. I represent a constituency that is, by and large, rural, and its communities have experienced many difficulties. They suffer because of their rurality, which is not adequately compensated for because of the way that local government grants are assessed. However, there are also problems with transport. Rural areas suffer from very poor transport links, and there is also much poverty and crime.

More and more people from rural communities are complaining to me—in person and in writing—about crime in their areas. We should not ignore that issue. Although my constituency is not considered an area of deprivation, pockets of deprivation exist. We have awful problems with drug dealers and with theft in certain parts of the constituency, and I am rather peeved that the national lottery grants do not adequately reflect that fact. Areas are assessed in terms of overall deprivation, but it is not recognised that certain pockets of deprivation—perhaps such as those in my constituency—do not have the full amenities and levels of wealth that other parts of the country enjoy.

To some extent, the Government have recognised the problem. They intend to concentrate on improving national lottery grants for 51 areas that they have identified throughout the country, but I should point out that 50 of those areas already receive more money than Tewkesbury does. As the Member of Parliament for Tewkesbury, I find that a little difficult to understand and hard to take. I have initiated one Adjournment debate on that issue already, and I am applying for another. Although Tewkesbury has applied for about a sixth of the money that has been applied for in Gloucestershire—there are six constituencies in the county, so that is about

[Mr. Robertson]

right—it has received only 3 per cent. of the amount available to the county. That is not acceptable to my constituents who play the lottery as keenly as anyone else. They do not think that they are getting an adequate reward for that.

On the theme of rural communities, farms are not only family businesses that generate sources of income on which people rely for their living, but a crucial part of the countryside. Farmers are the custodians of the countryside and have suffered terribly not only from the BSE crisis, but from the foot and mouth crisis as well, which hit my constituency hard. In addition, although I do not want to make a party political point, the Government are ignoring some of the bigger problems in the country and are determined to ban hunting.

I do not hunt and never have. Indeed, I have not always lived in a rural area. I lived in Bolton in Lancashire for 33 years and did not have a view on hunting because I knew nothing about it. I remind the Government that the Burns report, which they commissioned, identified that events and organisations like gymkhanas and pony clubs are dependent on people who participate in hunting. Hunting is important to some parts of our communities, such as my constituency, and in a few areas, it is crucial. It will be a further blow to those rural areas if it is banned.

A community is not just about a physical area; it is also about a community spirit. Many communities, each with their own spirit, are what make up a country. I am delighted to have been present for this important debate. I am glad that the Government introduced it and that I have been able to participate.

1.22 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When the Minister opened the debate, she talked in measured terms about the Government's proposals to improve the quality of life. It was unfortunate that the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) accused her of issuing a distorted press release before going on to give us the Tory press release for the day.

When the Tories and others denigrate the national health service as part of the quality of life argument, they should be careful. It is true that the *Daily Mail* can find a casualty here, there and everywhere every day, but those of us who go to hospital on a regular basis have seen for ourselves the smiling faces of the winners who come out after seeing the doctor for a check-up or whatever. When I discuss things with those people, almost every one of them praises the NHS to the skies. That was true of my brother as well, who recently died of cancer. Before he passed away, he had nothing but praise for the treatment that he received from nurses and everyone else who cared for him during his four to five-year struggle.

When politicians—the Tories and Liberals in particular—slag off the NHS, they do not fully realise just how many people have to use it. As we live longer, more and more of us will rely on it. Those of us who have had a second mortgage on life will defend the NHS. I am pleased that, in order to improve the quality of life, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has come up with an idea that some people might regard as old Labour. For me, however, it is sensible and necessary. It means that those pensioners who are going to benefit from the NHS like never before are not going to have to contribute to the national insurance levy.

I therefore think that it was a good proposal. It will mean that the quality of life in all our constituencies will be vastly improved over the course of the next 10 or 15 years. It may not be perfect—I am not one of those politicians who believes that we can discover or produce nirvana in the morning—but it will make one hell of a difference to those people who use it.

The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire also referred to crime. The Tories ought to keep their trap shut about crime. It is not just a problem on the Sheffield estates, although my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) spoke eloquently about his meetings. If we think about Archer and Aitken and about Lady Porter—and where she ought to be, as she owes £27 million but they cannot get hold of her—the truth is that crime cuts across all swathes of society.

The same thing applies to the argument that we have heard about drugs. The hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson)—I say this advisedly—was talking about the drugs issue as if it related to working-class people alone. However, the truth is that it cuts across large sections of society. I have had people in my surgery such as 27-year-old heroin users who are in a job; they have not been dragged in and they did not work in the pit. This issue has accelerated and has been accentuated in the last 20 or 30 years. It was not around when I was a kid. We used to smoke fags as we were going over the hills to school, and we thought we were involved in a great escape. Today, however, it is totally different.

I have not yet got caught up with those who believe that we ought to legalise this, that and the other. I shall certainly not advance the idea that was put forward by a leading Liberal Democrat the other day to improve the quality of life. She said that we ought to be handing out free cocaine. If I voted for that, people in my ex-pit villages would be saying, "What about free fags and free ale and all the rest?" Liberal Democrats say some barmy things. We can all dream up a fantasy solution, but we must find the money; it must be sensible, and it must make a difference.

I entered this debate principally because I was born and bred in a pit village and I represent a constituency that used to have about 25 pits. I watched the quality of life deteriorate in the period when pits were being shut left, right and centre in my constituency. By the time the Tories had gone, the net result was that every single pit in north Derbyshire had gone. As a result, thousands of people were without work. One of the things that I have been trying to do to improve the quality of life in each of the pit villages is to try to restore the social fabric that was decimated by those Tory Governments who decided to get rid of all the pits.

At the end, there was a qualitative change—in 1962, when I was a miner, I was transferred from one pit to another one, but there were no transfer pits for those that were closed in the late 1980s and in the 1990s. That is why, in the past four or five years, we have had limited success in trying to rebuild those communities. I would be foolish and naive, however, if I did not give the impression that once the social fabric and the tightly knit community of a pit village has been destroyed, it is a big job to try to get it back on its feet. That is why I have always concentrated on the issue of jobs and the need to get more jobs into those areas that have suffered even more.

I am pleased that in the past five years we have had an economy that is getting more and more people back into work. I was here between 1974 and 1979 and I saw the opposite. One of this Government's redeeming features is that, whereas in 1976 we were having to tear up the Labour manifesto and shoot off to borrow from the International Monetary Fund, we now have a bob or two to give the IMF to bail out the 22 under-developed countries and improve their quality of life as well. I know that the quality of life in Bolsover will not continue to improve unless we manage to get our macro-economic policies right. That means concentrating on reducing unemployment. There is no doubt that it has gone down even in my area, principally because of the general state of the economy.

My hon. Friend the Minister visited my area to look at Shirebrook and one or two other pit villages. Together, we are trying to rebuild those areas. I have to tell the hon. Member for Tewkesbury that we got a sum from the lottery to refurbish Shirebrook miners' welfare, and I have been as good as the next Member at getting money for this, that and the other. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and her predecessor both declared that the pit areas that were hammered mercilessly will get favourable treatment, so Shirebrook miners' welfare, a necessary part of the village, has been improved.

I have to be careful about what I say about all these figures, but I got £24 million for the Shirebrook pit site, not from the lottery but from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He had to sign for that personally because the amount was more than the original £20 million, but I managed to force him into it. There will now be an industrial site on the old pit tip. My hon. Friend the Minister went there and knows that the heat was tremendous because of the spontaneous combustion underneath.

We are going to develop the housing, much of which is derelict as a result of pirate landlords moving into the Coal Board housing estates and taking over. They take the rent for a short period but do nothing with the houses, which fall into rack and ruin. Now we have to pick up the pieces and try to ensure that the whole village can last the next 40 or 50 years. So there is the miners' welfare, housing and jobs where the pit used to be. I have been taking action in many of my villages. We have to get a bit more money, so I hope that my hon. Friend is listening carefully. We want some more money for Creswell model village. We have made a start and got rid of 80 old houses, and I think there are another 160 to go, so my hon. Friend will be hearing about that.

Another proposal is to do something with the old Markham area, where there were several pits. An announcement has been made by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. That is the Department that took back Railtrack. Our shiny new Labour Secretary of State upset the Tories because it looked as if he was acting out of character when he took Railtrack back into the public sector. Frankly, I think he did a great job on that score. On top of that, he agrees with me that the M1 will have a new junction, 29A, leading to an industrial site at Markham that will produce between 8,000 and 9,000 jobs. It will be bigger than Meadowhall, which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe knows all about. These jobs will not be in shops; they will be in factories and so on. It will be the biggest industrial development since they sunk the pits.

Hon. Members can see that I have been pretty active behind the scenes, trying to restore the social fabric and improve the quality of life in our area. I do not think that my hon. Friend the Minister knows this, but we have got £7 million for the King's Mill hospital. That is not in my constituency, but right on the border, so I cannot take the credit for that. However, there is £7 million to improve the Frederick Gent school at South Normanton, and there is another matter that I hope to sort out eventually.

What I am trying to say is that we cannot do any of that unless the economy is doing well. We cannot do anything, in socialist terms, if we are skint and if we are having to beg and borrow. That is why it is very important that the national economy is kept on an even keel, with more people in work and more people paying tax and national insurance. We can then have a regional policy whereby we can provide more money where it is absolutely necessary. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) is here. People in Wales and other parts of Britain understand that we have to restore opportunities in the areas that got hammered.

The quality of life in mining areas was never superb. I am not one of those ex-miners who has a romantic view of the wonderful past working down a pit. The camaraderie was wonderful, but it was a lousy job. We are trying to recreate jobs and improve the quality of life in those areas, and we have made a bit of a start. If we continue along that path, in 10 or 20 years' time, we will have made some of the pit villages that were almost destroyed, with their boarded-up houses all over the place, look a bit better; and if we can get jobs in those areas, I have no doubt that the quality of life will have improved in ways we can be proud of.

Quality of life means that people have to have the right to roam, whether or not they have a job. I am pleased that we passed the legislation securing that right. We shall be able to see the little foxes roaming all over the place, because we will ban hunting—there will be no third way, will there? No. We shall be able to see all the little foxes in Chatsworth park—we shall be able to trample all over the Duke of Devonshire's land.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Skinner: I think the hon. Gentleman wants to go there as well.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman knows that he is my parents' MP and that my father was a miner. Will he not respect the right of rural communities to live the life they have lived for many years, just as he wanted mining communities to be able to do?

Mr. Skinner: It is a false distinction to separate mining communities from rural communities. Most mining communities are rural communities, with each pit separated from the next by 20 or so fields. I was born in a rural community, and I know that we should not get the impression that the drive to ban foxhunting emanates from city dwellers. The ban is supported by a majority of people in my constituency and all the rural areas as well.

We will have the right to roam. Tomorrow marks the 70th anniversary of the mass trespass at Kinder Scout. We shall celebrate the fact that, after all those years, all the

[Mr. Skinner]

Labour party resolutions and all the previous Labour Governments, the current Labour Government have passed the legislation giving people the right to roam. I think that that, together with jobs, the health service, other public services, housing and all the rest, will improve the quality of life of all our people. Those are the things that improve the quality of life.

Improving the quality of life is not an abstract concept. It is about doing things and having the brass to do them with, and in the past five years we have had a bob or two to spend. I want us to spend the next five or 10 years doing the exact same things.

1.38 pm

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), although he is a hard act to follow—

Mr. Laurence Robertson: Impossible.

Mr. McCabe: I quite agree.

Like my hon. Friend, I was bemused by the synthetic anger displayed by the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss). Only after reading the press release and hearing the rest of his speech did I realise what he was doing. There were two elements, the first of which was an innocuous but fairly good press release that pointed out that certain Government activities were addressing some of the problems that people consistently bring to the attention of Members of Parliament from all parties. There was a little good news about some progress being made after a bit of work, but the hon. Gentleman could not bring himself to acknowledge that. Instead, he used it as a hook for a party political broadcast. Quite a broadcast it was too. He told us that rail privatisation was a good thing. Anyone would have thought that Mrs. Thatcher had been a friend of the railways. He relied on quotes from 1995 to tell us how well Conservative councils are doing now.

That was a shabby attack. The second element is that a pattern of opposition on the part of Conservative Members is emerging. It is not only that they cannot bring themselves to acknowledge any good news, or that they constantly want to denigrate what is happening, just for the sake of it. We know now that it is a strategy. The person who let the cat out of the bag was the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). He did not intend to do that. Instead, he intended to tell members of the Conservative party in secret what the strategy was. Unfortunately, he was taped and the *Daily Mirror* blew the gaff.

We know that the hon. Gentleman's strategy is to persuade the public that the health service will not work. That is phase 1 of a four-phase strategy. The idea is to denigrate the health service and demoralise people generally, including those who work in the service, so as to be in a position to do away with it.

I wonder whether the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire is widening that approach. Is the Conservative strategy on every other subject the same? If so, they will tell people who are worried about crime that we cannot solve the policing problem, and people who are worried about housing that we cannot do anything about that either.

I suspect that that pattern is emerging from a party that does not have any real engagement with the issues that concern people, but does have a clear desire to denigrate and smash public services. That is supposed to provide the platform for the Conservatives to remove the investment that the Labour Government have been putting in. I suspect that that is what we saw demonstrated by the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire.

I had intended to talk about what is happening in some of our communities, including the progress that we have seen through the strengthening of the economy, the jobs that are coming back and the money that has been put in, as well as some of the difficulties that we are still trying to confront.

As I was travelling to the House on the bus this morning, I read the report of an interview with a 13-year-old girl in the estate in which Damilola Taylor died. As I read it, I realised that the truth is that however much progress we are making and however many things we are doing that are making a difference, we must accept that for many people there is still a long way to go. We read about youngsters growing up in estates who at the age of 13 can say, "I've handled a gun. I know a 13-year-old boy who regularly walks round with one stuffed into the waistband of his pants." That should cause us all concern.

The problem is not confined to estates in south London. Only the other week there was a drive-by shooting in Birmingham. I know that the number of offences involving guns is creeping up all the time. They are becoming a regular occurrence. I know also that it is far too easy for people to gain access to guns.

I feel that the time has come to review gun laws. We should seek to stop guns coming in from external sources, and we should investigate the mail order business, the internet business and those who sell apparently "safe" guns—air pistols or replica guns, for example—that are re-engineered in back-street workshops and used in crimes.

If we want to show concern for the quality of life in our communities, we must tackle the big things that are destroying our communities. We must say that the gun lobby has had its day. It is time we tightened up and did everything in our power to take guns out of our communities.

It seems that we have guns in our communities because of the scourge of drugs. I am astonished that we should find ourselves in a position where debate is reduced to narrow arguments about which policing tactic is effective. People who are using guns and killing other members of the community, often in drive-by shootings, are locked into the heroin and crack cocaine trade, and they are ravaging communities across the country. We should go after those people with a vengeance and root them out.

We should use the powers in the Proceeds of Crime Bill to strip those people of every asset that they acquire from that illegal trade. I served for months on the Committee that deliberated on the Bill, and I was astonished how often Opposition Members sought to weaken the powers in it so as to preserve the interests of the folk who are wrecking our communities. I am not trying to make a desperate party political point; I am warning Opposition Members that if they are serious about dealing with the problems that ravage our communities, they should support us when we give the

police and other agencies the power to make a difference. They are out of order when they try to whittle away those powers.

Finally, there is a debate to be had about the nature of policing in this country. It would be a terrible mistake if that debate were reduced to the details of police numbers, or how police co-operate with other agencies that may engage in support activity. In my community, the crime fighting fund has been beneficial in establishing small squads in particular areas to tackle the antisocial criminal behaviour with which we are all familiar. A substantial reduction in crime and antisocial behaviour on the Pitmaston Estate in Hall Green is the result of work by a dedicated squad funded by the crime fighting fund. We should encourage and welcome that kind of activity.

If we are serious about trying to tackle ongoing crime, we must recognise that the police themselves want intelligence-led policing. Neighbourhood wardens and community support officers, for example, can provide them with assistance. When a house is burgled it is probably a waste of time sending a police officer, but it is a good idea to send a forensics team, which is much more likely to be of assistance in catching the people involved. I am sure that most Members know that 90 per cent. or more of forensic teams are civilians, not police officers, but work hand in hand with the police to boost the detection rate.

That is the kind of mature debate that I want on policing; it is the kind of debate that my constituents understand and are happy to engage in. They do not want slogans, they do not want our public services denigrated, and they do not want people to talk tough and then, in the privacy of Committees, water down Bills that would make a difference. They want real action on the things that concern them, and I hope that our activities in the months and years ahead will focus on that.

1.48 pm

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): The contributions to our debate have been wide ranging—not least that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who rightly made the point that unless the economy is in shape and we are delivering an extra 1.5 million jobs instead of spending money on debt and the dole, we cannot deliver the services in health and education that people want for a basic quality of life.

I shall not focus on those important wider issues, but on the quality of life on the street and in our communities. We have made enormous progress in providing better education, more jobs and a better health service, but in many of our areas people still have a fear of crime as they walk down their street.

Particularly in my area, one of the reasons why some people might experience such fear is the presence of graffiti, abandoned cars, and other signs and symbols of neglect and vandalism, which make people scared to walk their own streets. Much has been done by councils and by the Government to tackle the problem through lighting, CCTV, more police, street wardens, efforts to design out crime, and investment in youth provision.

In the brief time available, I shall focus on some of the pioneering work that is being done in Croydon and suggest what more might be done. In my home patch, there is enormous co-operation between the council, the police and the community to clean up the area and make it a safer place to be. We have six teams of two who go out and scrub off graffiti. We have action against young offenders, which does not necessarily mean a hard-line approach that pushes them through the courts and puts them in prison. The aim is to find out who is responsible for the graffiti and go to their homes, tell their fathers and get the culprits to clean off the graffiti. That is working, in co-operation with the youth service, and it is more effective than pushing people through the prison system.

Earlier, I mentioned the problem of the 70,000 people in British prisons. Many of those people had in the past been permanently excluded from school. I am glad, as I said, that the Government have decided to provide excluded children with permanent education. I believe that they deserve more and better education than the average, to ensure that they do not end up in our jails and become repeat offenders, causing mayhem on our streets. It is not value for money to spend £34,000 a year to keep someone in jail.

Other preventive measures implemented locally include the introduction of climbing plants and pre-grown ivy on flank walls that tend to be attacked regularly. That has eliminated the problem of graffiti and improved the local environment. There has been heavy investment in CCTV and we have asked local retailers to lock away aerosol cans. We found that as most of the paint that is used to spray graffiti is stolen, that has reduced the amount of graffiti locally but has not affected trade or the viability of local shops.

By the very nature of the crime, the offender leaves his signature on walls to show how clever he is. That allows us to create a database of tags and eventually identify the offenders. I believe that there is much mileage in advertising hefty rewards to discover whose the tags are. In the world of competing graffiti vandals, it is known whose the tags are—that is the whole point. If a reward of £1,000 leads to the identification of an offender through his tag, and Scotland Yard gets a warrant, enters his flat and finds the evidence—aerosols and so on—he should be charged with everything it is possible to charge him with.

What sort of people are committing those offences? Historically, graffiti vandals tended to be hard-core criminals. Increasingly, however, we now find that they are first-time offenders who think that they are participating in some sort of popular culture largely imported from the United States. We need to confront that at the core and demonstrate to people that they are destroying their own environment.

Speaking to primary school children in an area that I represent, I found that many young children said that they were scared by the emergence of more graffiti and abandoned cars. It is not true that the vast majority of young people tolerate vandalism. They want to stamp it out as much as we do. That is why Croydon is spending £250,000 a year on anti-graffiti measures. Across London the figure is more than £10 million. The Government have made some headway on the problem in terms of antisocial behaviour measures, and the Greater London Authority is asking, in clause 18 of the London Local Authorities Bill, that under-18s should be prevented from buying aerosols or marker pens.

In Germany a new anti-graffiti law was brought forward in January to extend the powers against graffiti vandals and ensure that less evidence was needed to

[Geraint Davies]

exercise them. In the United States it is already obligatory to lock up spray paint in shops and restrict its sale to adults. In Chicago, there is a complete ban on the sale of spray paints. I have written to the Home Secretary suggesting that we simply ban the production, sale and import of aerosol cans of paint.

Some people may lift their eyebrows at that proposal, but we are dealing with a balance of costs and benefits, and we must consider the reasons why people use the sprays. People who legitimately want to spray over a scratch on their car can use other means of applying the paint. Professional painters of cars have mechanisms other than cans at their disposal, which leaves only artists. Restrictions apply to guns and restrict their use to clubs. Perhaps artists should join clubs so that the items in question, which are used to destroy our environment, are kept under close guard. In my area a gentleman called Philip Ditton is running around the residents' associations trying to gain support for that idea, and I certainly think that it is worth while.

The least that we should do is impose very tight controls on the retail and manufacture of these devices, which are largely used by young people and are sold on the internet explicitly for the creation of mayhem and damage. The paints are also dangerous; many of them contain especially dangerous solvents, gas and resins. Some contain nitrocellulose and acrylic elements that bite into the painted surface to which they are applied.

Aerosol cans should be locked up in shops and kept away from children, and there should be local laws against their possession by children. The police should have greater powers to stop and search, so that they can deal with somebody who is walking along the road with aerosol cans clearly sticking out of his trouser pockets, while fresh graffiti has just appeared around the corner. When the police see such people, they should be able to demand that they turn out their pockets.

We could also introduce dry mineral cleaning equipment of the sort currently used in France, and there are some possibilities with anti-graffiti coatings—chemicals that are applied to signs and the like, and stop graffiti staying there and allow it to be wiped off. Also, as I said, there should be a more comprehensive tag database that the police can use to hunt down the perpetrators using the incentive of rewards.

Warrants for entry into property should also be available, and we should consider banning the advertisement of imported products, especially those coming from Spain and Germany, that are designed to be sprayed on walls and public spaces. They are mainly advertised on the internet. I wonder whether, if a ban were agreed to, some of the stuff coming through the post could be detected by X-rays and the like.

The private sector, too, has a duty to clean up its space. It is disgraceful that when people travel to London on the train, they pass massive areas of derelict railway land that has been completely vandalised and is covered in graffiti. It would be better if such places were covered in advertising, which would pay for itself, cover the areas and pay for some sort of clean-up. In general, there is an argument for the principle that the polluter pays. The manufacturers of aerosol paints should pay to repair the damage that misuse leads to.

There is a lot to think about in all those proposals. Members of my local community are sick and tired of having to see signs of graffiti when they walk down the road. They are also aware that council tax is being used to eliminate some of the problems. Croydon council is doing a marvellous job in fighting back to clean up the streets, but more measures need to be taken.

We also have a problem with abandoned cars. It is largely created by second-hand cars that have a negative value, partly because the scrap steel is no longer worth anything. The Government gave local authorities greater powers to clear up abandoned cars after the Prime Minister made a speech in Croydon. We are now clearing up approximately 5,000 abandoned cars every year. Last month the figure was 450.

There is a peculiar mystery involving the hon. Members for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) and for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), who recently visited Croydon—without notifying me, of course. They appeared in the news beside a burnt-out abandoned car that had not been reported to the council. However, when the council went to remove it, it had already gone. There was some suspicion that the visiting Conservative dignitaries put it there. We are still looking into that rather strange matter.

Contrary to the impression that those Conservative Members gave in the local newspaper, Croydon is second to none in clearing up abandoned vehicles. As I said, last month we cleared up 450, compared with 350 in Tory Bromley and 160 in Liberal Democrat Sutton. We take the problem seriously, as does the local community. We are grateful for the Government's support and wish them well in giving us more powers to tackle that difficult problem.

2.1 pm

Ms Keeble: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate, which has been wide ranging and has shown the importance of environmental issues to people throughout the country. Hon. Members from all parties understand that pavement politics issues are important to the well-being not only of individuals and local communities, but to local economies.

The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) struck a jarring note by focusing on the press release. It and the method that produced it will withstand any scrutiny. In drawing attention to it, he has created a story when none existed. I welcome the fact that more people will read it, but his actions fail to do justice to a serious, well-informed debate on an important subject.

Mr. Moss: Will the Minister confirm that, in her opinion, the press release did not break the civil service code?

Ms Keeble: I am absolutely clear that it did not break the civil service code.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned destruction of greenfield sites. He was wrong about that. The Government's approach is to monitor and manage, whereas that of the Conservative Government was to predict and provide. In many cases, our figures for housing need in different areas are lower than the current rate of building. When figures for town centre development are compared with those for out-of-town development, they show that our policies to

support town centres and protect greenfield areas from urban sprawl, especially out-of-town retail centre development, are working well.

The hon. Gentleman criticised the Government on transport. Our approach to London Underground was determined by a legacy of underinvestment and the well-perceived need to improve its quality as a key part of improving the capital city's infrastructure.

The hon. Gentleman also criticised our record on social services, but that of the Conservative Government was bad. Those who remember care in the community know that what should have been a good policy was fatally flawed because of the Conservative Government's failure to fund it properly. Many old people are now paying the price of that underinvestment. We have learnt from that, and in introducing our supporting people programme, we shall ensure the provision of good-quality, supported accommodation across the board for the people who need it. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) will be interested in that.

We recognise that not only elderly people, but people who have come out of prison, those who have left care and psychiatric hospitals and those who are fleeing domestic violence need supported accommodation. That applies also to some very young people who, on being given the key to a council flat and being told, "There's your flat; go and get on with your life", have real difficulties because they do not yet have the necessary social skills. A number of hon. Members have spoken about that today, and about the consequences for communities of young people not getting the support that they need when they need it.

We have provided free nursing care for people in care homes, and invested more money in the health service and in local authorities to deal with the pressing problem of ensuring that, when older people are discharged from hospital, they can go into appropriate accommodation. Having lived in their home for, perhaps, 50 years, many of them have the awful experience of seeing it for the last time out of the back of an ambulance as they are carted off to hospital. They never manage to get home to pack up their belongings because the necessary support systems are not in place. We have put the money into local government to unlock some of those acute difficulties.

In looking at ways of providing services, I have previously mentioned Castle Vale, which has come up with some extremely good partnerships—involving the private sector, the housing authority and the health authority—to find ways of helping older people in their transition from hospital back into the community. That brings me to the most depressing aspect of the contribution of the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire. His speech did not do justice to the outstanding work being done in communities throughout the country to tackle those difficult issues.

The hon. Gentleman might say that I look at life through rose-tinted spectacles, but I think that he had the most severe bout of the blues today that I have ever come across. Many disadvantaged areas have been beset by crime, drugs, poverty, poor housing and poor local management of services. They have taken a grip on those problems through measures such as the new deal for communities and have transformed what is happening. That has taken a lot of hard work, commitment and dedication by a range of people at local level.

Mr. Moss: Will the Minister point to any one of the statistics that I gave in my speech which she thinks is inaccurate, or with which she takes issue?

Ms Keeble: Yes, I will indeed be coming to one. I shall deal with it when I respond to the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) on crime statistics.

The Conservatives have made much of wanting to be compassionate and to be the party of the disadvantaged. If they want even to start going down that road, they should support their communities, listen to them and look at what they are doing. They should also look at their problems. The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire spent most of his speech denigrating the outstanding work that many of those communities are doing. The Conservatives are turning the crime statistics round and running them down. That does no justice at all to the work being done.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting talked about the problems of older people who are out of work, which the Government are dealing with through the new deal for the over-50s and through the work being done to encourage volunteering. He also drew attention to the need to ensure that the needs of black minority ethnic communities are catered for in our towns and cities, including through the provision of facilities. Issues about the provision of facilities often relate back to planning decisions, and I draw to his attention, and pay tribute to, the work of the planning inspectorate to attract more people from the black minority ethnic communities into the planning profession, and to get them to stay and become inspectors so that they can play a part in shaping our urban communities.

My hon. Friend also referred to the impact of property leases on people starting up in business. I draw his attention to the code that my Department recently agreed with all sectors of the commercial property industry to deal with some of the problems that he identified. I shall ensure that he gets a copy of that, and of the "Plain English" leaflet that goes with it, which is quite outstanding—it is a model of how to produce plain English leaflets.

My hon. Friend asked about the procurement of affordable housing through the planning process. We are extremely concerned about that and see it as part of the planning process to make sure that developments include some affordable housing. It is key to tackling some of the problems in London. If he writes to me about the issues that he is concerned about, I shall certainly look at them, although he is aware of the restrictions on the Department's role in the planning process.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) set out some of the serious issues raised by the urban taskforce. All of those have been taken on board by the Government and substantial progress has been made in delivering on them. He also talked about the flight to the suburbs. Some big cities are doing extremely good work in reversing that flight and increasing the residential population in city centres. I mentioned Newcastle previously, but Manchester and Nottingham are also doing good work through design and innovative housing. Nottingham works with the private sector and some housing associations, and environmental standards are being improved.

[Ms Keeble]

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) talked about including young people and children. The green spaces taskforce is looking carefully at the needs of children and young people. It recognises that young people can be a problem because they just want to hang out, like young people do. Parks and open spaces have a role in providing facilities where young people can do that without being perceived as a threat or a nuisance. Recommendations on that will, I hope, be made shortly.

I was pleased to hear about the success of the programmes for fishing communities. The Government recognise that the need to deal with the environment is particularly serious for seaside towns and all areas trying to attract tourists. I wish my hon. Friend's council all the very best for its planning weekend and its effort to engage the public in the planning process.

The hon. Member for Poole raised a number of issues. I agreed with many of his comments about the country's strong economic performance, but I take issue with his position on crime. Fear of crime must be tackled as well as crime itself. The Home Office statistical bulletin 18/1, which draws from information in the 2001 British crime survey, shows that crime went down by a third between 1995 and 2000 and has dropped by 21 per cent. since 1997. It also deals with fear of crime, because crime can be considered in terms of enforcement or victims, and shows that the chance of people being victims of crime is the lowest for nearly 20 years. That is important in terms of people's day-to-day experience.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) described eloquently the problems of antisocial behaviour. Most hon. Members have heard similar stories at their advice surgeries. He described many of the measures that my Department is considering, so I shall not go through them all again. We are also working closely with the Home Office. I re-emphasise the fact that we need to ensure not only that the police, local authorities and communities work together to enforce law and order, but that we prevent crime by building safety into the design of urban areas.

Geraint Davies: My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) mentioned the problem of witness intimidation. The statute book provides opportunities to protect the victims of rape as well as juvenile victims. Will my hon. Friend the Minister talk to her colleagues about the possibility of providing anonymity for those who have been subjected to violent crimes on estates and are in fear of coming forward as witnesses?

Ms Keeble: I shall certainly take up that point with my colleagues in the Home Office.

The hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) talked about the distance between local councils and the local community. He also talked about rural problems. We recognise those issues, which is why funding has been provided for rural policing and bus services. I understand that the funding for those bus services has produced an extra 4 million passenger journeys—a remarkable increase.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said that small pockets of disadvantage are often found in affluent areas. The aim of our proposals on the local strategic partnership and neighbourhood renewal—I agree that the jargon is often absolutely appalling—is to ensure that those involved in all local services sit down to address the problems that occur in all areas, not just those that are most disadvantaged. Problems must be properly identified and targeted, even in affluent areas—his constituency is fairly affluent—so that we can end the disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is a hard act to follow—and an even harder act to comment on—but he is absolutely right to say that the No. 1 issue is the economy. The economy determines our quality of life to a very basic degree. I thought that it would probably be helpful to try to limit this debate a bit, which is why I did not talk about the NHS, schools, employment, mortgage rates and all the other issues on which the Government have an outstanding track record. Obviously, those factors and services also dictate a person's quality of life.

My hon. Friend was absolutely right to refer to the work being done in the coalfields and to the investment in the economy, transport infrastructure, roads and motorways and in regenerating the former colliery sites. In his area, the investment has gone into an industrial park. Elsewhere, it has gone into leisure parks and nice green spaces, as well as into housing regeneration. In place of the dereliction of the Tory years, the Government have rebuilt.

The work in the coalfields shows perhaps one of the starkest contrasts between this Government's approach and that of the Conservatives. There are 13 or 14 villages in the Eden valley, and it is extremely important that we see that project through, because it can provide us with a model of how to deal with some of the problems found elsewhere in the country.

It is essential that we ensure that all sections of our society benefit from the strong economy. In addition to economic growth, we need to spread that development throughout our society. Again, one of the big differences between the Conservatives and Labour is the fact that we have put in place the mechanisms to ensure that, at the grassroots level, people can feel the benefit of our economic strength and progress.

The fact that those mechanisms did not exist previously is best summed up by what happened in London during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Canary Wharf was developed while some of the most disadvantaged communities nestled around it. We need to ensure that those disparities are ended and that all sections of society feel the benefits. That is what much of this debate has been about.

Mr. Skinner: Notwithstanding the success that I mentioned, I have about another 10 projects lined up, so I hope that they will not be disadvantaged. The job is only half done; there is a lot more to do.

Ms Keeble: "A lot done, a lot more to do" is a slogan that I have heard somewhere else, and I agree with it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) was right about the cynicism and despair engendered by Opposition Members. Telling

people that they can do nothing about anything and that nothing will make a difference only days before local authority elections—

Mr. Moss: I did not say that.

Ms Keeble: Actually, the hon. Gentleman did. It is tantamount to putting out a notice saying, "Don't bother to vote." In fact, all the evidence shows that people can make a difference. They can reduce crime and improve their estates and schools. How—and, indeed, whether—people vote does make a difference and does count.

The biggest antidote to the cynicism and despair that the hon. Gentleman encouraged and engendered is to go to one of the new deal for communities areas, such as the one in Tottenham that I visited recently, to see the difference that people have made by taking control of their own communities and saying what they want out of local services. It is not only a question of how much money is spent; what ultimately makes the difference is the way in which it is spent and the involvement of the community.

Several hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green, mentioned what happened on the North Peckham estate. As a former leader of Southwark council—I see that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) is now here—and a former governor of Oliver Goldsmith school, I think that we should be cautious before we leap to conclusions. I am sure that the whole House would want to extend great sympathy to the family of Damilola Taylor. His loss was a complete tragedy, and recent events must make things infinitely worse for them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) made direct links between micro-actions at community level and the big picture. If we are serious about achieving urban renaissance and regenerating our towns, cities and rural communities, and about ending the disadvantage that has been a scar on many parts of the country, we must deal with the day-to-day and street-level problems that make a substantial difference to people's experiences and chances in life. As my hon. Friend said, we should celebrate what our local communities and local councils are doing. The changes that they can deliver will improve people's quality of life in their local communities and help to transform our society very much for the better.

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Direct Telephone Marketing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

2.24 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I am delighted to have secured this debate on the regulation of telephone marketing. I am also delighted that it will be an all-Celtic exchange with my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness. Many of our Anglo-Saxon colleagues will be engaged elsewhere, probably in nuisance telephone calls to members of the public on behalf of political parties. I know that this is not always the most popular slot for Members or Ministers, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for coming to reply on behalf of the Government.

This Adjournment debate, like many others, arose directly from constituency casework. A constituent contacted me to complain that she was receiving marketing calls despite being registered with the telephone preference scheme, which should prevent that from happening. She even went to the additional trouble of going ex-directory, but continued to receive such calls. Apparently, the problem has become worse because of the introduction and more frequent use by tele-sales companies of automated dialling equipment. Many people are not aware of that technology; it involves computers that randomly generate telephone numbers and call people to sell them things. It is sometimes known as power dialling.

I wrote to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who confirmed that this practice could occur, and I received a written reply from the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, because the matter fell under his responsibilities. With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to quote from some documents as I go along, to tell the story of how the matter developed. In the Minister's reply, he confirmed that

"an ex-directory listing"

by a customer

"does not in itself prevent direct marketing calls. An ex-directory listing with BT means that the subscriber will not be included in the BT Phonebook, nor will BT give out details of the subscriber through their directory enquiries service. This will serve to stop calls from direct marketers using the telephone directory as a source of contact information. However, direct marketers who are using other sources for contact information, such as that collected from promotional questionnaires and flyers, or through dialling numbers at random or in series, will be unaffected by an ex-directory listing."

I believe that most people would be surprised to find out that registering one's number as ex-directory does not provide protection against calls from direct marketers. To achieve that it is necessary to register actively with the telephone preference scheme, but, in fact, that scheme in itself does not protect the customer from market surveys by companies. I shall return to that point towards the end of my remarks, with some suggestions for the Minister.

Two more constituents then contacted me to draw my attention to an even more worrying aspect of the technology and practice of power dialling. The first, Gill, contacted me because she had been receiving silent phone calls—very worrying and disturbing—and, not being a vulnerable person but someone who was active and was worried that she might be being stalked, she contacted the nuisance calls bureau. She discovered that the silent calls

[Kevin Brennan]

were emanating not from someone who was stalking her or trying to frighten her, but from a commercial organisation, and were being produced by power-dialling equipment.

The second constituent, Simon, contacted me because he had been receiving phone calls at regular two-hourly intervals. When he picked up the receiver, a silent call resulted, follow some time later by a click. He investigated and, interestingly, when he contacted the nuisance call bureau of his telephone provider, NTL, was told that if it was a nuisance phone call that might result in criminal action—that is, from someone with malicious intent—the bureau staff would contact the police, but if a commercial operator was responsible NTL would contact the commercial operator but would not tell Simon who had been calling him.

The problem with such calls is that when the recipient tries to discover who is behind the phone call by dialling 1471, he hears the message:

"The caller withheld their number",

which makes it very difficult indeed to discover what is going on, and very worrying.

On 31 August 2001, I wrote to the Minister about that problem. On 1 October I received a reply, in which my hon. Friend confirmed that power dialling silent calls did occur.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Kevin Brennan: The Minister's letter states:

"This equipment automatically transfers the call to an available operator if the call is answered. Although the system can give the direct marketer certain efficiency savings, it can also result in silent calls which are subsequently terminated at times when the number of answered calls exceeds the number of available operators . . . registration with the TPS"—

the telephone preference scheme—

"should offer her protection from all direct marketing calls, irrespective of how they have been dialled.

To address the issue my Officials have arranged to meet with Oftel, the ICO"—

the Information Commissioner's office—

"both BT and NTL's nuisance calls bureau and the Direct Marketing Association at the beginning of November. I will update you on their findings in due course."

I have yet to receive an update, and I hope to hear from the Minister about the outcome of those consultations, what the current position is, and what progress is being made in dealing with the problem.

As the Minister suggested, I contacted the telephone preference scheme. I received a reply on 16 November as follows:

"Whilst registering with the TPS may well stop silent calls if the cause of them is a power dialler used by a telephone marketing company the use of auto diallers is widespread and it could be the call is not initiated by a direct marketing company."

That shows that, as I said, one can still receive nuisance calls from market survey companies in particular. The letter continues:

"One of the main problems is identification of the companies making silent calls and sanctions that can be taken against them. Until the caller can be identified and contacted there is no way of telling if the attempted call was an unsolicited sales and marketing call . . . TPS is anxious to see enforcement action taken against companies who do not abide by the Telecommunications (Data Protection & Privacy) Regulations 1999 . . . TPS is keen to see the problem of silent calls reduced as the increase in registrations as a result of recommendations that registering with TPS will solve the problem is an unforeseen cost burden to running the service."

The Government are recommending that people register with the telephone preference scheme to get over the problem, but according to the letter—from Tessa Kelly, director of compliance operations for the scheme—doing so imposes unforeseen cost burdens on the service. In November, I received an answer to a parliamentary question to the Minister, which confirmed the existence of this particular practice.

Following those letters and constituency cases, I tried to find out exactly what was going on, and in that regard I am grateful to the House of Commons Library for its help. I discovered that two types of power dialling exist, the first of which is not so pernicious. We all accept that tele-sales calls are regrettably necessary, and the first type of power dialling makes outgoing calls only when an agent becomes free. In that way, it can be guaranteed that an agent is available to take successful call attempts. In other words, on answering the telephone, a human voice explains who they are, which company they represent and what they are trying to sell. Most people would find it reasonable to receive a call of that type if they have not registered with a telephone preference service.

It is the second and more pernicious type of power dialling to which I object. It is known in the industry as predictive power dialling and is a version of power dialling that attempts to improve agent productivity by increasing their talk minutes per hour. The computer application that makes the outbound calls uses predictive analysis to maximise the agent's telephone talk time. That is achieved through a combination of predicting when an agent is likely to become free and starting an outbound call to coincide with it or, alternatively, through predicting the number of call attempts that are statistically answered.

For example, if only one in three call attempts are successful, the system can make three simultaneous outbound calls at the same time although only one agent is free. If people answer the telephone in greater numbers than the computer predicts, which is bound to happen from time to time, the unfortunate person at the other end of the line will receive a corporate silent nuisance call. I am sure the Minister will agree that that is unacceptable. We need to ensure that safeguards are in place to protect the citizen from such corporate nuisance calls.

Oftel started to review the use of power dialling in June last year with a view to relaxing further the restrictions on the use of that type of technology. However, it admitted in the consultation documents that there is huge potential for abuse of the technology. As a result, it issued a statement on 18 January 2002 in which it said that the current regulatory position should mean that the calls do not take place. The director general of communications said:

"The use of automatic equipment licence condition (the ACE Condition) prohibits the use of automatic calling equipment . . . where the resultant call does not consist of live speech, unless

written consent has first been obtained from the recipient of the call. The ACE Condition is intended to protect consumers from abuses, including . . . using ACE to initiate calls with insufficient operators available to take the calls when answered, resulting in customers receiving either a recorded message or just silence."

The document goes on to say that Oftel decided to relax the restriction requiring prior written consent for such a call. However, regulations are in place to stop them. In theory, therefore, despite the dilution that Oftel announced to the regulations on power dialling, consumers should still be covered by the existing protection. However, it seems from the information that I receive from constituents that they are not.

There is little awareness of the problem and only a low level of protection. There have been one or two references to the issue in the public domain and the press. Sue Arnold wrote an article in *The Independent* as long ago as 30 January 1999 in which she described how she received silent telephone calls at 27 minutes past three every afternoon which were from a corporate source. In finding out about the series of nuisance calls that she was receiving, she came across the term "power dialling" for the first time. Furthermore, I discovered a letter as recently as 17 December last year in the *Daily Express*, which was from a Mr. Peter Ivers of London SE8. He wrote:

"Having been subject to such calls for about a year, I rang BT to request an ex-directory number and it was then that I was informed that 'power-dialling' was probably to blame and that the companies concerned had been asked to include a recorded message informing the recipient of the nature of the call but they had declined to do so. If anyone out there has any ideas on how to combat this problem, I would like to hear them."

That is partly why we are here today; we want to hear the Government's views on that. Clearly, this problem is still going on. Incidentally, if the company included a recorded message telling the recipient the source of the call, that would technically be illegal, because the call would not have resulted in live speech but in recorded speech.

I believe that what I have uncovered is just the tip of the iceberg. This morning, a constituent who heard that I was raising this subject in Parliament sent me an e-mail via the House of Commons website constituency locator service to say that he was pleased that I was raising the issue. As one of my constituents, he wanted to tell me—I shall not repeat the words that he used, for fear of breaching the convention of the House—that he had had many of these calls early in the morning and at weekends. He said that he would not call himself a vulnerable member of society, but that he genuinely thought that he had a crank caller. When he reported the calls to BT's nuisance calls line, he was given a number to ring and he was able to get his name removed.

This should not be happening. Many people out there are not going to the trouble of contacting the nuisance calls bureau because they are living in fear of the kind of calls that they are receiving. Thousands of people are suffering in silence. Perhaps today's debate might help them to come forward and raise their concerns with Members of Parliament.

It is not clear that there has been sufficient will to deal with the problem until now, but the Government are now aware of it. With power dialling, the balance of rights between the citizen and the corporate world is wrong. There is a lack of public understanding of the problems, and there is a confusing number of bodies involved—TPS, Oftel, the Information Commissioner, DTI, NTL, BT, representatives of the industry and the Direct Marketing Association. It is a confusing picture for members of the public.

We need to establish clear principles. There should be no predictive power dialling, and the pernicious form should be completely stopped. Companies should not be allowed to withhold their numbers when they ring people up to sell them something and there should be rapid action against an abuse of that. Telephone preference scheme registration should also be included when somebody registers as ex-directory, unless the consumer opts out from that registration.

As I said earlier, tele-sales can be a good thing. Many people enjoy the benefits of being able to buy goods and services over the telephone, but it is open to abuse. I have not even mentioned some of the overseas scams of which some other Members of Parliament are aware, in which people are phoned from overseas and have to ring back high-premium numbers. I would like to know that the current regulation is being enforced and to hear the outcome of the Minister's talks.

One of my constituents suggested an alternative to registering with the telephone preference scheme: when people receive one of these calls, they should politely ask the caller for the home telephone number of the directors of the company involved so that they can phone them up in case they have anything to sell—perhaps a useful way of trying to get rid of that old kitchen table.

2.44 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) on securing this debate. As he said, the motivation was his concern for his constituents, which is widely recognised across the House. I am fully aware that the subject of the debate can, as we have heard, rouse strong feelings and generates much interest, not least from individual constituents. I shall seek first to put the issues into context.

Used responsibly, telephone marketing is a useful and valuable tool for businesses; used badly, it can be the cause of serious nuisance and inconvenience. It is therefore important that the right protections are put in place. I shall outline what the current rules say about unsolicited direct marketing by phone, and the individual subscriber's right to opt out, and then move on to what people can do if they are getting those unwanted calls.

The current rules originate from the EU telecoms data protection and privacy directive. Under the UK implementing regulations, we introduced statutory opt-out rights for individual phone subscribers who do not want to receive unsolicited direct marketing calls. They can register with the telephone preference service, or TPS, which is run by the Direct Marketing Association under supervision by the telecoms regulator Oftel. Registration is fairly straightforward: a telephone subscriber can do it by phone, fax, post or e-mail, and it is free.

The regulations also give individual subscribers the right to opt out of calls from particular direct marketers. No one may make an unsolicited direct marketing call to someone who has previously instructed them not to ring again. People may object to calls from a particular marketer without wanting to opt out on a blanket basis, and the rules accommodate that option for the individual telephone subscriber. Of course, that raises the question what are the sanctions for breaches of the regulations.

The Information Commissioner has powers to enforce the rules and will take action against direct marketers who persist in breaching the rules despite being warned of

[Mr. Douglas Alexander]

their obligations. Ultimately, failure to comply with an enforcement notice issued by the commissioner is a criminal offence punishable by a fine. Alongside those provisions for the individual telephone subscriber stands the position for corporate subscribers. No one should suffer in silence if they are being called despite having registered with the TPS or opting out of calls from particular marketers. Anyone who finds that they are being called despite opting out should complain to the TPS, if they are registered, or to the commissioner's office.

The TPS does not apply to corporate subscribers, however. The Government took that decision following extensive consultation before the new regulations were introduced. Many businesses both sell and buy products and services over the telephone. However, although corporate subscribers do not have a blanket opt-out right, as with the TPS, they do have the right to instruct individual callers not to make further calls to them. That right comes from the Telecommunications Act 1984 licensing regime, which requires anyone making that kind of call to cease doing so on receipt of a written request. Those rules are enforced by Oftel.

Yet it remains the case that those rights are enforceable only where the source of direct marketing calls can be traced and people know who is behind a rogue call. Consequently, as part of all direct marketing calls, the caller must give their name and, on request, a freephone telephone number on which they can be contacted. If callers withhold that information, telephone operators are able to trace the source of calls and disclose it to subscribers and/or the relevant enforcement body.

My hon. Friend identified the problem concerning the significant number of complaints received recently about the use of power diallers by direct marketers. These systems, also known in the industry as auto-diallers or predictive diallers, generate calls automatically but can cause silent calls if there are not enough operators available at the direct marketer's end to handle all the calls put through. When the call reaches its destination, if there is no operator available, a silent call results.

I stress that whatever phone system a direct marketer is using, he or she must still respect registration on the TPS or any direct request not to make any further calls. Direct marketers who fail to do so risk breaching the regulations and, therefore, enforcement action. When subscribers receive silent calls, their service provider should be able to trace their source. I understand, however, that marketers are now taking action themselves to sort out that problem. The DMA issued new guidelines in January which all responsible marketers will want to follow. These are to be incorporated into the DMA's code of practice, which is binding on its members.

My hon. Friend referred to individuals dialling 1471 to identify the person making the call. Among other things, the new guidelines require direct marketers to provide calling line identification when using that kind of calling system. The effect is that the source of any failed calls can be traced by dialling 1471. The marketer must ensure that anyone who rings back on the number thus provided is given clear information about the marketer's identity and how to stop any further calls. The guidelines will also strictly limit the number of failed calls that systems can make.

The new guidelines result from an industrywide initiative and follow extensive consultation that involved, among others, representatives of telephone operators' nuisance call bureaux and of enforcement agencies including the Information Commissioner's office, Oftel and ICSTIS—the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services—as well as my officials. Although I regret the delay in responding to his earlier letter, I assure my hon. Friend that the work has been continuing as I have described. I am sure that the new guidelines will be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House as a significant step forward.

I agree that silent calls of any kind can be distressing. If silent calls are made with malicious intent, consumers should contact their telephone operator. Operators co-operate with police to trace any such calls, and such investigations can lead ultimately to prosecution and fines, or imprisonment for those found guilty of making malicious calls with intent.

The new regulations I mentioned are making a real difference as subscribers and marketers become more accustomed to the new system. Surveys carried out on behalf of the TPS show that 27 per cent. of the UK population is now aware of the service—an increase of 5 per cent. over last year. The number of direct marketers that check their lists with the TPS has also increased considerably. Some 1.8 million subscribers are now registered with the TPS. Despite rising registration numbers, the TPS reports that the number of complaints has remained steady, at approximately 300 a week, which indicates increased compliance.

My hon. Friend will be interested to hear that there is to be an opportunity to review how the regulations are working and whether improvements can be made when we implement the communications data protection directive, which is the updated version of the directive on which the current rules are based. The new directive is expected to be adopted later this year for implementation in 2003. Not least because of the degree of interest in these matters, we will run a consultation exercise before we implement the new rules, and I shall certainly welcome Members of Parliament and their constituents giving their views as part of that process.

Although real progress has been made, we now have a significant opportunity to take forward this important work. Our ongoing challenge is to ensure the appropriate balance between the use of responsible telephone marketing as a useful and valuable tool for business and appropriate protection from serious nuisance and inconvenience resulting from misuse.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to Three o'clock.

Correction

Official Report, 24 April 2002; In col. 426, the third sentence in the paragraph starting "With 19,000 applications" should read "More than 43,000 asylum applicants were still awaiting an initial decision in the middle of last year."

House of Commons

Monday 29 April 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Afghanistan

1. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): If he will make a statement on the deployment of British troops in Afghanistan. [50940]

10. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on the work of Royal Marine Commandos based at Bagram, Afghanistan. [50949]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): British troops in Afghanistan have been carrying out security assistance and combat tasks. The United Kingdom has led, and made a substantial contribution to, the international security assistance force in Kabul since its inception. Our troops have been widely praised for their work in helping the Interim Administration to maintain security and stability in Kabul as the Afghans begin the rebuilding of their shattered country. The number of British troops committed to ISAF in Kabul is now less than 1,500, compared with 2,100 at its peak.

The deployment to Bagram of a battle group formed around 45 Commando Royal Marines is nearing completion. Its first task, Operation Ptarmigan, achieved all its objectives. The Royal Marines searched a high mountain valley and its caves, where they found evidence of occupation by al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorists. That included large quantities of ammunition, which they destroyed, as well as valuable intelligence material, which we are now studying. The operation enabled our forces to gain vital experience of operating in Afghanistan and to test our battle procedures and command and control arrangements.

Kevin Brennan: Can my right hon. Friend comment on reports that the Turkish Government have agreed to take over the leadership of ISAF, and can he tell us when that will happen and whether British troops will remain in ISAF under the leadership of the Turkish Government?

Mr. Hoon: I can confirm that the Turkish Prime Minister's office issued a statement this morning that it had been decided by the Council of Ministers that Turkey would take over command of the international security and assistance force from the United Kingdom for a period of six months. Obviously, I warmly welcome that announcement. Discussions on the date of transfer are continuing. However, as I told the House on 11 April, we may well have to remain as lead nation until June. In any event, our commitment to ISAF will continue and a significant number of British troops will remain in Kabul under Turkish command.

Michael Fabricant: The Secretary of State will be aware that there is growing instability in Afghanistan and that battles are going on between various warlords. He will also be aware of the recent attack on Gardez, the capital of Paktia province, not too far away from the capital of Afghanistan itself. Is the right hon. Gentleman concerned that 45 Commando may become involved in peace operations, trying to separate rival forces? If so, what are the risks posed to the lives of those in 45 Commando?

Mr. Hoon: There are no plans for 45 Commando to become engaged in such tasks. I have set out to the House on more than one occasion the expectation of what 45 Commando will be engaged in. With regard to the security situation outside Kabul, the hon. Gentleman should not be too carried away with the idea that battles are taking place all across Afghanistan. Incidents are certainly occurring from time to time, and it is important that we are not in any way complacent about them, but the Interim Administration are responsible for the security of Afghanistan in general—that is, outside Kabul. That is why we so strongly welcome the successful completion of ISAF's training of the first battalion of the Afghan national guard. That is an important stage in the process of security sector reform in Afghanistan, and one to which we are determined to continue to contribute.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): Does my right hon. Friend share my dismay at the report in last Thursday's *Daily Record* stating that it had been banned from visiting Afghanistan to report on the work of 45 Commando? An MOD press officer was quoted as saying:

"We prefer to deal with newspapers which are helpful to the Ministry, and not ones which write bad stories about us."

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is intolerable for any newspaper to be barred, and will he make sure that that does not happen again to any newspaper that writes either good or bad stories about the MOD?

Mr. Hoon: I can tell the House that there is simply no truth in that suggestion. The *Daily Record* has not been banned from any visit to Afghanistan. Indeed, as I understand it, one of its correspondents will join a visit to Afghanistan in due course.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): The Secretary of State was right to warn the House that the operations of 45 Commando might result, tragically, in some casualties. Can he give an assurance today that he is satisfied with the existing medical service? We would not expect him to go into detail about that, but is he satisfied about the medical evacuation of troops in the event of any casualties?

Will he briefly explain what the Government's view would be of any prisoners that we might take? Would we treat them as prisoners of war under the Geneva

convention? If we transfer them to America, as the Secretary of State has suggested, who would make that decision, and what would we do with those prisoners whom we did not transfer to America?

Mr. Hoon: It is vital that our forces deployed in Afghanistan have access to the best quality medical facilities. I am confident that our arrangements secure that objective.

Prisoners will be handed over to the Interim Administration in Afghanistan, which are primarily responsible for security in Afghanistan. I am entirely happy that the arrangements that we have agreed with them are appropriate and within international law.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Key to the success of any operations in the eastern mountains of Afghanistan is the attitude of the Pakistani military. Will the Secretary of State confirm that they are co-operating with operations and are actively involved in them?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Obviously, we recognise that terrorists may try to escape from remote parts of Afghanistan across a difficult border into Pakistan. That is why we are co-operating closely with the authorities in Pakistan, which maintains a substantial number of troops along the border with Afghanistan. Indeed, it has recently had considerable successes in apprehending people fleeing from Afghanistan.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the Secretary of State give us his estimate of roughly how long the commitment will last in Afghanistan? We all know that this matter is very difficult, but is it an open-ended commitment? If so, what impact will it have on other spheres in which the British Army is involved?

Mr. Hoon: I have made it clear to the House on previous occasions that the deployment of 45 Commando is anticipated to last about three months. That will clearly depend, however, on the situation on the ground, the circumstances that 45 Commando faces and whether it can bring the operation to an end more quickly. A period of three months is the planning assumption that has been made.

On ISAF, I have previously indicated to the House my anticipation that at the end of the current United Nations Security Council resolution mandate, an extension will be made for a period, especially bearing in mind the Bonn timetable. Although Britain would want to continue to make a substantial contribution to the success of ISAF, today's news that Turkey will assume responsibility as lead nation is extremely welcome and will certainly allow us to reduce our forces.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): We, like all others in the House, remain filled with admiration for the way in which British armed forces are carrying out operations in Afghanistan, and we send them our best wishes. I welcome the news that Turkey has now made a commitment to take over command of ISAF, although I am a little distressed that the Secretary of State still cannot say when it will do so. Following up the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), what exactly will be the level of our future commitment? After Turkey takes over, what will be the total UK troop commitment to Afghanistan, and how long will that commitment now last?

Mr. Hoon: I have already answered the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question. I hope that the House would not expect me to deal with the issue again quite so soon after the hon. Member for Blaby asked the same question. As I have already indicated, I anticipate that there will be a reduction in total numbers once Turkey assumes lead-nation responsibility for ISAF, but, equally, I have said that it is important that the United Kingdom continues to play its part. It would not be sensible at this stage, before final negotiations with Turkey are completed on the precise handover date and the numbers that are required, to give the House a specific indication of a figure that has yet to be renegotiated. Therefore, all I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that it will be rather less than the current figure.

Mr. Jenkin: Does that not rather underline how foolish the Government were to make an initial planning assumption of only three months for the deployment? Does not the present situation also demonstrate that involvement in nation-building is inevitably protracted and makes a heavy call on our limited resources? When will the Government start to plan more effectively? Why leave it all to the last moment? What are they doing to ensure that the additional commitments are fully funded and do not simply contribute to the continued rundown of the rest of the armed forces?

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman sees things in that light. He moves from congratulating us on the deployment of forces and on decisions taken back in the United Kingdom to being extremely critical about the process. He cannot have it both ways; he needs to make up his mind on which approach he will take and decide whether he will support the deployment or criticise it. At the moment, he seems to want the best of both worlds.

On the decision that was taken, it is obviously important—he would encounter the same problem if he were standing where I am—that we take decisions not in the light of some abstract suggestion made at the start of operations, but once those operations are under way and we can make judgments about how they develop and the contribution that the United Kingdom can make. I am absolutely convinced that we have taken the right decisions about the contribution that we can make, that those decisions are properly funded and that there will be no financial difficulty in sustaining the operations. If the hon. Gentleman thought about the issues more carefully, he would agree with me.

Military Communications

2. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What steps he has taken to improve military communications since engaging in operations to combat global international terrorism. [50941]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): A significant proportion of the funding made available for the immediate operational

requirements needed in support of the campaign against international terrorism has been spent on military communications.

We have provided our forces with capabilities to improve interoperability with allies who are also engaged in the fight against international terrorism, and we have provided forces deployed to Afghanistan with the necessary communications assets to ensure maximum operational flexibility in a particularly demanding environment.

Mr. Bryant: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. As he will know, many historians argue that during the second world war Britain's superior communications systems proved decisive in winning victory. Will he do everything in his power to ensure that British troops, many of whom are deployed 3,500 miles away in Afghanistan and many thousands of miles away in other places, still have that competitive edge?

Dr. Moonie: Looking in some detail at what we have done for troops in Afghanistan, we have improved our secure speech assets for deployed aircraft, improved our secure fixed communications links with allies, increased the number of tactical data links fitted to aircraft, undertaken improvements to our intelligence networks and expanded our operational level command information systems. We have procured additional lightweight tactical satellite systems, and 45 Commando now has several of those systems deployed in Afghanistan. We have also taken action to ensure that all those deployed in Afghanistan have the new personal role radio at their disposal.

Looking to the future, our ability to respond to urgent equipment requirements in support of specific operations is backed by a comprehensive programme of investment in military communications that will be progressively delivered over the next few years: Bowman, the new tactical communications system, in 2004; Skynet 5, the next generation of ground terminals, in 2005; and Falcon, the operational level communications infrastructure, in 2006.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I welcome those improvements, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that however supportive one may be of European defence co-operation, especially within the ambit of NATO, it is important that strategic communications are not duplicated? What improvements are planned for NATO's strategic communications within the overall context of the fight against terrorism?

Dr. Moonie: I admire the hon. Gentleman's ingenuity in working that into a question on communications in Afghanistan. Communications requirements at the highest level in NATO are kept under constant review. Should any changes be planned, I am sure that he will be one of the first to be told.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The shopping list of items that the Minister announced was extremely welcome, but will he confirm that even on his own schedule most of the British Army will be left with communications that are well behind those of many third world countries?

On the battle against terrorism, what steps are the MOD and its sister Departments taking to provide some form of intercommunication between our armed forces and the various civilian agencies that will be used in the event of terrorist attack in this country?

Dr. Moonie: If the previous Administration had worked a little faster on developing communications, we might have been in a better situation today. I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that interoperability with civilian capabilities and communications receives a high priority in our planning and will figure strongly in any future action that we take.

Missile Defence

3. **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): If he will make a statement on the Government's policy on missile defence. [50942]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): We recognise the role that missile defence systems can play as one element of a comprehensive strategy to tackle the potential threat posed by weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. However, we believe that it is currently premature for the United Kingdom to make decisions on acquiring active missile defences. It remains the case that we have received no requests from the United States for the use of facilities in the UK for missile defence purposes as part of its plans.

Mr. Prisk: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that somewhat familiar answer. Last Friday, the American Missile Defence Agency reported that it had received several specific expressions of interest in collaboration from Germany, Spain and Holland, among others. Given that the technologies represent a wonderful opportunity for British science and industry, have the British Government also registered an interest in them? If not, why not?

Mr. Hoon: I understand that those expressions of interest were from commercial private sector companies, which suggested that they were willing to participate in scientific opportunities for developing such equipment. I am sure that similar opportunities will be available to British commercial interests.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): The focus of such debates has been strategic missile defence—indeed, Conservative Members made that point—but much shorter-range missiles are in widespread use, including by smaller forces and even militia. We have forces operating throughout the world without area protection from missiles. What are the Government doing about that?

Mr. Hoon: I entirely accept the force of my hon. Friend's point. We are considering the matter, and have a programme in hand to examine ways of protecting our deployed forces. We must have regard to that, although we anticipate no current threat to them. We acknowledge that the ultimate means of protecting deployed forces are similar to methods of dealing with the strategic threats that my hon. Friend describes. Current thinking suggests

that means of protecting deployed forces when compared with, for example, the territory of the United Kingdom, are increasingly similar.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Secretary of State recall that more than 200 of his own Back Benchers do not wish the Government to have anything to do with missile defence? Given that it is unreliable against a country with many weapons of mass destruction, will he remind those Back Benchers that it can be decisive against countries with few such weapons?

Mr. Hoon: United States' thinking has always been that missile defence is designed to deal with a small number of incoming missiles from relatively few states of concern. That remains its position. As I said earlier, it has not yet made a request of the United Kingdom. Until it does, the UK is not in a position to say whether we would respond.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the Ministry of Defence regard itself to be subject to normal local authority planning regulations for the possible extension of Menwith Hill or Fylingdales?

Mr. Hoon: In the past, the Ministry of Defence has accepted the normal rules of planning for acquiring new facilities. However, it is important to draw my hon. Friend's attention to the full range of planning rules and their effect on Departments.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): One of the gravest ballistic threats that faces the world comes from Saddam Hussein. Perhaps the Prime Minister had that in mind when he talked about the "first Gulf war" last Wednesday at column 331 of *Hansard*. That clearly implies that he expects a second one. Perhaps that is also what General Tommy Franks had in mind when he spoke of Desert Storm 2.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) had tabled a question about Iraq. Indeed, it would have been the first question, but she withdrew it, although she is present. If the Secretary of State is nervous about talking to his Back Benchers about ballistic missile defence, will he be bolder in speaking to them about his plans for Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: That was an interesting set of assumptions, but I do not accept many of them. The Prime Minister and the Government have made it clear that no decisions have been made about any military action that involves Iraq. In those circumstances, most of the hon. Gentleman's comments were highly speculative and theoretical. It is important to say, however, as the Prime Minister has made clear, that the events of 11 September demonstrated the need to take seriously threats to international and regional stability—in particular, threats by states of concern that might be seeking to develop weapons of mass destruction. In the light of 11 September, it is important that we do not overlook those developments, but, as I said earlier, no decisions whatever have been taken about military action in relation to Iraq.

MOD Land

5. **Tony Baldry** (Banbury): What financial targets have been agreed with the Treasury for returns on the disposal of MOD land surplus to requirements. [50944]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): As part of the comprehensive spending review in 1998, the Ministry of Defence was set a target of £700 million in estate disposal receipts over the four years to March 2002. The MOD achieved cash receipts of £819 million against that target.

The spending review 2000 set another demanding target of £600 million of asset disposals, including equipment and other non-land disposals in the three years between 2001 and 2004. We expect that receipts from the sale of surplus land will make up the bulk of that target. An accrued receipt of £208 million in the financial year just ended represents an excellent start.

Tony Baldry: In the interests of openness, will the Minister explain whether, if MOD land at Bicester is made available for an accommodation centre, the Home Office will have to pay a commercial rate for the land? If not, will the MOD budget bear the loss?

Dr. Moonie: I shall certainly write to the hon. Gentleman on this matter if I am wrong, but, as far as I am aware, this is based on normal valuation of the land concerned. If that is not the case, I shall send the hon. Gentleman the correct reply to his question.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Surely the truth is that the MOD is hooked on asset stripping to underwrite its day-to-day expenditure requirements. Is it not the case that while the Minister waits for land and other assets to be sold off—including, I must remind him, 27 per cent. of the Aldershot garrison—HMS Monmouth lies idle awaiting a refit, 5 Squadron's Tornadoes have been mothballed, infantry recruitment has been put on hold until September, and Para recruits cannot complete P Company owing to a shortage of C130 crews and aircraft? When will the Government match the resources to the commitments that they are imposing on our hard-worked armed forces?

Dr. Moonie: I think that one of the points of selling land that is surplus to requirements is to get what receipts we can to offset the costs of the very matters that the Opposition spokesman is talking about. Surely, one can hardly suggest that the MOD ought to hold on to land that is surplus to requirements. That would be commercially and militarily foolish, to say the least.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the Minister bear in mind that, in this age of international terrorism, it is more important than ever for the Royal Air Force to have options to disperse its aircraft? If it is going to concentrate its aircraft in an ever smaller number of bases, they will be inherently more vulnerable. Will the hon. Gentleman assure the House that no more flying stations will be closed in the next few years?

Dr. Moonie: No, I certainly cannot assure the House on that matter. I have to say, however, that any disposals

or closures are made on the advice of the service chiefs in the department; they are not just plucked out of thin air by Ministers sitting in Whitehall.

Veterans' Forum

6. **Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): What progress the Veterans' Forum has made in addressing the needs of veterans; and if he will make a statement. [50945]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The veterans plenary met for the second time on 17 April and was attended by 172 representatives from veterans organisations. I was able to highlight a number of successes achieved by the nine working groups that were set up last year to take forward the veterans' strategic action plan. We have also achieved agreement on a £100,000 research programme—funded by the Ministry of Defence and other Departments—to understand better the nature of the problems facing veterans and how they arise. In addition, a trial began on 1 March seeking to provide a much-enhanced package of resettlement advice for those who leave the services on medical or disciplinary discharge, and who are judged to be at greatest risk of unemployment or homelessness.

Dr. Iddon: I have always felt that we have not cared enough for our ex-service men, particularly those who experienced trauma in service and suffered as a result, so my hon. Friend's remarks are welcome. What practical benefits does he expect the recently formed Veterans Agency to bring to Britain's war veterans?

Dr. Moonie: In the first instance, we have concentrated on setting up an effective helpline, which will allow all veterans access to a range of services and advice across government. That was not available in the past and it will greatly improve and ease access. I am considering the role of the welfare advisory service within the Veterans Agency to see how it can best work with the voluntary and charitable sector, which provides so many of the services on which veterans depend, to improve services across the board.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): The whole House welcomes the improvements that have come through the formation of the Veterans Agency, but will greater resources be made available in the coming year, in particular to assist the agency with helping three groups—test and nuclear test vets, veterans with asbestos-related illness and Gulf war veterans—to put their claims together and to get supporting medical evidence so that they can make legitimate claims to the MOD in support of genuine veterans' grievances?

Dr. Moonie: This and previous Governments have spent a great deal of money on providing advice and support for veterans with medical problems. Many of the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman are the subject of potential or actual court hearings, which are a matter for those who decide to initiate proceedings against the Government.

The Government provide generous help through the War Pensions Agency and the armed forces pension scheme for those who are damaged or ill as a result of their service. The asbestos situation, for example, is the subject of test cases. I do not think that this or, indeed, the previous Government need hang their head in shame over the help given to veterans who suffer from the illnesses that the hon. Gentleman refers to.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Many surviving veterans served in Suez between 1951 and 1954. As my hon. Friend knows, none of those service men and women was awarded a medal for their service between those dates. Has that been raised under the auspices of the Veterans' Forum, and will he bear it in mind that a recommendation was never made to the medals and decorations committee that such an award be made? Could such a recommendation now go to that committee?

Dr. Moonie: My hon. Friend will be aware that I have spent a great deal of time over the past two years or so looking into the matter of a medal for Suez veterans. My conclusion is the same as that previously reached by the Department—that there is no avenue available for reopening the matter. However, I understand that it has been referred to the Cabinet Secretary, who is secretary to the honours and decorations committee, to see whether he can identify potential avenue.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will the Minister confirm that the veterans advice unit that he has set up consists of three warrant officers? Would not those personnel be better used if they were seconded from the MOD direct to the British Legion and the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association? Perhaps the other warrant officer could deal with prospective veterans who are still in the armed services? Is not that a better way to provide the most immediate, direct and effective link between his Department and veterans?

Dr. Moonie: There is no shortage of links between my Department and the major agencies responsible for providing help in the charitable sector. The three warrant officers to whom the hon. Gentleman refers are part of the existing MOD structure for providing advice; their work will be drawn into the helpline that is being provided on a much wider scale by the Veterans Agency. I can assure him that we are looking very closely indeed at any avenue for improving communications with the voluntary sector, but so far, and I hold meetings regularly, nobody has raised that as a problem.

Strategic Defence Review

7. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What response he has made to the consultation exercise on the new chapter of the strategic defence review; and if he will make a statement. [50946]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I have been delighted with the wide-ranging and constructive responses to the Ministry of Defence's discussion paper on a new chapter to the strategic defence review. We have now received more than 300 responses, of which some 250 were from external organisations and individuals. Although last month's deadline for responses has passed, I have made it clear that we continue to welcome views and ideas. The responses have been acknowledged where possible, and are being taken into

account in the work. As I have previously told the House, I expect to be in a position to publish conclusions in the late spring or early summer.

Miss McIntosh: How does the Secretary of State hope to achieve the aims that he has set out in the new chapter? As he told the House in February, we are to mount find-and-strike operations and to extend the global reach of the forces, at a time when our Army has a shortfall of approximately 8,000.

Mr. Hoon: It will depend first on our reaching some conclusions from the work that is under way. Although the hon. Lady has anticipated those conclusions, the material produced previously, and indeed in the discussion document, constituted only our tentative view of what would be required. I expect to be able to tell the House how the funds necessary to support the work will be secured when we are nearer to reaching conclusions.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Has the Secretary of State any plans, as part of the review, to examine the pattern of recruitment, particularly at senior officer level, to ensure that all sections of society and all educational backgrounds are represented? At present, the officer class seems to be drawn from a relatively narrow educational background.

May I also ask whether the Secretary of State, or his Department, intends to continue to be extremely unhelpful in answering questions about this matter?

Mr. Hoon: I was sorry to hear my hon. Friend's last observation. I will certainly try to be as helpful as I can.

The opportunities for individual service men and women to progress to the rank of officer, either directly or indirectly, are currently determined entirely on merit. If my hon. Friend has criticisms of the existing system I shall be delighted to hear the details from him, and I assure him that Ministers will consider them very carefully.

Hawk Aircraft

8. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): If he will make a statement on the prospects for selling surplus Hawk aircraft to India. [50947]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The Government currently have no plans to sell surplus Hawk aircraft to India.

Mr. Jack: The Minister has been very courteous, as have his colleagues in both the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry, when I have raised issues relating to the prospect of the United Kingdom's obtaining an order for up to 60 Hawk aircraft from the Indian Government, but we seem to be continually marched to the top of the hill and down again. Can the Minister bring us up to date on the present state of negotiations, and can he confirm that in his judgment there are no financial, operational or work-share barriers to the securing of the order once the Indian Government have made up their mind that they want the aircraft?

Dr. Moonie: In answer to the final part of the right hon. Gentleman's question, I can assure him that that is the case.

We are, to an extent, in the hands of British Aerospace and India, as the order is a matter of negotiation between them. The Government continue to support British Aerospace's efforts to export Hawk trainers to India, but, as I have said, the decision currently rests with the Indian Government. Until they make up their mind, I can only say that no contract has been signed and no application for an export licence has been received.

Fleet Air Arm

9. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If he will make a statement on the future of the Fleet Air Arm. [50948]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The future of the Fleet Air Arm is assured as an integral part of the Royal Navy, under Flag Officer Maritime Aviation and CINCFLEET. Maritime aviation capabilities are provided on a tri-service basis, but led by seasoned Royal Navy and Royal Marines aviators in all three service commands. The three pillars of the Fleet Air Arm are the battlefield helicopters of the commando helicopter force in Land Command, fixed-wing squadrons in Strike Command, and naval helicopters in the Fleet.

Plans to build two large aircraft carriers are well advanced, with selection of a prime contractor expected in early 2003. Two of the four planned Harrier GR9 squadrons in the Joint Force Harrier will be manned predominantly by Fleet Air Arm personnel, the other two predominantly by Royal Air Force personnel. The first Merlin mark 1 helicopter squadron is already on HMS Ark Royal, and plans are in hand to replace the Maritime Lynx helicopter beginning in 2007. The first upgraded airborne early warning Sea King flight will go to sea later this year, and the joint strike fighter will be introduced from 2012.

Mr. Turner: I thank the Minister for that reply. Bearing it in mind that the Sea Harrier has the proven altitude, range and manoeuvrability to provide better advance warning of attack than any ship-based radar, why have the Government reversed their decision in the strategic defence review to keep the Sea Harrier until its replacement is available in 2012, and what is going to fill the gap?

Mr. Ingram: There is an associated risk attached to all of this, but it is without question a decision based on the balance of investment. We believe it to be an entirely logical step in the smooth transition to future joint combat aircraft. There are significant technical risks associated with the upgrading of the FA2, the Sea Harrier. The decision that we have taken facilitates the capability that we want and will need in future in accordance with the SDR.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Given that all the procurement information must have been known for some time, why did it take so long before crew members and their families at Yeovilton were advised that they were not going to be moved to the wilderness of Lincolnshire and were going to remain in Somerset? The design of the new carriers will depend on the marine form

of the joint strike fighter. When will that design be finished, and when will it be possible to finalise the design of the carriers?

Mr. Ingram: I hope that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the announcement regarding Yeovilton and recognises that these are carefully balanced decisions. We tell people such decisions as early as we possibly can because a lot of uncertainty and doubt can arise from undue speculation. All this is a complex business. I think that we have handled it in an appropriate, sympathetic and structured way. The hon. Gentleman should await the decision on the future aircraft carriers. It is coming.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): The withdrawal of the Sea Harrier represents a major change in the Government's defence policy and we remain concerned about the risk to which the right hon. Gentleman himself refers. Without the Sea Harrier after 2006, and until the Sea Harrier replacement in the 2012, our fleet will be less well protected and therefore less deployable.

How can Ministers pretend that the new type 45 destroyer can replace the fleet air cover provided by the Sea Harrier when only fighter aircraft can provide both the long-range radar cover and the necessary deterrence to protect ships from air attack? Incidentally, the type 45 destroyers do not come fully into service until 2015. Why do the Government refuse to answer my written questions and to tell the House what savings they are making from the withdrawal of the Sea Harriers six years early? Is not the decision to scrap the United Kingdom's most capable fighter aircraft just another example of how cash-strapped the UK's armed forces have become under this Government?

Mr. Ingram: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would listen to answers. This is not a savings decision. The decision to upgrade the GR variant of the Harrier to the GR9 has been made on the balance of investment, and it will give us an offensive strike capability that is wholly consistent with the SDR. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says that it is a different aircraft. Of course the FA2, the GR7 and the upgraded variant are entirely different aircraft. That is why I referred to some of the significant technical difficulties in seeking to upgrade the aircraft. We have to make a balance of investment decision in terms of where best we can invest to move forward into the future that we have laid down for the expanded fleet and the way in which it will operate as part of the expeditionary force.

Defence Fire Service

11. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If he will make a statement on the future of the Defence Fire Service. [50950]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): There are two separate but complementary studies that could affect the future of the Defence Fire Service. The first is the airfield support services project, a public-private partnership project. The bids from the three consortiums involved are due back at the end of April. The second, Fire Study 2000, will inform the public sector comparator for the airfield support services project. The main approvals stage for the airfield support service project is planned for early 2003, and no decisions have been taken at this stage.

Mr. Grogan: Given that privatisation of the Defence Fire Service is opposed not only by many Government Back Benchers but by the official Opposition as a privatisation too far, given that there is an in-house proposal that would result in a 20 per cent. saving on current costs, and given that, according to a memorandum that I have seen, the United States Air Force is unlikely to allow a privatised Fire Defence Service to provide fire cover for US bases here, is not it now time for a rethink in policy?

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend and other colleagues have made representations to me on those very points, and we had a useful examination of the issues. I thought that I had laid to rest the view that he expressed on behalf of one member of the US armed forces and explained that there would be Government-to-Government determination on future use. I hope that he and all the other objectors will at least recognise that we are testing the market to ensure that we get maximum efficiency from every pound that we spend on defence and that to do otherwise would be wrong. I repeat, however, that no decisions have yet been taken on this.

Angus Robertson (Moray): The Minister of State will be aware from previous debates of the overwhelming quantity of correspondence that I have had from RAF personnel and families at RAF Lossiemouth expressing concern about the privatisation proposals. He has said that the issue is being reviewed and that all options are open. Can he name one single neutral observer, trade union, political party or Back-Bench Member of Parliament of any party who supports the privatisation of the Defence Fire Service?

Mr. Ingram: The one thing that we can say with certainty is that there would not be a Royal Air Force if the hon. Gentleman's party had its way. For him to be claiming support for RAF Lossiemouth is a bit off the beam. Indeed, in relation to the whole future strategy for NATO, there would not be much of a defence footprint in Scotland under the Scottish National party.

I recognise that there is a lot of concern surrounding this subject. We will examine all the options honestly and openly. To do otherwise would be wrong. Objections will be best made when people understand what the position is and we have explained our decision.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): Is my right hon. Friend aware that not only are all the Opposition parties opposed to the privatisation but there is deep unease here on the Labour Benches? Has he consulted the rank and file service people who are protected by the Defence Fire Service at bases throughout the country and is he satisfied that they support the proposed privatisation?

Mr. Ingram: We do not have a privatisation proposal yet. We are examining the options. If that becomes a decision, full consultative processes will be put in place, as with every other change to the way in which we deliver

our services. I am currently engaged on such an intensive consultative process in relation to the modernisation of our warship support.

Afghanistan

12. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What recent discussions he has had with his European Union colleagues on military operations in Afghanistan. [50951]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I continue to have regular discussions with my European Union colleagues about operations in Afghanistan. All members of the coalition are committed to the fight against international terrorism, and to supporting the Afghan Interim Administration as the Afghans begin the rebuilding of their country.

Helen Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need not only to root out al-Qaeda but to ensure that Afghanistan cannot become a safe haven for terrorists in the future? If we are to achieve that, a reform of the whole security apparatus will be needed. What steps are we taking, alongside our colleagues in the European Union, to assist the people of Afghanistan to achieve that?

Mr. Hoon: I agree with my hon. Friend. I described to the House earlier the efforts being made by military forces, particularly by part of the international security assistance force, to train Afghan armed forces for their role in defending Afghanistan. It is equally important to explain how closely we, together with our European partners, are working with the Afghans to reform other areas of their security sector. For example, Germany is leading on the training of the Afghan police force and Italy on the reform of the judiciary, while France, working closely with the United States, will train two battalions of the new Afghan army.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Did the agenda of the discussions that my right hon. Friend had with his European counterparts include the setting up of a taskforce, either within the European self-defence force or under the auspices of NATO, to block the drug route from Afghanistan through the Balkans? I ask that question because at the annual meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO the Civil Dimension of Security Committee, on which I serve, was given a presentation by Interpol in which it was said that heroin is finding its way from Afghanistan through the Balkans. There was a view that bin Laden had been in the Balkans only two years before, and may have been involved in setting up the route through to Europe, so the taskforce would be very important.

Mr. Hoon: There are no specific plans for a particular taskforce, but I can tell my hon. Friend that determined efforts are being made, in co-operation with the Interim Administration inside Afghanistan, to deal with the current poppy crop. Further efforts will be made in each succeeding year. Each country along the route that my hon. Friend mentioned has been approached with a view to persuading it, where necessary, to take urgent action that should be taken against drug smuggling. That is certainly the case in the Balkans, where I know that determined efforts are being made to deal with the supply of drugs, especially heroin originating from Afghanistan.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): During the Defence Committee's recent visit to Afghanistan, I was impressed to see a rather unexpected additional French battalion of infantry, which was fully recruited. Meanwhile, 1 Royal Anglian, alongside, had struggled to find the recruits that it needed. Last Saturday four of my constituents tried to join their county infantry regiment, which expects to go on operations to Afghanistan in the not too distant future, only to be told that there were no places available for infantry training until at least September. Can the Secretary of State explain?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman knows full well, from the correspondence that he has entered into with the Ministry of Defence about this issue, that there is a temporary difficulty as a result of the fact that we are consolidating infantry training at Catterick. There is no secret about that, nor is this the shocking revelation that the hon. Gentleman and the "Today" programme appear to claim to have uncovered. That has been said to the hon. Gentleman clearly and plainly in recent correspondence.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the development of a properly trained and accountable Afghan national army is an important step towards Afghanistan's future peace and stability? Can he tell the House what role he sees such an army playing to achieve that goal in the longer term?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is right. As I have explained already, it is important that we continue to support the Interim Administration's efforts to train an army that reflects the ethnic diversity of the Afghan people and can gain the confidence of people across the country in undertaking both internal and external security responsibilities.

Iraq

13. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): If he will make a statement on preparations for future military action in Iraq. [50952]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): We have made plain our concerns about Iraq's continued development of weapons of mass destruction and the potential threat the Iraqi regime poses to the international community. Allowing those programmes to continue unchecked is simply not an option. However, no decision on military action has been taken and no such action is imminent. Any decision that we make will be taken carefully, cautiously and in accordance with international law.

Mr. Osborne: Both the Prime Minister and the American President have made it clear that military action against Iraq is at least an option, even if no decisions have been taken. Can the Secretary of State reassure the House—or at least, the Opposition—that intensive

preparations are under way for the contingency of military action, including a possible ground campaign; otherwise, the threat against Saddam Hussein is hollow?

Mr. Hoon: Intensive efforts are being made to require Iraq to comply not only with a series of resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, but with international law. Specifically, weapons inspectors, who have not been in Iraq since 1998, should be allowed to return. It is vital that we see for ourselves whether or not Saddam Hussein is, as we suspect, continuing in his efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction. That is the diplomatic and international political route that we continue to take.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Do the Secretary of State's recent comments concerning the possible use of nuclear weapons against Iraq signal a change of Government policy, whereby Britain is reneging on assurances given to non-nuclear weapons states under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty? Indeed, are the Government abandoning the policy of successive British Governments of regarding nuclear weapons as a deterrent of last resort?

Mr. Hoon: There has been no change in the British Government's policy—the use of nuclear weapons is still a deterrent of last resort. However, for that to be a deterrent, a British Government must be able to express their view that, ultimately and in conditions of extreme self-defence, nuclear weapons would have to be used.

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about today's press reports, suggesting that weapons are being smuggled from eastern Europe, through Syria and into Iraq? If so, will he investigate the matter? Does he also agree that, if the reports are true, they are a further indication that Saddam Hussein has no intention of voluntarily complying with the UN resolutions and allowing an inspection team into Iraq? His sole interest appears to be his own power, rather than a peaceful future for the Iraqi people.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. She is quite right: the matter must be investigated. So far as we have been able to discern, the Iraqi regime have no obvious intention of complying with either international law or the UN Security Council resolutions.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Secretary of State referred to the possible use of nuclear weapons in circumstances of "extreme self-defence". Can he help the House by explaining what that phrase means? People either defend themselves, or they do not.

Mr. Hoon: I accept that there are those—some of whom may well be sitting on the Labour Benches—who do not believe in the use of nuclear weapons in any circumstances, but that is not the position of the Government or of the Labour party. It is therefore important to point out that the Government have nuclear weapons available to them, and that—in certain specified conditions to which I have referred—we would be prepared to use them.

Sierra Leone

15. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): What recent assessment he has made of the involvement of UK forces in Sierra Leone; and if he will make a statement. [50954]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I visited Sierra Leone in March, and I was therefore able to see for myself the excellent progress our forces have made in helping to develop a professional, accountable and effective Republic of Sierra Leone armed forces and Ministry of Defence. Our goal, however, is that the Sierra Leonean armed forces be able to protect the country's security and territorial integrity without the need for substantial external assistance, and much work needs still to be done if that is to be achieved. Following the May elections in Sierra Leone, the UK-led international military advisory and training team will continue to help build the capacity of the Sierra Leonean armed forces and Ministry of Defence over the longer term.

David Taylor: I am pleased to hear that IMATT will continue to operate after the May elections. However, how confident is the Minister that the Sierra Leonean armed forces will indeed be able to maintain security in that country in the period after those elections, which could well prove to be a time of considerable internal conflict?

Mr. Ingram: Our training is successfully transforming the Sierra Leonean armed forces into a more effective, disciplined and accountable fighting force, under a now functioning Ministry of Defence. British short-term training teams provided basic infantry training to some 10,000 men. Such training of all the Sierra Leonean armed forces should make them increasingly capable of protecting the country's security, and they are already deployed throughout the country to that end. In addition, under UNAMSIL, the largest UN mission in the world, some 17,500 troops are deployed throughout the country to keep the peace.

Israel

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on recent developments in Israel and the occupied territories, specifically in relation to Hebron, Bethlehem and Jenin, and to the better news involving a UK contribution to ending the siege of President Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah.

Since the House last debated this subject on 16 April, the situation in Israel and the occupied territories has remained very tense. On Saturday, after four Israelis, including a five-year-old child, were killed in the west bank settlement of Adora, the Israeli defence forces moved into the nearby town of Hebron. There have been reports that at least seven Palestinians have been killed there and 20 injured in the fighting that followed.

At the same time, the stand-off continues at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, where 200 Palestinians, some of them armed, have taken refuge from the Israeli forces for the last three weeks. Three of the Palestinians inside the church compound have been shot dead by Israeli forces, including one last night.

The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury has raised his concerns at the situation with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and myself, as have leaders of many other denominations and faiths. However, talks between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators are under way in an attempt to resolve the situation. Nine Palestinians have already left the church compound. I understand that several dozen more Palestinian civilians may shortly leave, and that there will be deliveries of food to those who remain inside.

During the debate on 16 April, many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House expressed their concerns at reports alleging that the Israeli military had used disproportionate force during its action in the refugee camp at Jenin, which began on 3 April. At our instigation, the United Nations Security Council on 19 April agreed resolution 1405, which welcomed the initiative of the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, to send a fact-finding team to Jenin to establish what had happened.

Following that resolution, the Secretary-General appointed a team led by Martti Ahtisaari, the former President of Finland, and including Sadako Ogata, the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees; Cornelio Sommaruga, the former president of the International Committee of the Red Cross; Bill Nash, a retired American major-general; and Peter Fitzgerald, a senior Irish police officer. At General Nash's request, Lieutenant-Colonel Miles Wade, a serving officer in the British Army, has been added to the team.

However, I am sure that I speak for the whole House in expressing my serious concern that, 10 days after Israel first agreed to that fact-finding mission, it has yet to be admitted to Jenin. During the meeting of the Israeli Cabinet yesterday, further objections were raised to the arrangements for the team's visit. Let me repeat what I said last night to Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres: Israel must co-operate without delay with the UN team in order to establish the facts. The Israeli Government have claimed that their action in Jenin was necessary and proportionate. If that is so, they have nothing to fear and much to gain from such a fact-finding mission composed of such distinguished and internationally respected individuals.

Potentially the most positive development over the weekend was the acceptance in principle by Israel and the Palestinian Authority of a US-UK initiative to allow the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, to leave his compound in Ramallah, which has been under siege continuously since 29 March. Under the terms of that initiative, Israeli forces would pull back from President Arafat's compound, and from Ramallah itself, and leave him free to travel both within the occupied territories and elsewhere, and free to return.

At the same time, six Palestinian men would be removed from the compound to a Palestinian facility in a secluded location in the occupied territories. Of these six, four have been convicted by the Palestinian Authority for involvement in the murder last October of Israeli Cabinet Minister Rehavam Zeevi. One is secretary general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the group that claimed responsibility for Minister Zeevi's killing, and one is being detained because of alleged involvement in the Karine A arms shipment in January.

Under this initiative, Britain and the United States have agreed to provide a small number of supervisory wardens to oversee the men's detention. The wardens will be unarmed. Let me make this clear: it is the prime responsibility on the Palestinian Authority to ensure the physical security of the facility and the personal security of the United States and United Kingdom wardens.

A British scoping mission visited the region last month. An advance party of experts from the United Kingdom is due to arrive in the region this afternoon to begin to set the detailed arrangements in place and to satisfy themselves as to the personal safety of the wardens. The United Kingdom wardens all have experience of working in similar capacities with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

The proposal was first put to the Israeli Prime Minister by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in early October last year. I drew it to the attention of the House again in our last debate 13 days ago.

I would like to place on record my appreciation of the work of United States Secretary of State Colin Powell, of others in the Bush Administration and of American and British diplomats in Israel and the occupied territories who have helped to achieve the progress that we have made. However, there is still much work to be done to bring this initiative into effect. I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing the hope that no last-minute hitches occur and that these arrangements can be put in place with all dispatch.

This is a significant step forward, but on its own it is not enough. It is now imperative that the two sides build on this modest measure of agreement, stop the violence and start talking to one another. In a series of resolutions in recent months, the Security Council has laid down clear imperatives on both parties. Both are obliged to move to a meaningful ceasefire and to resume security co-operation. Israel should withdraw from Palestinian-controlled areas and must heed Security Council demands. Once he has been released from the siege, President Arafat will plainly be able to exercise a much enhanced political leadership of the Palestinian Authority. He must take that

opportunity and do all in his power to stop the violence and work for peace. Ministers and officials have been in constant touch with both sides to the conflict to stress the need for a constructive approach.

The Government's commitment to helping restart a peace process is absolute. The same unity of purpose exists throughout the international community, but the hopes and expectations of a generation of Israelis and of Palestinians rest, above all, on the shoulders of two men—Prime Minister Sharon and President Arafat. Now is the time for them to grasp the opportunity that international efforts have created and to demonstrate that they are truly committed to peace.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I welcome today's announcement of the decision to send British and United States monitors to Ramallah to guard the six Palestinian detainees and thus to enable the Israeli siege of Chairman Arafat's headquarters to be lifted. I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for coming to the House so promptly with details of what is involved. It is, as he says, a small but significant step in the essential process of restoring dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and moving gradually back towards acceptance of the Tenet ceasefire plan and the Mitchell proposals for resuming the peace process. I congratulate President Bush and the British Government on their part in building this small but important bridge.

There will be concerns, however, that our involvement should be carefully planned and suitably restrained. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that this small deployment is not the forerunner of any larger peacekeeping or nation-building deployment being planned for the future?

We must all be aware of the importance of today's announcement. It is in the building of such small bridges, rather than in grand gestures, grandstanding conferences or veiled threats, that progress can be made to turn back from the staircase of violence on which the middle east has recently been embarked and, in doing this, to set out once more on the route that can lead to agreement on the establishment of two states west of the Jordan: the state of Israel, secure within acceptable boundaries, and a viable, economically sustainable and independent Palestinian state. This bridge is important. I hope that it will be followed by other steps, not least in Bethlehem.

Today's development in Ramallah must go hand in hand with the continuing and urgent need for Israel to cease the military incursions into the territories. If, however, Israel is to withdraw with confidence that her security from vicious acts of terrorism will not once again be compromised, there must be clear indications that the use of the territories as a base for the preparation, equipping and delivery of terrorist acts will be ended. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that that is primarily a challenge for Chairman Arafat and that, as President Bush has stated, his newly regained freedom of movement must be accompanied by the delivery of a genuine cessation of violence on the Palestinian side? This must now be a test of his leadership.

Many, while doubting Chairman Arafat's desire to deliver a lasting peace and settlement, still see him as I do: as the only effective Palestinian leader with whom real negotiations can be held. He must respond to today's settlement by both condemning and actively thwarting terrorist activities and by showing a real willingness to re-engage on all the elements that were on the table at both Camp David and Taba. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with me, however, that if Mr. Arafat is genuinely to deliver leadership in that regard, he will require assistance in rebuilding the civic structures through which he can operate in terms of law and order? Can the Foreign Secretary indicate what help is likely to be forthcoming to enable him to do so and, at the same time, what precautions will be taken to ensure that any financial aid given is not siphoned off into support for terrorist organisations and plans? In the same context, what conversations has he had with the Israeli Government about the retained Palestinian revenues?

These are delicate but vital matters on which both sides need clear assurances if the confidence to move back towards the talks table is to be established. In that context, can the Foreign Secretary report on what steps he is taking to persuade other Arab states to support today's initiative? If Mr. Arafat either cannot or will not deliver the cessation of violence and terrorist activity within the territories, what steps is the Foreign Secretary taking to support other initiatives that can produce the same required levels of security?

The positive step forward today in Ramallah is a small ray of light in an otherwise dark and frightening scene. It is only a first step, but it is a well-grounded one. As we know, every journey begins with the first step. This journey is about confidence on both sides, which is hard to build when the truth on which it must rely is too often distorted on all sides. It is therefore vital for both the Palestinians and Israel that truth is established openly and fairly, not least in relation to what happened in Jenin and the reasons for it. I join the Foreign Secretary in urging that the truth be established swiftly through the United Nations, on a fair and acceptable basis.

May I finally and seriously ask the Foreign Secretary to reflect that, on the same day on which the President of the European Commission is in Oxford disparaging the usefulness of Anglo-American relations, the joint efforts of the United Kingdom and the USA have begun to deliver, as they so often have in the past, showing once again the value of that unique relationship?

Today is a better day. It carries a positive step towards peace. We must all wish it well.

Mr. Straw: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments and for welcoming the initiative. It is extremely important for those people from the UK who participate in it to know that they go there with the support of the whole House and all the parties represented in it.

Our involvement is being carefully planned. As I explained, we preceded this stage by an earlier scoping measure and visit, which was obviously contingent on agreement. I should also say, as I said in my statement, that it is possible that there will be last-minute hitches, although we hope not—such is the nature of events in the middle east. All of us are working with the United States to ensure that those do not arise.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me whether this is a forerunner of any larger deployment. It is not, in itself. He asked whether any deployments are currently actively planned, and the answer is no. However, as I made clear in my speech to the House on 16 April, if and when peace develops in any greater depth, in our judgment, there will be a greater role for such people and perhaps, down the

[Mr. Straw]

track, for an international force, and none of us should rule that out. As I explained to the House on 16 April, our policy is very clear: there should be two states, a secure state of Israel and a viable state of Palestine, consistent with the clear decisions of a sequence of United Nations Security Council resolutions, the most important recent one of which is 1397.

I accept what the right hon. Gentleman says about the importance of Israel ceasing its incursions into the occupied territories. I accept also what he says about the responsibility that now rests on the shoulders of President Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. That is why I made the point that as soon as he is released from his siege, he will in practice be able to exercise a much higher degree of leadership and authority over the Palestinians and the Authority, and it is incumbent on him to do so in a responsible way.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me whether there are plans afoot to provide further assistance for rebuilding the facilities of the Palestinian Authority and, indeed, those on the west bank as a whole. The answer is yes, and there have been very detailed discussions with colleague Ministers in the European Union. This time last week, I was at a two-day meeting in Valencia of what is called EuroMed, an EU-Mediterranean states meeting, which was completely dominated by the middle east crisis. So far as I am aware, EuroMed is the only forum attended by representatives of both the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority, and, after some difficulty, they stayed in the same room for what turned out to be a poignant but very important discussion. I also saw the new Japanese Foreign Minister this morning, and Japanese assistance for rebuilding facilities in the occupied territories was part of our discussion.

We are, however, conscious of the fact that if there is to be, as there will have to be, a rebuilding of the Palestinian Authority's infrastructure—schools, hospitals and so on—it can only be on the basis of undertakings from the Government of Israel that this will not be under threat in the future. It will have to be in the framework of an overall settlement. There will have to be better and more transparent arrangements to ensure that the money paid in is used for the purpose.

I have not seen President Prodi's speech, but I say to the House that we should judge institutions by their actions. Javier Solana, the European Council's high representative on foreign affairs, has been tireless in his work to secure a settlement. The United States Administration would be the first to say that much of what they have done has been in concert and collaboration with Javier Solana, to whom I spoke just before I came to the House to make this statement. The second thing that has to be said about the European Union is that, over many years, it has been by far the largest donor of aid to the Palestinian Authority, and it stands ready to act in that constructive way as soon as it can in the future.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): The deployment of British and US personnel to resolve the question of President Arafat is a very welcome development and a tribute not only to my right hon. Friend and the British Government but to those personnel who carry out these incredibly difficult tasks, and we should place that on record. However, I hope that the Foreign Secretary is aware that we should press on the Israelis the importance of bringing an international aspect to the matter, not least because the Israelis, while they occupy the territory of the Palestinians with illegal settlements, might one day have good reason to call on international observers of the type that we are employing at this time. I hope that my right hon. Friend will make sure that the Israelis never forget that.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. We found it difficult, and quite painful, when it was first suggested that outside intervention might help us to resolve the situation in Northern Ireland, but in the event it turned out to be a very sensible move.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): There is nothing in the Foreign Secretary's statement with which I take issue. I offer him my support and, indeed, congratulations on the ingenious initiative to free President Arafat from de facto captivity. In addition, it is worth recognising that there will be physical risks for those who will be deployed on that difficult and dangerous task, and we should take every step to ensure that they are minimised.

The Foreign Secretary mentioned the Church of the Nativity, where conditions surely do not bear thinking about, given the duration of the siege. In the name of humanity, is it not now essential to end the incarceration of those inside? Does the Foreign Secretary, like me, feel a sense of irony or perhaps even discomfort, because he and I and others in the House have asserted, by reference to UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, Israel's unqualified right to live within secure boundaries, but Israel persists in its defiance of the United Nations and its Secretary-General on the necessary inquiry into events in Jenin? Finally, what is the Foreign Secretary's response to those who allege that Israel's operations in the occupied territories will have the effect of dismantling the Palestinian Authority and emasculating Yasser Arafat, consequently leaving a vacuum, which will severely undermine the possibility of creating a viable Palestinian state?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's welcome for the initiative; as I said, please God that we can deal with the final details and it can go ahead. I am in no doubt that resolving the issue of the continued detention of the six suspects in a way that satisfies Israel's legitimate anxieties about the manner in which the Palestinian Authority in the past have or have not detained such individuals is important. We need to recognise that the Palestinian Authority have been open to entirely justified criticism that too often in the past they have picked people up, detained them for a period, then the revolving door has got going, and they have let them out the back, which is unacceptable behaviour. We are seeking to resolve the issue without absolving the Palestinian Authority of its principal responsibility of ensuring the security of those who are detained and those doing the detaining.

As for the physical risks, of course one understands that monitors could face a risk, which is why a further mission is going out today, arriving shortly, and why every effort will be made to minimise the risks. It is worth repeating that all the individuals in our team have police, prison or military backgrounds, although they are not serving

officers and have, as I said, previously worked for the OSCE. In the Church of the Nativity, conditions are dreadful and negotiations must continue. As for the question of dismantling the Palestinian Authority, at the meeting last Monday and Tuesday in Valencia, we were given a lot of detail and tables by Nabil Shaath, the foreign affairs representative of the Palestinian Authority, about what he claimed was the gratuitous destruction of Palestinian Authority facilities, which is obviously of concern, especially if and where they serve no military purpose whatsoever. It just adds to the challenge facing the Palestinian Authority to rebuild that infrastructure as quickly as possible.

As for President Arafat, if under the arrangement he is released and can travel, whatever has happened until now—we must not forget the increasing terror suffered in Israel in recent months and the assassinations—and in the past, he has a heavy responsibility to act for peace once he has his new freedom.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): With regard to the potential lifting of the blockade on Yasser Arafat, does my right hon. Friend accept that it is distinctly unimpressive that it has taken six months' work by the British Government, together with the wheedling of the United States President and the British Prime Minister, to persuade the Israeli Government to do what they should have been made to do weeks ago, and as they continue rampaging through the Palestinian territories?

Will my right hon. Friend understand further that throughout the Arab world and the Muslim world, and much more widely, it will be seen as double standards that we threaten military action against Iraq because it will not allow United Nations arms inspectors in, as they should be allowed in, while we allow the Israelis to get away with dodging UN resolution 1405, which provides that a fact-finding mission should be admitted? The more that the Israelis continue postponing the implementation of the resolution, the more others will take the view that that is because they have something to cover up. If the Israelis do not get on with allowing the mission in immediately, it will be time to impose sanctions and an arms ban on them.

Mr. Straw: It was always our view that Chairman Arafat should not have been incarcerated at the facility in Ramallah or anywhere else. We made that increasingly clear over many weeks. Indeed, we were pressing the Israelis—unsuccessfully as it turned out—to release President Arafat from his detention in Ramallah so that he could attend the Arab League summit in Beirut a few weeks ago.

I am fully aware of the concern in the Arab world and the wider Muslim community about what has happened in the occupied territories. As it happens—this is not the moment for a lengthy debate about these matters—I do not believe that there is a parallel between the position of Iraq and its flagrant violation of nine separate Security Council resolutions and the fact that all the Security Council resolutions relating to Israel and the occupied territories impose obligations on both sides in Israel and the occupied territories. It is fair to say that neither side has implemented these obligations with sufficient alacrity or assiduity in the past.

There has been a serious obligation on the Palestinian Authority and on Palestinians not to engage in terrorism, and we must bear that in mind.

I understand entirely what my right hon. Friend says about Jenin. It is a point that I have made repeatedly to Israeli Ministers. If, as they say, the action in Jenin was proportionate and justified, the quicker an international inquiry of the standing of that appointed by Kofi Annan gets in there, the better it will be for Israel itself.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Has President Arafat given a clear and unambiguous statement that he deplores the activity of suicide bombers and believes that those who organise them should be brought to justice? In a complex and difficult situation, does the Foreign Secretary think that such a statement, highly publicised, would be a major contribution to bringing about a peaceful settlement?

Mr. Straw: The answer is yes to both questions, but it is important that President Arafat speaks not only in English, in which he is very competent, but also in Arabic to his own people. That is an important element in him exercising leadership.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): As chairman of the Britain-Palestine group, may I thank my right hon. Friend and his team for all the efforts that they are making at this difficult time?

From the Palestinian point of view, it must be difficult for Palestinians and their sympathisers now to believe that Israel is serious about establishing a Palestinian state. In my opinion, it is up to the Israelis to make a bold gesture—for example, at the least to stop building the 32 settlements that have been started since Ariel Sharon came to power. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that should be done to bring back confidence to the Palestinians?

Mr. Straw: While I accept what my hon. Friend says, there is not one view in Israel about the nature of any final settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The UN is clear about what needs to be done, which is that we have a secure state of Israel and a viable state of Palestine, and that there is also a solution to the problems of refugees and the siting of capitals in Jerusalem, and the settlements of Israeli residents in the occupied territories.

We have always been clear that the physical settlements must be ended quickly. There cannot be a lasting solution to the problem of Palestine until that happens.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The Foreign Secretary has been forthright, and rightly so, about what he expects from President Arafat. Will he be equally forthright about what he expects from Mr. Sharon; and will he tell Mr. Sharon that if he expects a newly released President Arafat to behave as a responsible leader, it is essential that the siege of the Church of the Nativity be lifted and that the international team, which is about as respectable an international team as has ever been assembled, be allowed in immediately?

Mr. Straw: The answer to the hon. Gentleman is yes.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would it not be useful to recognise that that should be the first step in international intervention to try and end the long, bloody conflict which has taken the lives of so many innocent

[David Winnick]

people, including children, in the past two years? Although we should criticise Israel, and Israel should recognise the depth of criticism—which is by no means anti-Semitic, and it is nonsense for Sharon to describe it as such—is it not also necessary for the Palestinians to accept that suicide bombings and public lynchings do nothing to further the Palestinian cause? Those messages to both the Israelis and the Palestinians should be clear and sharp, and there should be no illusions on the part of the Israeli and Palestinian leadership about our feelings on the matter.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the balanced way in which he expressed that. It is not possible to understand the depth of the hatred of Israel in the occupied territories without understanding the fact of occupation and the way the Palestinians have been treated; nor is it possible to understand the depth of fear and, in many cases, hatred in the state of Israel without understanding the way in which the increasing crescendo of suicide bombings going off indiscriminately and without warning has terrorised that country.

As for public lynchings, that is no justice in any territory or any country, and it damages the reputation of the Palestinians. We must look forward, and rather than trying to allocate blame, which in my judgment is an impossible and hopeless task in a desperate situation, recognise that people have been profoundly damaged on both sides. They need our moral, practical and physical support. We are proposing small but significant steps—in the hope that by going forward rather than backwards, we may in the end secure some peace.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I wholeheartedly support everything that the Foreign Secretary said in his statement this afternoon, particularly in respect of sending experienced British monitors to the region and an international inquiry into what happened in Jenin. Is it not worth while pausing for a moment and reminding ourselves that Israel is one of the few complete parliamentary democracies in the middle east? If, therefore, we are to win over Israeli opinion so that there is a withdrawal from the occupied territories, it is essential that there be an end to terrorism, suicide bombings and the lynching of so-called collaborators. If that does not happen, the situation will go from bad to worse.

Mr. Straw: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. I also say that, in any conflict, one side has a significant responsibility to the other side to take account of the way in which its own political processes operate.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): If the Sharon regime continues to act in flagrant defiance of the United Nations, international law and fundamental human rights, will Her Majesty's Government consult our American and European allies about the possibility of putting economic pressure on Israel?

Mr. Straw: I object to the failure by all sides fully to implement United Nations Security Council resolutions as quickly and assiduously as possible. I say to my hon. Friend, however, that it is important that we use words in a particular context. "Regime" is generally applied to countries that are undemocratic. Whatever else one says about the Israeli Government and Parliament, they cannot be criticised for not being democratic. They are democratic. Some of us, were we writing the Israeli constitution—I speak entirely personally—might come up with a slightly different voting system, but that is another matter.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: D'Hondt?

Mr. Straw: I do not want to go into that now. I mention it in passing and as an entirely parenthetical remark.

My hon. Friend spoke about economic sanctions. The economies of Israel and the occupied territories have already been very severely damaged by the conflict. Nabil Shaath, the foreign affairs representative of the Palestinian Authority, told the gathering in Valencia last week that what had been a $4 billion economy was now reduced to a $2 billion economy, and Israel's has also suffered. In that context, the argument that making the suffering worse on both sides will somehow advance a settlement is not one that I find especially convincing.

Angus Robertson (Moray): The Foreign Secretary urged other parties to give their support. I am pleased to speak on behalf of the major opposition parties in Scotland and Wales in giving the full support of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru for the diplomatic initiative. I share the concern felt by many hon. Members on both sides of the House about the continuing lack of access of the United Nations to investigate circumstances in Jenin. Are the UK Government expressly ruling out the possibility of economic and military sanctions? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he agrees with Labour, Liberal Democrat, SNP and Plaid Cymru Members of the European Parliament, who have voted in favour of suspending the EU-Israel association agreement as a first step toward trying to bring the Israelis to a decision to allow UN access?

Mr. Straw: I understand what the European Parliament has done, but it is not a decision-making body; it expresses points of view. *[Interruption.]* That is true; I am not seeking to make a point, but explaining the way in which its constitution operates. If I had accepted its agenda, I would have brought it before the House. The honest truth is that, with a bit of luck, we are engaged in the beginnings of a negotiation. In those circumstances, difficult and delicate though the process is, we should give it some time to operate rather than apply measures whose purpose, apart from an expression of anger, which will not get us very far, I have yet fully to comprehend.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): Many, especially in this country, who wish to see a Palestinian state as well as an Israeli one, feel very frustrated that while we put an onus on Yasser Arafat to deliver, we do not place quite the same onus on Israel to do so. As I have understood the successive international agreements, they have required an end to the making of settlements and negotiations about reducing their number. More significantly, it is now very important for Israel to recognise that it must agree in the next few hours to the entry of a United Nations team. The longer it leaves the issue, the more suspicious people will become. May I also

ask my right hon. Friend where we will go from here if Israel does not agree? Should we consider the question of sanctions?

Mr. Straw: The Jenin inquiry was set up with the agreement of the Government of Israel. The formal position is that it was set up by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, and it was welcomed by the Security Council. I still hope that Israel will acknowledge and respond to the international pressure, not least from the United Kingdom and the United States, to which it has been subjected, and will admit the fact-finding inquiry. I spoke with Shimon Peres last night, and it is fair to point out on behalf of the Israeli Government that they are anxious not about the possibility of any fact-finding mission, but about its nature and how far its inquiries will deal with the discipline of individual soldiers. I think that we understand that.

As to sanctions, we can if we wish get into the blame game, in which case many people on both sides might choose to drag up what happened at Camp David and at Taba and try to allocate blame to the Palestinian side as much as to the Israeli side. I am far from convinced that that would produce anything but further difficulty for both sides. It is important instead to accept that the current situation is desperate and to take small steps such as this—which has taken a huge amount of work by British and American diplomats, especially by Secretary of State Colin Powell—to try to achieve some easing of tensions, then to get a peace process on the road.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I welcome the progress announced by the Foreign Secretary. Does he accept that one of the imbalances involved in the problem is that when Israel behaves badly, as it does from time to time, everybody knows who is responsible, but when Palestinian terrorism occurs there is much greater uncertainty? In that context, will he tell the House whether he believes that there is a direct link between the Palestinian suicide bombers, the Al Aqsa martyrs brigade, the Fatah organisation and Yasser Arafat himself?

Mr. Straw: It is true that because Israel is a nation state, a member of the United Nations and a democracy, it is expected to observe higher standards than any group of terrorists. That point was made by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) in his speech on 16 April and it has been widely endorsed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. We had to recognise that fact in respect of Northern Ireland too. Of course, democratic nation states that subscribe to the charter of the United Nations have to accept higher standards of behaviour than groups of terrorists. On the other hand, that does not mean—I would be the last person to suggest this—that we should indulge the terrorists or ignore their funding. It was I who, as Home Secretary, introduced the Terrorism Act 2000, which banned Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorist organisations in this country.

I cannot comment with certainty on precise connections between the different organisations and the suicide bombers. However, I can say that there must be a determination by everybody in authority in the occupied territories—above all, but far from exclusively, President Arafat—to clamp down on terrorist activity in Israel and those territories.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): It is now more than two weeks since I came back from Jenin, and I consider it an absolute outrage that the United Nations has been frustrated in its efforts to send a team to the area. It is disgraceful that people think that they can behave as though they were in a pick-and-mix shop, picking sweets as they like, and we have had enough of it.

When I came back from Jenin, I was very careful about what I said because I wanted to keep a sense of proportion, but now I would say that on the day we were in Jenin for eight hours many of us heard witness statements. We heard about people coming out of their houses in the refugee camp with their hands above their heads and being shot dead. We heard about people being injured and lying there to die without any help. While we were there, the humanitarian teams were denied access. I am therefore not surprised that Israel does not want people there to find out the truth. Those of us who heard some of the truth will be pleased to place it on the record at some time in the future if the team does not get in.

This is a test of the credibility of the United Nations and of the position of Kofi Annan. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). We take sanctions against other countries that defy UN resolutions; we should also take sanctions against Israel, which has perpetually defied UN resolutions.

Mr. Straw: I not only understand but share my hon. Friend's frustration about the Government of Israel's failure so far to make satisfactory arrangements to admit Kofi Annan's inquiry team. Following her visit to Jenin and the debate in the House on 16 April, I determined that the United Kingdom Government should take the initiative to get such an inquiry established. I was glad that we did that and that we gained support in the Security Council. My frustration therefore relates not only to my office but is personal.

My hon. Friend is right to talk about the credibility of the United Nations. It is important that Israel recognise that point and that its reputation is damaged as long as it refuses to admit the inquiry. Under its terms of reference, it is only a fact-finding inquiry. The people in the team have been carefully chosen for their experience, record of distinguished international service and, I believe, ability. For example, the former president of the International Committee of the Red Cross is a member. The membership of the team is balanced between the two sides.

Whether or not the inquiry team is admitted, I hope that my hon. Friend produces and submits her witness statements.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): In respect of United Nations resolutions and Israel, are there any consequences for not complying? The Foreign Secretary argued that we should not apply sanctions to democratic countries. One could argue that it is more legitimate to apply sanctions to such countries because sanctions hurt many people apart from the Government.

[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]

We applied sanctions against South Africa, which had democracy for some of its citizens. In Israel and the country occupied by it, not all citizens are entitled to vote. And not all citizens who are entitled but not allowed to live in Israel can vote.

Mr. Straw: I understand that my hon. Friend feels strongly about the matter. He asks about United Nations Security Council resolutions that have not been accepted or followed in full by Israel. Elements of such resolutions have not been followed in full by Arab states that are expected to recognise the state of Israel. Of course, they have not been followed by those behind the terrorist activities. We should bear in mind the imperative of United Nations Security Council resolution 1373 against terrorism.

If my hon. Friend had listened to my comments, he would realise that I talked about Israel being a democratic state in the context not of sanctions but of having to accept a higher standard of behaviour than any terrorist organisation.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): May I recount to my right hon. Friend a story that was e-mailed to me last week by my constituent, Isabelle Bennett-Humphries, who works for a human rights organisation in Palestine? Last week, she spoke to an elderly woman in Jenin who described soldiers coming to bulldoze her house. She told them that she had a disabled son in the house and asked them whether they would wait for a couple of minutes while she got him outside. They refused and held her back. She had to listen to her son's screams as he was killed by falling masonry. Does not my right hon. Friend believe that, with such stories coming out of Jenin, it is in the interests of Israelis and Palestinians to get to the bottom of the matter as soon as possible?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend makes the case for a proper fact-finding mission to go in without delay more eloquently than I ever could.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that the essential answer to the questions that many hon. Members have asked is that clear evidence exists that atrocities in Jenin and possibly elsewhere were committed, not only by individual soldiers, groups or operations, but by the state? That very state obstructs the inquiry that the United Nations requires. If that state continues to obstruct these inquiries, will my right hon. Friend give a clear, distinct and short answer to the question raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)? If Israel continues to obstruct this inquiry, what are we going to do about it?

Mr. Straw: The fact that there have been allegations of very serious misbehaviour by soldiers and others in Jenin makes the case for the inquiry. My hon. and learned Friend asks what we are going to do about it. We are but one member of the United Nations Security Council, which has to agree unanimously at the level of the permanent members before further action can be taken. We have been vigorous in pursuing the case for an inquiry and, as I have said, it was as a result of concern expressed in the House and of the visit by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) that we were able to get the inquiry. I hope that the Government of Israel will, even at this stage, acknowledge the need for this inquiry to take place without delay under the arrangements set by Kofi Annan. If they do not, the short answer is that we and the international community will have to consider very carefully what further action may be taken.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does my right hon. Friend understand the frustration of people at hearing that we "will have to consider" what further action may be taken, when Israel is using the full panoply of its military might against civilians, including women and children, day after day—while we sit saying, "We will have to consider this"? Will he take the lead in the UN to ensure that Israel, as a democracy, respects the human rights of the Palestinian people, which it is demonstrably failing to do every day at the moment?

Mr. Straw: Of course I understand my hon. Friend's frustration. Most of the time, I share it. I must also say, however, that we have to work in the world that exists, not in the world that we wish to invent. The world that exists is a world in which there are five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—my hon. Friend knows which they are—and we have to work in concert with them if we are to achieve the enforcement of international law and of UN Security Council resolutions. I understand her frustration, and I understand the attraction to people of venting their anger and frustration about this situation.

I happen to know, however, that had it not been for some painstaking work by British and American diplomats—with the full support of and great activity by American Secretary of State Colin Powell, and with my active support—we would not be where we are today, with a little bit of luck, with a solution to a long-standing problem. The six detained people may now be moved to a secure facility elsewhere, and President Arafat will be released to restart his activity in effective and constructive politics inside the occupied territories and elsewhere. That seems to be the kind of positive contribution that the House expects of the British Government, and which it sought in the debate 13 days ago.

Points of Order

4.23 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I raise a delicate matter of jurisdiction as between the Westminster Parliament and the Scottish Parliament, on which I would ask you to reflect, and which I have outlined to your advisers? On the Easter Adjournment, I asked in relation to Lockerbie:

"Now that the appeal is over, what steps are being taken to preserve the productions amassed by the Crown for use in the Lockerbie trial? Can an assurance be given that they will not be destroyed in the same way as certain police note books have apparently been destroyed?"

I must tell the House candidly that I am not a lawyer. It was suggested to me, however, by the professor of Scottish law at the university of Edinburgh, Robert Black QC, that I should ask this well sculpted question, which he and other lawyers regard as of considerable importance.

At the end of the debate, the Parliamentary Secretary replied:

"My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the Father of the House, referred to Lockerbie, as he has done on several occasions in the House, and sought careful reflection from the Government. I certainly take note of his concerns and his long-standing involvement in seeking to get to the truth of that dreadful episode. He will not be surprised to hear that the only response I am able to give him today is to say that he has had the opportunity to ventilate that issue. He will be aware that most of the issues that he mentioned are devolved; they are matters for the Scottish Executive. I will ensure that the Lord Advocate is made aware of the points that my hon. Friend has made and seek an answer from him."—[*Official Report*, 26 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 724-93.]

What is not devolved is the United Nations report on the appeal proceedings at the Scottish court in the Netherlands in the case of Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed Al Megrahi *v.* Her Majesty's advocate by Professor Hans Koechler, international observer of the International Progress Organisation nominated by the United Nations Secretary-General on the basis of Security Council resolution 1192.

On Thursday, I saw Dr. Koechler for four and a half hours to discuss his submissions to the UN. Various avenues of appeal through the UN and the Court of Human Rights, not to mention the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission, are possibilities. Dr. Koechler said that it is vital that the productions be preserved for further proceedings at inquiry.

On Friday morning, we learned from the press that the productions are to be collected by 47 families and sent by post to another 41, and that other material is to be destroyed. Without going into the matter, that has horrified the officially appointed solicitor, Mr. Eddie McKechnie, with whose approval I raise this point of order. Given the UK interest in the need for a public inquiry into the international aspects of Lockerbie, does the House have a locus in commenting on whether the productions at Zeist should be dispersed or destroyed? Such hurried dispersal or destruction at this time would suggest that there is something to hide. I therefore look forward to a ruling at your convenience.

Mr. Speaker: The Father of the House has raised a lengthy point of order. He will understand that I must think about the matters that he has raised.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any indication from Ministers of their intention to come to the House to make a statement on Thursday night's breakdown of the 999 emergency service covering the Isle of Wight, Hampshire and parts of Wiltshire; the widespread failure of the telephone system on part of the island and in Southampton and surrounding suburbs; the apparent breakdown of BT's back-up systems; and the appearance of television announcements saying, "If you want to call the emergency services, please go to a police station."?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no approach from any Minister regarding the matter that the hon. Gentleman raises, but it is now on the record and I hope that the appropriate Minister will look into his deep concern.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Three days ago in the town of Kalamata in southern Greece, 12 British citizens were found guilty of various charges associated with the innocuous activity of plane spotting. Six received one-year sentences and six, including my constituent, Garry Fagan of Kegworth in North-West Leicestershire, received three-year sentences. Have you received any request from the Foreign Secretary to make a statement on what the Government intend to do to assist those 12 citizens in their hour of peril, in relation to charges that would have been dismissed out of hand in any other country, especially one as closely allied to us as Greece is in NATO and the EU? Has any such approach been made?

Mr. Speaker: No such approach has been made to me.

Orders of the Day

Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill *[Lords]*

[Relevant documents: The Eighth Report from the Joint Committee on Human Rights of Session 2001–02 on the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill, HC 474, and the Government's response thereto, included in the Committee's Fourteenth Report, HC 674.]

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State, I must tell the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Government came to office with a commitment to ban tobacco advertising. Today we are able to honour that commitment. The Bill will ban both tobacco advertising and tobacco sponsorship. It will do so to reduce health inequalities, to protect public health and, most important of all, to safeguard children from the dangers of smoking.

This is a policy for which we have fought over the past five years, first in the European Union, then in the European courts and then in the British courts. At all stages this measure has been resisted by the tobacco industry; nor has it been helped by the attitude of the Opposition. In the last Parliament, we also introduced a Bill to ban tobacco advertising. It completed all its stages in this House, and was introduced in the other place before the last general election. Had it not been for the Opposition's refusal to agree to its passage, that Bill would by now have become law.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I should be grateful if the Secretary of State would make a distinction between the Conservative Opposition, sometimes called the official Opposition, and the Liberal Democrat Opposition, who have constructively supported the measure. I mean that as a helpful comment.

Mr. Milburn: That would make a change. It is sometimes difficult to tell the difference, but in this case I am able to differentiate.

After the election the self-same Bill was reintroduced in the other place by Lord Clement-Jones, to whom I pay tribute for his skill in taking the Bill through that House. I believe that it benefited from the scrutiny it received on both sides there, but, with the addition of one or two helpful amendments that were made during its passage, the Bill before us today is the same as it was when Parliament was dissolved before the last election. I am pleased that we have been able to find Government time for it to conclude all its remaining stages, and I look forward to its successful passage.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I do not deny the contribution made by Lord Clement-Jones, but will the Secretary of State also acknowledge that of Nicola Sturgeon, an MSP who took a similar Bill through the Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Milburn: I am sure that they and others have played their part in ensuring that we secure what we all want—an improvement in public health for all people in our country.

This Bill forms a core part of our strategy to reduce smoking and so improve health. Smoking is the single biggest cause of early death in our country. As Sir George Alberti, president of the Royal College of Physicians, said in the college's report "Nicotine Addiction in Britain",

"the humble cigarette is responsible for a dozen times more deaths in the UK in the past 40 years than British casualties from world war two—over 5 million."

Every year, smoking kills 120,000 people. It causes one in five deaths in Britain. It causes 85 per cent. of lung cancer deaths. It causes cancer of the mouth, larynx, oesophagus, bladder, kidneys, stomach and pancreas. It causes one in seven deaths from heart disease. Smoking is also one of the principal causes of health inequalities in our country. In pregnancy it contributes to low birth weight among babies, itself one of the principal causes of higher rates of infant mortality. Quite simply, it is a public health disaster, and we are determined to tackle it.

Our 1998 White Paper "Smoking Kills", published by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), was the first comprehensive programme of action produced by any Government to prevent and reduce deaths from smoking. That programme has helped us to secure a reduction in smoking prevalence. Among adults, tobacco consumption had been falling consistently until 1994. It rose in 1996, but I am pleased to say that, according to figures obtained from the general household surveys undertaken in both 1998 and 2000, it has now fallen again. Perhaps even more significantly, smoking among manual groups, where tobacco consumption is highest, has also fallen, after rising between 1992 and 1996. Because the fall among manual groups has been faster than that in society as a whole, it is helping to tackle health inequalities in our country.

That progress reflects the approach we have been taking in recent years to tackle the problem of smoking. First, we have taken fiscal and other measures. We have increased tobacco duties, because there is a clear link between price and consumption levels. We have also taken measures to crack down on the real problem of illegal smuggling of cigarettes and other tobacco products into the UK. More than £200 million is being spent by the Government on tackling that illegal trade, which poses such a health hazard to our country. Again, that effort is beginning to pay dividends, with Customs successfully seizing almost 3 billion cigarettes in 2000–01 alone—1 billion more than in the previous year.

Secondly, we have launched a major public education campaign, including television advertising and an NHS smoking helpline, which so far has taken 400,000 calls. In my view, people have a right to choose to smoke. If that is what they want to do, they have a right to do it, but they also have a right to know the implications of their decision for themselves and, more importantly, for others.

Thirdly, alongside information to encourage people to give up, we are providing more help for smokers who say that they want to give up. It is worth bearing in mind that

all the surveys say that seven in 10 people who smoke say that they want to quit the habit. We are giving them more help to do so than they have ever had. Today, the NHS has the most comprehensive smoking cessation services anywhere in the world. Both Zyban and nicotine replacement therapy are available on prescription. There are specialist counselling services to help those who find it hardest to quit, especially in the poorest areas. Those resources are producing results.

In the first six months of the last financial year, over 50,000 people had quit smoking with help from those services. Smoking among pregnant women is falling. We will be looking to expand those services still further in the years to come.

The next step in that comprehensive programme of action on smoking is to end tobacco sponsorship and advertising. Some have said that the Bill is anti-smoker and anti-choice. In my view, it is a tough but I hope proportionate response to the marketing and promotion of the only legally available product that is guaranteed to kill one in two of its regular, long-term users. It will help reduce tobacco consumption.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): As the Secretary of State knows, I have a long-standing interest in sport. He will also know that many of those who are struggling to ensure the continued development of sport, particularly minority sports, are concerned about the loss of revenue from sponsorship. There is obviously a trade-off between the health risks of tobacco and the benefits for sport from financial support. Will the Government indicate what kind of assessment they have done of the dangers of sport losing revenue, with consequent health risks?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. As he is aware, throughout discussions about this Bill and about other action, whether it be in Europe, the UK or, I hope, internationally in due course through the World Health Organisation, it has been important to get the balance right between taking forward an important public health measure—banning tobacco advertising and sponsorship—and ensuring that the effects on certain sports are not over-discriminatory. I want to come to that point later.

The Bill will ban overt advertising on billboards, posters and in the press. It will end, with only limited exceptions, advertising in shops. Only advertising at the point of sale will be allowed. Direct marketing, too, will cease, stopping the tobacco industry bombarding people with promotional material, so undermining their attempts to give up. However, the Bill will not prevent members of the general public, journalists, writers and others from talking about tobacco products, representing them on stage or film, or commenting in the press about smoking and tobacco.

Tobacco sponsorship of sports and other events will end under the Bill. Tobacco companies will no longer be able to exploit sports and public events to glamorise their products and to get their logos emblazoned across our TV screens. It is important that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House understand why. According to the Cancer Research Campaign, the impact of such sports sponsorship should not be underestimated. It says that boys are twice as likely to become regular smokers if they are motor racing fans and that

"this is damning evidence that tobacco sponsorship encourages young boys to take up smoking".

Tobacco companies will of course be free to make donations to sporting or indeed artistic events, provided that they do not promote tobacco. We have always said that we do not want the ban on tobacco advertising to harm sports. Our intention remains to implement the policy and the timetable on sponsorship agreed with our European partners in 1998. Subject to consultation, UK sports and events will have until July 2003 at the latest to find alternative sponsorship. Global sporting events will have until October 2006 at the latest to do the same, with two important caveats: that they do not sign new contracts with tobacco companies; and that they phase out the current sponsorship that they receive. It is my intention to publish draft regulations for consultation on sponsorship during the passage of the Bill.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Where has the Secretary of State found the voluntary agreement to be defective, and what measures has he taken, through consultation with tobacco manufacturers, to tighten it, if he thinks that desirable?

Mr. Milburn: If the hon. Gentleman is talking about the fault lines in the voluntary agreement on tobacco sponsorship of sporting events, those are plain for all to see. He is well aware of certain events—some have been on our television screens over recent days—at which tobacco logos are emblazoned for all to see. That clearly has an impact on tobacco consumption levels. If he is talking about the voluntary code on tobacco advertising more generally, again that measure has not been particularly effective.

The clearest fault line is in relation to tobacco advertising in areas where children live, work, play and go to school. As I understand it, the tobacco companies say that they are happy to prohibit enormous billboards advertising their products within 100 m of a school. That is great, but the kids do not live, play, shop or enjoy their leisure opportunities within 100 m of the school. The evidence is crystal clear, I believe, that that has an impact on tobacco consumption among the children and teenagers who are the future generation of smokers. The voluntary code has not been successful and that is why it is important to enact this legislation.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Is not this legislation the culmination of measures introduced during the Thatcher Administration, when she chose to ban tobacco advertising on radio and television because of the clear link between advertising and not only buying particular brands, but taking up smoking in the first place? Surely what is right for Margaret Thatcher should be right for this House.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman made one good point and then, if I may say so, one less good one. It is pretty difficult to substantiate the case for the continuity between this legislation and what went before, not least because, as he must be painfully aware, when his party was in office it resisted precisely this sort of measure. However, he was right to point to the clear link between

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tobacco advertising and tobacco consumption. Why on earth do right hon. and hon. Members think that tobacco companies bother to spend £100 million a year on advertising? Clearly it is not out of the goodness of their hearts.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South) *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: The story from the industry has always been that mass advertising has nothing to do with increasing consumption, and still less with persuading children or young teenagers to start smoking. The industry claims that it is only about maintaining brand loyalty. Of course, until relatively recently, it is precisely those companies that were denying that there was any link whatever between cigarette consumption and cancer. Indeed, some even promoted the life-enhancing qualities of tobacco consumption. Even today, so many years after the original research was published in this country, some companies still deny that passive smoking is dangerous, while others refuse to publish the additives that they put in their cigarettes. The evidence, however, suggests that tobacco advertising is not neutral in its impact; it is all about recruiting more new smokers. As the former chairman of the board of one advertising company who has had the pleasure of working for the tobacco firms so clearly put it:

"the cigarette industry has been artfully maintaining that cigarette advertising has nothing to do with total sales. This is complete and utter nonsense. I am always amused by the suggestion that advertising—a function that has been shown to increase consumption of virtually every other product—somehow miraculously fails to work for tobacco products."

The facts are obvious enough to most people: every year the tobacco industry in this country has to replace the 120,000 customers who are killed through the consumption of its products. The target market is young smokers—including, sad to say, children. Why? Because fully 83 per cent. of smokers start before they are 20 years old. Today's teenager is tomorrow's regular smoker, and therefore tomorrow's regular consumer. The cigarette brands smoked most by children are also those that are most heavily advertised.

The polite fiction behind the tobacco industry's advertising campaigns has been exposed by recent research: for example, we have learned that in Canada, Imperial Tobacco's marketing plan in the late 1980s explicitly involved targeting what it called "men" aged 12 to 17, and "women" aged 12 to 34. Research has proved that the most commonly remembered brands, even among children as young as 11, are the most heavily advertised.

Further research, published in the *British Medical Journal* in 1993, concluded that Embassy Regal's "Reg" campaign

"held most appeal for teenagers, particularly 14-15 year old smokers".

Research from Manchester university found that

"awareness of the most advertised brands was a strong predictor of smoking . . . children appear to take in the messages of cigarette advertising and interpret them as generic to smoking rather than brand specific."

We should be clear about the fact that tobacco advertising and sponsorship act as a recruiting sergeant for children and young teenagers to start the tobacco habit. Although tobacco consumption by adults has been falling for many years, there was a steady increase among children aged 11 to 15 between 1988 and 1996—precisely when the so-called voluntary ban started. I am pleased to tell the House that that trend has started to reverse in recent years, and that there has been a drop from 13 to 10 per cent. of the age group since 1996. There can be little doubt, however, that tobacco advertising preys on teenagers who are susceptible to its corrosive and often covert portrayal of smoking as somehow glamorous and grown-up.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Milburn: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman once.

The industry's response to the concerns expressed has been at best inadequate and at worst cynical. As I said earlier to the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), the proposal not to site billboards advertising tobacco products within 100 m of schools is practically worthless. It is to safeguard children and generations yet to come that the ban on tobacco advertising and sponsorship is so necessary.

Some have argued that it is unfair to ban the advertising of a legal product. As I said at the outset, I happen to believe that people have a right to choose to smoke, and it can be argued that when consumers start smoking, they are making a choice. However, because nicotine is so enormously addictive—as the Royal College of Physicians and others have testified—it is much harder for smokers to exercise an equivalent freedom of choice to give up.

Tobacco advertising and sponsorship seek to get more people to smoke by conveying the idea that smoking is glamorous, when in fact it is dangerous, and that it enhances the quality of life, when in fact it serves to shorten people's lives.

Given the impact that we all acknowledge smoking has on public health, I believe that we in Government have a responsibility to act. We have a duty to inform, so that if people want to smoke they do so on an informed basis, not on the basis of advertising hype. The Government also owe a duty to the wider community, to help smokers give up and to protect children from ever starting. That is what the Bill seeks to do.

The opponents of the Bill argue that there is insufficient evidence that the ban would reduce tobacco consumption.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Before the Secretary of State moves on to his next point, I want to ask about—*[Interruption.]* I wonder whether the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) could desist from speaking for a moment. My interest has been clearly declared in the Order Paper, Madam Deputy Speaker, and when I can catch your eye I shall explain it fully. However, for the moment I want to ask the Secretary of State a question of a legal nature, concerning the statement on the front page of the Bill about section 19(1) of the Human Rights Act 1998.

Secretaries of State and Ministers often rubber-stamp Bills with the section 19(1) statement, but I should like the Secretary of State to explain his understanding of the articles of the European convention on human rights, which he must have considered, and which he says are

not affected by this legislation. Did he listen to, or read a transcript of a recent edition of the Radio 4 programme "Unreliable Evidence", in which an American supreme court judge said that the Bill would be struck down under United States law, and in which an English High Court—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman could conclude his point.

Mr. Garnier: I would be a little quicker if I were not interrupted. During that programme, an English High Court judge also said, contrary to the 19(1) statement, that it is highly arguable that the Bill does not comply with the convention. I should be grateful for the Secretary of State's views on those points.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. and learned Gentleman may or may not be aware that the Joint Committee on Human Rights reported on the Bill on 19 December. It made several proposals and asked us to provide substantive evidence concerning the Bill's compatibility with the European convention on human rights. We have done so in respect of a number of issues, such as evidence, entitlement to compensation and brand sharing. I am happy to expand if the hon. and learned Gentleman would like me to do so. I know that several concerns have been raised—not least in the other place—about human rights issues, but I am satisfied that the Bill does comply with human rights legislation.

Richard Ottaway: May I return the Secretary of State to the issue of sport sponsorship, on which I tried to intervene? On 15 April, he will have received a letter from the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile, which runs motor sport across the globe. It states that

"the FIA has no objection . . . to . . . a total ban on all tobacco sponsorship in sport with immediate effect."

It points out that, so far as grand prix races in this country are concerned, such advertisements are permitted at only four track-side billboards. The Secretary of State shakes his head, but the letter is from the FIA itself. In the light of it, why is he extending the ban to 2006, and why does the Bill not cover motor racing?

Mr. Milburn: Of course I have seen the letter, not least because it was addressed to me. Believe it or not, I do read my letters.

I believe that those who run Formula 1 are saying that they will happily remove tobacco advertising or tobacco sponsorship from the British grand prix with immediate effect. If that is indeed their plan, nobody will be more delighted than me, and I applaud and encourage them. However, in terms of global sports, we are not talking about specific exemptions for Formula 1. Indeed, as I said earlier, the issue that we have always had in mind is the impact on global sports—which might include Formula 1—that have relied excessively on tobacco sponsorship for many years. In those cases, it seems only reasonable and fair that we should give them an opportunity to wean themselves off the habit of tobacco sponsorship.

As I said, we will consult on regulations. In broad terms, our intention is to follow the formula that we intended to follow before, had the Bill been able to proceed further: a deadline of July 2003 for sports, and of October 2006 for global sports. That is an end-date, however. If we and the sports in question can move more quickly than that, we will do so. As far as the FIA letter is concerned, if that organisation wishes to make the British—or any other—grand prix free from tobacco sponsorship, that is a matter for it. I urge it to do so if it can, and I hope that I do so with the support of the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway).

As for evidence of tobacco advertising leading to increases in consumption, as long ago as 1989, the US surgeon-general concluded that

"the collective empirical, experiential and logical evidence makes it more likely than not that advertising and promotional activities do stimulate cigarette consumption."

Two years later, research found that a 10 per cent. increase in advertising expenditure would lead to a 0.6 per cent. increase in consumption. More recently, in a report entitled "Curbing the Epidemic", the World Bank noted that

"a recent study of 22 high income countries based on data from 1970 to 1992 concluded that comprehensive bans on cigarette advertising and promotion can reduce smoking."

It predicted that a European Union-wide ban on tobacco advertising would reduce tobacco consumption by about 7 per cent across the continent. Further research by American researchers Saffer and Chaloupka, who studied data from 22 countries, concluded starkly that

"tobacco advertising increases tobacco consumption."

The most compelling evidence however comes not from abroad, but from research undertaken in this country. It comes from the research commissioned and published by the Department of Health under—to their credit—the then Conservative Government in 1992–93. In 1992, the chief economic adviser to the Department of Health, Professor Clive Smee, examined evidence from Norway, Finland, Canada and New Zealand—countries in which tobacco advertising had been banned—about the impact on consumption levels. The fact that consumption fell by between 4 per cent. and 9 per cent. in those countries led Smee to conclude:

"in each case the banning of advertising was followed by a fall in smoking on a scale which cannot reasonably be attributed to other factors."

The problem was that having commissioned and published the evidence, the then Government—now the Opposition—did precisely nothing about it. They failed to ban advertising and sponsorship in this country. What is more, they blocked a ban in other European countries, and blocked it consistently between 1989 and 1997. It was not until the election of a new Labour Government that the block was removed.

Even today, I am sad to say, the Opposition in their amendment apparently refuse to back this Bill. The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who speaks for the Opposition on these matters, told *The Times* before the general election—in December 2000, I think—that

"if it comes to a choice between public health and the tobacco industry I think public health would be a priority."

I hoped that in the light of those remarks the Opposition would make the right choice today and put the wider health of the nation before the narrow interests of the tobacco industry. Indeed, my hopes were raised still further when I read the comments of the Conservative spokesman on health in the Scottish Parliament,

[Mr. Milburn]

Mary Scanlon, before the general election. She told the Scottish Parliament's Health and Social Care Committee on 10 January 2001:

"My party also supports the Bill, the fact that it is UK-wide legislation and the ban . . . should the Tories win the next general election, we will pursue the legislation."—[*Scottish Parliament Official Report, Health and Community Care Committee*, 10 January 2001; c. 1347.]

When the hon. Gentleman replies, he might care to tell the House what happened between 2000–01 and 2002, because somehow there has been a change of heart. I do not know whether he was overturned and outvoted in the shadow Cabinet or whether, once again, the interests of the tobacco industry have come before the interests of public health in our country.

The Opposition ask for evidence in favour of a ban on tobacco advertising and sponsorship. The weight of evidence is overwhelming and it points in one direction. Advertising and promotion of tobacco products imposes enormous costs on our health service and does enormous damage to the health of our nation. Its effects are felt most acutely in the poorest parts of our country. We estimate that, in this country alone, a reduction in smoking following an advertising ban such as that proposed in the Bill could save the NHS up to £40 million a year on treating smoking-related disease. More importantly, we estimate that 3,000 lives a year will be saved in the UK in the longer term.

A ban on tobacco advertising is backed not only by a majority of the public but by a phalanx of medical charities and professional organisations, including the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Physicians, the Cancer Research Campaign, Diabetes UK, the National Consumer Council and the Consumers Association.

Overwhelmingly, however, it is the evidence that commands support for the Bill. That evidence comes from the scale of the tobacco industry's advertising, not only in this country but throughout the world. It comes from countries where bans have already served to reduce smoking significantly. It comes also from medicine and science, which have shown the damage done by smoking and nicotine addiction.

The Opposition's amendment asks for evidence. That evidence is all around them, but they choose not to see it. It screams out to them from billboards across the country. Advertising works—smoking kills. Today we can begin to break that link. The Bill will protect children, reduce smoking and so save lives. For those reasons, I believe that it deserves the support of Members on both sides of the House.

5 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"whilst supporting the aim of reducing the number of deaths from smoking, declines to give a Second Reading to the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill *[Lords]* because there is insufficient evidence that its provisions will lead to a quantifiable reduction in tobacco consumption; because it does not allow for a mechanism for testing and reflection upon the assumptions upon which the Bill is based; and because it does nothing to combat the increase in the prevalence of smoking amongst teenagers and other vulnerable groups due to the growth in the importation and sale of illegal tobacco products."

Here we are again, debating this Bill in exactly the same terms as before, in what seems like a political version of "Groundhog Day": we have seen and heard it all before.

The debate is not about whether we think smoking is a bad thing. Certainly, those of us with first-hand experience of dealing with the consequences of smoking can testify all too readily to its evils. As one of the 15 per cent. of people who suffer from asthma, I can happily testify to the perils and torments of passive smoking that so many of us have to endure. I confirm that I have no affection for the tobacco industry and would not be upset were it to cease its trade immediately.

It is worth starting with the points on which we are in agreement, which fall into five categories. First, there are serious risks to health associated with smoking. That is well known and understood by smokers and the public generally, and increasing awareness of the health risks is likely to persuade people not to smoke.

Secondly, it is an objective of public health policy to reduce total tobacco consumption and the prevalence of smoking among the population.

Thirdly, children should not smoke and should not be allowed access to tobacco products.

Fourthly, adults should be free to make an informed choice about whether or not to smoke.

Fifthly, although it is not against the law to manufacture, sell, buy and smoke tobacco products, it is appropriate that the advertising and promotion of tobacco products should be regulated.

Today's debate is about means; there is not a difference between us about ends. The debate needs to occur at two different levels. Not only does the House need to consider the philosophical arguments about the balance between individual liberty and state intervention; it must examine the practical aspects of this measure.

The questions concerning the restrictions of individual freedom are profound. Under what conditions, and with what safeguards, should a tolerant society ban things because the results of informed personal choice are disapproved of by the majority? What alternative means might be available to achieve the same ends? In other words, what is the value in our society of personal liberty and what is the appropriate level of intervention by the state, since the state has been increasing its interference in our lives for some time?

I do not expect the Secretary of State to have read the Macmillan report into how Parliament operates, but it makes interesting reading. It refers to

"the change of outlook of the government of this country in recent times, its growing preoccupation, irrespective of party, with the management of the life of the people".

It also says

"Parliament finds itself increasingly engaged in legislation which has for its conscious aim the regulation of the day-to-day affairs of the community and now intervenes in matters formerly thought to be entirely outside its scope."

It is interesting that that report was commissioned in 1931. It is a long-standing trend in British politics that Governments have been increasingly willing to intervene in the affairs of individuals.

As the Prime Minister—I mean, the Secretary of State—

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Not yet anyway.

Dr. Fox: I am sure that there will be a race before long, and the right hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) could throw his hat in the ring.

As the Secretary of State pointed out, it is not against the law to manufacture or import tobacco products provided that regulatory requirements governing those products are met. It is not illegal to sell tobacco products except to children under 16, and they are sold through more than 200,000 retail outlets and sales points. It is not illegal to buy and smoke tobacco products, and 15 million adults sadly do. The Government earn handsomely through the system.

Irrespective of which party is in government—and irrespective of what we ourselves may think about those freedoms—we have to ask ourselves whether, since the Government not only profit from those freedoms but accept them as legitimate, adults who choose to exercise them should not be able to make informed choices about the range of those legally available products. Where does regulation end and a ban start? How do we differentiate between the two? If the Government do not believe that such freedoms should exist, it would be more honest to restrict the availability and distribution of tobacco rather than merely dealing with advertising.

Michael Fabricant: I accept my hon. Friend's argument on freedom of choice—indeed, I note the increase in the nanny state since the Labour party came into power—but does he share my concern that advertising encourages people to smoke who would not otherwise do so? Does he also acknowledge the fact that it was perhaps the most libertarian of Governments—the Administration in the 1980s—who made the then Independent Broadcasting Authority impose a ban on tobacco advertising for the health of the nation?

Dr. Fox: My hon. Friend makes two important points, and I will deal in moment with the record of the Conservative Government. He raises an essential philosophical question: when should Governments intervene and restrict the freedom of individuals? There are undoubtedly cases in which state intervention is acceptable—for example, to protect the weak and vulnerable from being preyed on. That is the basis of our legal system and the protections that we afford our people. However, there is also a utilitarian argument which says that because there is a large financial cost to society and, therefore, to each individual within it of the choices made by a few, it is acceptable to limit freedoms in certain circumstances. We are asking whether the example of tobacco consumption, sale and advertising comes within that argument.

Some people say that it is not acceptable for the state to interfere with individual choices, which is the libertarian argument. I simply say to them that, on re-reading Hayek's "The Road to Serfdom" recently, I was interested to come across the following paragraph:

"There is nothing in the basic principles of liberalism to make it a stationary creed; there are no hard-and-fast rules fixed once and for all. The fundamental principle that in the ordering of our affairs we should make as much use as possible of the spontaneous forces of society, and resort as little as possible to coercion, is capable of an infinite variety of applications . . . Probably nothing has done so much harm to the liberal cause as the wooden insistence of some liberals on certain rough rules of thumb, above all the principle of laissez-faire."

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman explain exactly which individual liberty is being removed? I am not suggesting that we stop people smoking even though they impinge on my liberty by making me a passive smoker. Are we removing any liberty other than that of a tobacco manufacturer to entice individuals and entrap them into smoking?

Dr. Fox: Were we not imposing restrictions on freedoms, the Bill would not be before us and it would not involve banning, which implies removing something that is currently legal. We have to consider whether there are alternative means. If the Government believe that there are not, we must consider whether safeguards should be built into the Bill to which we can return in light of evidence at a later date.

Dr. Evan Harris: As someone who comes from a party that purports to know something about liberalism, I accept the hon. Gentleman's argument that such legislation restricts liberty. The question is whether that is justified on the basis of harm. We have to strike a balance between the restriction of liberty and the harm that can be prevented. In that context, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the thrust of his argument would carry greater conviction if his party were a little more liberal on things which clearly do no harm, such as the private consenting behaviour of adults in the bedroom, in relation to which his party has a prejudiced view that goes against liberty without requiring any proof of harm being done? That is an important point.

Dr. Fox: One might think that, after all these years, we would have learnt that taking interventions from certain Members of the House does nothing to further the debate. Certainly we have no lessons to take from parties such as the Liberal Democrats, who want to legalise many drugs that would be a lot more carcinogenic and more harmful to people—

Dr. Harris: Such as?

Dr. Fox: Such as cannabis, which is a good deal more carcinogenic than tobacco. Of course, the Liberal Democrats are now famous for selective liberalism, having abandoned the genuine liberal tradition, which I would suggest these days rests more on the Conservative Benches.

Dr. Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: No, I certainly have no intention of giving way to the hon. Gentleman again, in this debate or in any subsequent debate. If I were a rat and such a slow learner, I would probably have been exterminated in some experiment by now.

One of the flaws in the Secretary of State's argument—and I was sorry to hear him make this assertion—was that following the publication of the Smee report in 1992

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the then Conservative Government took no action whatsoever. That is unworthy of the right hon. Gentleman because that Government did take measures. I accept that he thinks that those measures were insufficient, and I accept the legitimacy of that position, but to say that no measures were taken is quite wrong.

In 1980, advertising expenditure on cigarette brand posters was limited to 30 per cent. of the amount spent. As the right hon. Gentleman said, there were restrictions on poster advertising in schools and other educational establishments, and such advertisements were not allowed in publications wholly or largely aimed at young people. There was a ban on tobacco advertising in cinemas and on video cassettes and computer games.

For the Secretary of State to say that no action was taken is demeaning in a debate of this nature. In those years, this country was one of the most successful in the world in reducing smoking prevalence, and we should take pride in that. Between 1971 and 1996, tobacco consumption fell by more than 37 per cent. and prevalence fell by 40 per cent. Policies to reduce advertising were complemented by better public health education and taxation policies that made smoking progressively more expensive and reduced consumption.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I want to return to the essence of the logic behind the hon. Gentleman's reasoned amendment and the point about liberalism. I recall, many years ago, reading a 19th-century philosopher who said, "Your freedom to swing your stick ends where my nose begins." Will the hon. Gentleman expand on the point about how the individual freedom that he describes balances out against the freedom of others to be free from tobacco? He talks about the weak and the vulnerable, but what about protecting children and young people from indulging in smoking?

Dr. Fox: I was frank about the need for a balance, and we accept the restriction of individual freedoms in other areas. The question, which I am going to deal with, is whether this particular ban falls within those parameters. We are a little cavalier in wanting to ban things without thinking sufficiently about all the detailed arguments that we should raise in the House.

To return to the point that I was making, the Conservative Government's judicious mix of advertising restrictions, taxation policies and public health education meant that we had a very good record. The question that is very difficult to answer is which part of the mixture was most successful in reducing smoking prevalence. It is difficult to say what is the relative importance of each of the three strands of policy.

Despite the continuation of advertising restrictions and health education under this Government, there has been a much smaller reduction in the number of adult smokers and a rise in the number of children who smoke. It is worth pointing out to the House that the figures are quite horrifying. The latest available figures show that between 1999 and 2000, the number of boys who smoked either occasionally or regularly went up from 12 per cent. to 16 per cent, while the number of girls who smoked occasionally or regularly went up from 16 per cent. to 22 per cent. The critical question is what lies behind that upward trend: advertising did not increase in that period because restrictions were still in place.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I entirely accept that the House needs to be careful about evidence, but how can the hon. Gentleman possibly explain the fact that in countries where a ban was instituted there were immediate drops in the number of people smoking cigarettes, ranging from 35 per cent. to 15 per cent., and where there was no other influence on the decline?

Dr. Fox: It is genuinely difficult to look at the cultures within which the bans were imposed. In the United Kingdom, a big reduction was achieved by a mix of policies; along with the Netherlands, we were particularly successful in getting our smoking rates down through a variety of different policies. I am not arguing that restricting advertising would not have played a part; the Conservative Government thought that the code on advertising was part of the mix, but there is a difference between a voluntary code and a legal ban. The step proposed in the Bill needs to be balanced against important philosophical arguments.

Mr. Garnier *rose—*

Dr. Fox: I shall give way to my hon. and learned Friend, but then I want to make progress.

Mr. Garnier: I want to underscore my hon. Friend's point that it is difficult to make estimates of the sort that the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) wants. In the other place, Lord Hunt said that the anticipated decline in the prevalence of smoking as a result of the Bill was somewhere in a range between 0 per cent. and 5 per cent; he could not be more specific. He plumped for 2.5 per cent, because that was halfway between 0 per cent. and 5 per cent, but it could have been 0 per cent., 0.3 per cent., 5 per cent. or some other figure.

Dr. Fox: I shall come to that argument in a moment, but in all honesty, I must tell my hon. and learned Friend that for many of us this is genuinely a difficult debate. On the one hand, we believe that only when it has no alternative should the state act to restrict individual freedom. On the other hand, I personally detest the effects of smoking.

Michael Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Fox: No, I said that I would not for the moment.

As I was saying, if advertising restrictions have not changed, but smoking has increased, what is the cause? If we are to answer that question, we need to look at the real-terms cost of tobacco, which has been affected by the huge increase in smuggling. The National Audit Office report on tobacco smuggling made for grim reading, according to the *Financial Times:*

> "Customs & Excise is losing up to £7.3 billion a year to fraud on indirect taxes such as value added tax and tobacco duty . . . equivalent to nearly £300 for each household".

The report gave the first formal estimate of how much Customs and Excise is losing; the true figure is likely to be higher. Surprisingly, about half the losses are

accounted for by tobacco smuggling, and it is estimated that the number of cigarettes smuggled last year rose from 14 billion to 17 billion, with more than one in five cigarettes consumed in the UK being smuggled.

According to the Government's statistics, the proportion of smuggled cigarettes has gone up in each of the past five years, rising from 3 per cent. to 6 per cent, to 12 per cent., to 18 per cent., and finally 21 per cent., which tells an alarming story about the Government's failure to tackle the real problem—the fall in the true price of tobacco. Banning or further restricting advertising may be part of the solution, but only a small part. The Secretary of State said today that banning advertising would be at the "core" of the Government's programme on tobacco. However, if he cannot tackle smuggling and if the true price of tobacco in this country continues to fall, there will be a drive towards greater prevalence of smoking and increased consumption, so banning advertising should not be the core of the Government's policy.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Is the hon. Gentleman seriously saying that there is a higher prevalence of smoking among teenage girls because they are managing to buy cigarettes cheaply on the black market? That is nonsense.

Dr. Fox: In pubs throughout the country one can buy smuggled tobacco at lower and lower prices. If the price decreases, demand will increase. Why does the hon. Lady think consecutive Governments have continued to try to raise the price of tobacco, if not to make it less attractive and to reduce the market? She is surely not saying that she does not believe that there is a link between the price of tobacco and the level of consumption—or is she?

Miss Begg: The hon. Gentleman was talking about the growing prevalence of smoking among young teenage girls. I agree that that is where we find the higher incidence of tobacco smoking. Young teenage girls do not frequent pubs and they are not able to buy tobacco at pubs. There are other reasons for young girls smoking, and a major reason is that the advertising of tobacco makes it attractive to smoke. As I have said, there are other reasons, and I will go into them if I have the opportunity to do so.

Dr. Fox: I accept the hon. Lady's sincerity, but her intervention is hopelessly, if charmingly, naive. Young teenage girls do frequent pubs. Youngsters do not get tobacco for free. They have to buy it somewhere. The lower the price, the more accessible it becomes. The cheaper the price, the more young people will be able to afford it, and the higher the prevalence rates will become. To pretend that there is no link between price and consumption is not helpful to the debate. In his Budget statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer seemed to believe that there is a link, when he raised the duty on tobacco.

Michael Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Fox: No. I shall make some progress if I may.

I return to the point made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). What hard evidence do we have that a ban, as opposed to a restriction, will make a difference? The Secretary of State was right when he said that it was a Conservative Government in 1992 who commissioned and published the Smee report. The report stated:

"The Department expects the likely eventual net effect on consumption to be in the range between 0% and a 5% decrease."

The report did not provide an adequate or reliable basis for estimating the likely effect of a total advertising ban in the UK. The author of the report made a statement in *The Times* in 1993, saying that he had

"looked at the conflicting evidence of bans in other countries and made no estimate for the UK. In seeking to justify its Bill, the Government has done no more than make an 'assumption' that a tobacco advertising ban will reduce consumption by 2.5%"—

as my hon. and learned Friend said, that involved picking a number between the two—

"without producing any evidence in support of that claim."

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman has been rather selective in quoting the Smee report. When the analysis took place before consideration by the Secretary of State, Smee concluded that

"in each case the banning of advertising was followed by a fall in smoking on a scale which cannot be reasonably attributed to other factors."

Smee also concluded that a total ban, in conjunction with an anti-smoking policy from Government, worked.

Dr. Fox: Smee concluded that in the areas that he had considered such an approach had worked in other countries. He said that there was conflicting evidence. He added that no clear assessment could be made of what would happen in the UK. At that time, we were already working against a background of having better reductions in our smoking prevalence and consumption than other countries. In the light of the evidence in the UK and elsewhere, it is difficult to come to clear conclusions.

There are fundamental questions to be faced. If we have no clear evidence that a ban will definitely produce a set benefit and yet we are going ahead in the face of arguments concerning the reduction of individual liberty and freedom of expression, can we not provide some safeguards that will make the balance of the argument more palatable?

In the previous Parliament, the Conservative party tried to introduce a clause into the Bill stating that if the Bill came into effect and did not produce any benefit at all in terms of reduced prevalence or consumption—in other words, if prevalence and consumption against trend rose—the Government would have to introduce new legislation in the House if they wanted to extend the ban. That is a perfectly rational and reasonable position and should be a no-risk policy for a Government who believe that the evidence is entirely on their side.

Why will the Government not apply such a clear scientific test to their proposals? On the face of it, that seems utterly unreasonable. It is partly because, as with everything else, the issue is not one of substance but one of presentation—intellectually two-dimensional and enmeshed in its own tissue of lies and sleaze.

The idea that the Government wanted to bring the Bill back is nonsense. They were forced to bring it back because the private Member's Bill in the other place was successful. If the Government had wanted to bring the Bill back, they would have announced a space for it in

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the Queen's Speech. They did not want to do so, and to pretend otherwise is humbug. One of the reasons why they did not want to bring the Bill back is that that risked opening up the whole Formula 1 affair at a time when the Government have never looked more as though they were up for sale to the highest bidder.

I wrote to the Secretary of State in the light of the recent revelations about the Formula 1 affair. We all know now that events were very different from the account given by that very straightforward kind of guy the Prime Minister. It might be helpful if I tell the House what I wrote to the Secretary of State. I now know that he reads his letters; it would be nice if he replied to them as well. I wrote:

"When the Government originally decided to exempt Formula 1 from the proposed Tobacco Advertising ban, it was suggested that the Prime Minister struck the deal at a meeting with motor racing chiefs at 10 Downing Street. This meeting supposedly took place on October 16th 1997, and the decision to exempt Formula 1 became Government policy on November 4th that year."

My letter continued:

"You will be aware, however, that information published today in *The Times* suggests that this version of events is incorrect. It now appears that the Government's decision to exempt Formula 1 was made before Bernie Ecclestone's donation to the Labour Party in January 1997. Mr. David Ward told *The Times:* 'In contrast to the widely held view that Ecclestone's donation was made to change policy on tobacco, in fact it was rewarding a policy decision he approved of after it had been taken by Labour.'

This situation requires urgent clarification. When was the decision first taken to exempt Formula 1 from the Tobacco Advertising ban?"

In the letter that he sent to the Secretary of State, Sir Max Mosley gave a very different version of events from the Government. He stated:

"We are not seeking and have never sought any exclusive exemption for Formula One from UK or EU efforts to ban tobacco sponsorship and advertising.

Unfortunately the obvious absurdity of an exclusive exemption for Formula One did not occur to your department when it was proposed unilaterally and without consultation with the FIA in November 1997."

Did the Government, without any negotiations, offer an exemption for Formula 1 that was never even sought? If so, why, who did it, who knew about it, and when did it happen? That fundamentally undermines everything that the Secretary of State has been saying about the points of principle. As a result of the Government's appalling handling of the whole affair, Mr. Ecclestone has been unfairly maligned following his donation to the Labour party.

There is another scandal that has not been mentioned today and which should be mentioned—the scandal of what we as British taxpayers contribute to the EU's policy on tobacco growing. It is scandalous that the European Union spends £600 million supporting tobacco growing—£600 million of taxpayers' money, including ours. Of the tobacco grown, under the EU's policy, a third is burned, a third goes into the European tobacco market, and appallingly and shamefully, the remainder is exported to third-world countries. That is EU cash-for-cancer money, and we are paying it.

How can any EU country successfully fight against tobacco consumption with the hypocrisy of those massive subsidies continuing? It would be nice to know from the Minister when he winds up tonight what the Government intend to do about that scandal. We continue to subsidise the promotion of cheap tobacco to people in developing countries. We fail to tackle smuggling effectively, so the real price of tobacco falls and consumption rises. The Government give exemptions from their own policy where none is sought, undermining their own credibility.

There is no doubt that the Government will get their Bill—or, rather, someone else's Bill—because they have the numbers and the time to do so, and there is also no doubt that we will get many more initiatives. However, I say to the Government that just as a No. 10 briefing about fining feckless parents is supposed to make us think that they are tackling crime, the Bill is a diversion from the real job of tackling smuggling and making tobacco more expensive in real terms. Tobacco smuggling is, to borrow a phrase, swamping this country. This Government's approach simply will not do.

5.31 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on having had the rather strange privilege of introducing the same excellent Bill twice in two successive Parliaments. Sadly, because of the vagaries of parliamentary procedure and the Conservatives' opposition, the original Bill did not get through the House of Lords in the previous Parliament, but it is here now and we must ensure that it gets through this time. I should also like to thank him for his kind mention of the tobacco White Paper, "Smoking Kills", which was published when I was Secretary of State for Health. I congratulate him on a thoroughgoing implementation of its contents, making possible a concerted approach to reducing smoking in this country.

The Bill is intended to end tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship—and not before time. It is 40 years since the Royal College of Physicians published its report on smoking and health, which demonstrated beyond any doubt that smoking kills, so no one can suggest that the Bill is a rush to judgment. Whenever we discuss smoking and those who wish to continue its promotion, we should continue to keep in mind one simple fact: smoking kills. We should not allow ourselves to be distracted by the specious arguments, delaying tactics and weasel words of the tobacco industry or any of its friends.

If we think of ourselves as part of the animal world, as we must, we can reasonably regard the tobacco industry as a predatory animal, as it has to kill others in order to survive. It must continue to make and sell tobacco products to survive, knowing that half the people who follow the maker's instructions will die. That is the sort of industry that we are talking about. It promotes smoking in the sure and certain knowledge that if it does not continue to promote smoking and the making and selling of its products, it will not be the consumers who die, but the industry. So we have a stark choice: we can support either the tobacco merchants of death, as has happened on previous occasions, or the people whom they would otherwise kill.

In the knowledge that smoking kills, our campaign must, first, try to stop the tobacco industry recruiting new smokers, and, secondly, get existing smokers to desert the ranks of the people whom the tobacco industry does to death. These are all strong words, but they are all true.

The tobacco industry seeks the reverse of what we seek. Day in, day out, its executives and employees strive to recruit more people to smoke and to keep to a minimum the number of deserters from the ranks of the smokers. People in the tobacco industry understand their position, as they would, given that they are in an industry that in this country kills 120,000 of its customers every year, and obviously needs to recruit another 120,000 customers to make up for those it has killed.They knowingly sell a product that kills, so it follows that they have to take extreme measures, and they knowingly lie. For decades, the principal characteristic of the outward manifestation of the tobacco industry has been big lies to promote big tobacco.

Richard Ottaway: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, not for the moment.

People in the tobacco industry promoted three big lies. First, they said that tobacco did not kill; then they said that tobacco was not addictive; then they said, as they are still saying, that they did not want to recruit new smokers. All those lies have been exposed as such.

The claim that tobacco smoking does not pose a threat to health has been exposed as a lie. Originally—I give them the benefit of the doubt—people in the tobacco industry and its promoters may actually have believed that their product was not harmful. Subsequently, however, they knew from their own research, as well as that of others, that it was harmful, yet they practised and peddled the lie. They knew that they were lying; they knew that they were trying to deceive the public and potential smokers. Finally, they had to admit that smoking is harmful to health. We have now reached the preposterous situation whereby the boss of British American Tobacco says that he tells his children,

"I would advise you not to smoke . . . It is not good for you. You are better off not smoking".

then runs an advertising campaign to try to persuade everybody else's children to smoke. That is rank hypocrisy and a disgrace.

For years, people in the tobacco industry denied that tobacco was addictive. Again, they may have believed that at the beginning, but they subsequently knew from their own research—not someone else's—that tobacco was addictive. So what did they do? They decided to start growing tobacco that had more of the addictive characteristics, and, because that might prove to be difficult in the United States, they did it in Brazil and Zimbabwe in the hope that nobody would notice. They lied, then tried to make their product more addictive. Now, they have finally had to admit to their second big lie and accept that tobacco—or rather nicotine—is addictive.

The third great lie, which is still being perpetuated—sadly, some Conservative Members, either knowingly or otherwise, are going along with it—is that the industry is not trying to recruit new smokers. There is no first stage in that respect—people in the industry have always known that they were lying when they said that, because they were doing the recruiting. Why do they spend £130 million a year in this country on trying to promote tobacco sales if they are not trying to recruit new smokers? They are not giving £130 million-worth of outdoor relief to advertising executives; they are trying to recruit new people and to keep existing smokers on their list. They have deployed all sorts of different techniques over the years, but still deny that they have been doing so.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if tobacco was discovered today, it would be banned along with all the other drugs that have been banned?

Mr. Dobson: That is probably true, but trying to prohibit it would not work and might interfere with the individual liberty about which the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) was so concerned. As my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) said, we are trying not to restrict any individual but to prevent fat-cat bosses in the industry from persuading people to start or to continue smoking. That is all that we are talking about.

We do not want to stop Tom, Dick or Harry, but Ken and his mates. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) is not here. I have a high opinion of him; I like him and believe that he is the sort of person whom most of us would get on with. I cannot understand why he gets involved in the tobacco industry—it is beneath him.

The lie about not recruiting smokers includes a subsidiary lie that the industry is not targeting young people. If it is not, it is barmy. Almost everyone who smokes starts young; hardly anyone does so when old. Indeed, hardly anyone over 20 starts smoking. As night follows day, it follows that tobacco companies target their efforts on the young. There is clear evidence of that from information that had to be disclosed through court cases in the United States. It shows that the industry wants early recruits and knows that the product is addictive. It could be summed up in the slogan, "Get 'em young and you've got 'em for life." That is a disgraceful approach, but it characterises all the industry's actions.

The industry claims that it no longer targets children, but now emphasises that smoking is an adult activity. That is simply a change of tactics intended to make smoking more attractive to young people and portray it as something that the rebellious do—something that grown-ups do. It is all part of the promotion.

We must try not only to prevent recruitment but to get existing smokers off their habit. The Government are implementing the approaches that were set out in the White Paper to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State kindly referred. Banning tobacco advertising is only part of a general drive. The advertising ban is good, but we need to be careful about the way in which we formulate it.

Clear evidence shows that for more than 20 years the tobacco industry has been planning methods of coping with an advertising ban. British American Tobacco's objectives state:

"Opportunities should be explored by all companies to find non-tobacco products and other services which can be used to communicate the brand or house name, together with their essential visual identifiers . . . The principle is to ensure that tobacco lines can be effectively publicised when all direct lines of communication are denied."

That was said in 1979. We must be prepared, because the tobacco industry has been preparing for 20 years to cope with the problems that it will face as a result of a ban on advertising. It is still at it.

[Mr. Dobson]

We must be careful that the industry does not use the point of sale—for example, a shop—as a huge advertisement by turning it into a glowing, sparkling fag packet. We must make sure that, when brand-stretching, it does not open cafés that resemble packets of cigarettes, with their logos and colour schemes, as happened in Malaysia. We must watch that.

It has recently been revealed that the tobacco industry has paid Hollywood millions of pounds to persuade film companies to get people to smoke on TV so that the camera can focus on the cigarette logo as often as possible. We know about another shameless activity, which involves the fashion industry. I do not know whether tobacco industry money goes into it—no one would expect me to understand the ins and outs of the fashion industry—but young women, who are admired by girls and other young women, smoke cigarettes on the catwalk but not in their private life. There is something wrong there, and we need to watch all such developments. We must get ahead of the game.

I understand from the Clerks that we cannot strengthen this Bill, and that my proposal is outside its scope. I believe, however, that, in view of the deathly nature of the product of the tobacco industry, we should require it to disclose all its market research and scientific research, in the first instance to the Department of Health and then to the public.

The opponents of the advertising ban have advanced three arguments. The first is that if the industry does not have to spend money on promotion, it will be able to reduce its prices. Fine—if we want to maintain a constant price, all that we need to do is increase the tax. That would be good for people's health, good for every other taxpayer, and good for the public services that received the money.

That takes us on to the second argument—that the ban might lead to more smuggling. Smuggling is portrayed as though it is not only the Exchequer, British taxpayers, the public and those who depend on publicly financed services who are being swindled. The impression being created by the tobacco industry is that, somehow or other, it is being swindled. Far from it: it is being paid for every cigarette that is smuggled. Perhaps, therefore, we should consider a tax at the production end of the tobacco industry, and catch it out that way.

Perhaps there is an alternative. We need to get the scale of the worldwide tobacco problem clear in our minds. More people will die this year from tobacco use than from all the military action in the world. We force companies to obtain export licences and produce end-user certificates for armament exports. We should examine the possibility of requiring the deathly products of the tobacco industry to be subject to end-user certificates. We must take this seriously. Tobacco kills more people than all the battles and fighting going on in the world.

That brings me to the third argument. The hon. Member for Woodspring has gone on about freedom of choice. An addict does not have freedom of choice. An addict's choice is biased in favour of the addiction. If that were not the case, the 70 per cent. of smokers who want to give up would have done so. It is difficult to give up smoking, and the tobacco industry has known that all along. We must remember that, when most people took up smoking, they were not in a position to make a mature judgment, because they were not mature. They were in their "salad days", and "green in judgment". They were probably 10 or 11, or perhaps 13 or 14 years old when they made their erroneous judgment and got themselves addicted. Now, apparently, in the name of freedom of choice, we are told that more and more generations have to join them. That is not good enough, and it must be changed.

The Bill will provide some of the changes, and it is therefore very welcome. About 3,000 lives will be saved in the United Kingdom as a result of the ban. I have been in the House since 1979, and I have seldom taken part in a debate in which, if we voted the right way, 3,000 lives would be saved. Indeed, that might be an underestimate, because the European Union and the World Health Organisation have said that a total ban on advertising would reduce smoking by more than the Department of Health's official estimate of 2.5 per cent.

We must work with the European Union. I quite agree with the hon. Member for Woodspring about the scandal of the huge subsidy for growers of inferior tobacco. There is nothing novel about that; it happened when Mrs. Thatcher was Prime Minister and when John Major was Prime Minister. It is still going on now. It ought to be stopped—I agree with the hon. Gentleman entirely—but we need an EU-wide approach and we must support the WHO's approach to try to get an advertising ban worldwide.

Nothing better demonstrates what I can only describe as the moral degeneracy of the people who run the tobacco industry than the fact that, as it has found it harder to sell its deadly product to people in the developed world, it has increasingly pitched its sales promotion at the third world. What sort of people are they? They look at the third world—devastated with malaria, devastated with tuberculosis and more and more devastated with HIV/AIDS. Everybody else says, "What can we do to help?", but the tobacco industry says, "We'll give you lung cancer as well."

Those are the sort of people we are talking about. It epitomises the mindset of the tobacco industry that nothing is more important to it than selling cigarettes, so I urge everyone to vote for the Bill and for a long series of ever tougher measures against smoking.

5.51 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): First, I alert the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) to the fact that if he sneaks out, which he is about to do, he will miss the opportunity to reply to the points that I would like to put to him in debate. After all, we are in a debating Chamber. I understand that he may have more pressing engagements than doing his job here, and I see from his departure that he has.

I suspect that the Secretary of State will also leave, but I hope that he does not, because I want to echo his tribute to Lord Clement-Jones without whose assiduity—and, indeed, that of his Liberal Democrat colleagues in the House of Lords—we would not have the Bill, which is, I grant, the same as that which the Government introduced. I am glad that the Secretary of State at least paid tribute to him. The right hon. Gentleman was a little churlish—I would like to say that that is unlike him, but I cannot—in remarking that merely a few people played their part. Otherwise, I agree with everything he said,

except his dangerous complacency and self-congratulation on the Government's achievements in their tobacco strategy, which I want to go into further.

My final tribute goes to my constituent, Sir Richard Doll, who was the first to publish the clear evidence that tobacco kills and smoking kills. His landmark study set the background not only for this policy, but for many others that Governments have introduced. I hope that future Governments do the same. The fact that he is still going strong at his ripe old age, nearing 100, testifies to what people can achieve if they do not smoke.

It is always a pleasure to be able to support the Government on a manifesto commitment, but it is more than a little unfortunate that we are supporting one from 1997. I concur with almost everything that the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said about the Bill saving 3,000 lives, but it has come too late to save some that could have been saved had it been early legislation. Nevertheless, it is welcome.

Smoking is a public health disaster. The damage that it causes has been described by previous speakers and I shall not repeat what they said, but it is important to recognise that if the Government's only aim is to reduce the prevalence of smoking, they must recognise that their job is to help with that change, not just comment on it if it happens incidentally.

The danger is that the Government may think that they brought about incidental changes in the prevalence of smoking. For example, a large number of people who took up smoking before the dangers were known are dying off, which will inevitably lead to a reduction in prevalence if not in the incidence of people taking up smoking. That is not sufficient, however, and it would be complacent to say, "There has been a fall." We must recognise that the product kills, that it is addictive and that the people who manufacture it seek to recruit more smokers.

The Government must recognise that a comprehensive tobacco strategy has to do more than just ban tobacco advertising. There is a role for increased tobacco duty, but a one-club approach must not be used, because tobacco duty increases create the climate for increased smuggling. Unless commensurate action is taken to curb smoking and to impound smuggled tobacco, simply increasing duty, which may or may not produce more revenue for the Exchequer, will not solve the problem of access to tobacco.

Indeed, if the price of tobacco sold legally and carrying health warnings were increased significantly without tobacco smuggling being curbed, one would lose all the benefits of the price increase as well as those of the point-of-sale health warnings. There are no point-of-sale health warnings in pub car parks and increased tobacco duty is no price barrier for smuggled goods.

Again, the Government appear complacent, because the Secretary of State boasted that the number of cigarettes impounded by Customs and Excise has risen from 2 billion in 1999–2000 to 3 billion in 2000–01. As we heard from the hon. Member for Woodspring, the number of cigarettes estimated to have been smuggled increased in the same period from 14 billion to 17 billion. Despite more cigarettes being impounded, which is no surprise considering the increased flow, 2 billion more cigarettes net are being sold illegally to young people in this country, including young teenage girls, in pub car parks and elsewhere, without price barriers and health warnings. That is a failure of Government policy.

John Robertson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Proceeds of Crime Bill, which has been through the House and is being considered by the other place, will go a long way to attack the white van people who bring those cigarettes in? What he says about the Government doing nothing is not exactly true.

Dr. Harris: I hope that that Bill will do something, but my point is not that the Government are doing nothing, although they are not doing enough, but that they should not tell people that the situation is improving because of the increased capture of smuggled cigarettes when the figures suggest that it is getting worse. Nor should the Government see tobacco duty increases as the only answer, because there are problems with using that as the only measure.

I am speaking against a previous policy of my party, but it is appropriate to recognise faults in previous policies when they exist. Increased tobacco duty may have either a public health effect or a revenue-raising effect. It is difficult for it to have both. Therefore, to say that hoped-for increased cigarette duty revenues should go to the health service is self-defeating, because there will be increased revenue for the health service only if people continue to buy cigarettes carrying increased duty. I used to support that policy, but it is flawed. It might be more rational to use increased cigarette duty revenues, if they exist, within Customs and Excise to block the natural consequence of increased cigarette duties. We must recognise that there is a major problem with smuggled cigarettes, especially among young people.

The Secretary of State and the Government are always careful not to antagonise anyone who might later appear in a focus group, so they talk about the right to smoke being protected and the Government being keen to make that clear. But we are really talking about the right of 70 per cent. of smokers to be addicted to cigarettes, because those people want to give up: only 30 per cent. of smokers—a small number of the population—want to continue to smoke come what may.

I realise that there are civil liberties arguments relating to smoking what is currently a legal product, but they must be balanced against arguments about the risk of harm. When the Government talk of their smoking-cessation policies, they must acknowledge that they are dealing with addiction, and with a habit that is probably the single most dangerous in terms of risk. I support their cessation programme as far as it goes, but, as the Secretary of State recognised, it must go further. The Government's attempt to restrict access to Zyban and nicotine replacement therapies, especially in terms of the length of treatment, spoilt what would otherwise have been a good policy.

Notwithstanding evidence now confirmed by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, Government funds for cessation products in the NHS were initially restricted to health action zones. When it was extended beyond those zones, the time for which Zyban could be prescribed was, at first, much less than what experts deemed to be the optimum. That may save money for hard-pressed drug budgets in the short term, but, as I

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know Ministers are told by advisers who know about smoking cessation, long-term investment in cessation treatment—partly drugs and partly counselling—is the single most cost-effective Government intervention. Penny-pinching and sloth are regrettable in this context.

I see the Minister responsible for public health frantically scribbling a rebuttal. To rebut what I have said, she will have to claim that her policy on nicotine replacement therapy and Zyban when she took office was the same as that recommended by NICE now. It was not, although at the time the evidence was strong.

General practitioners in my area have told me that because they do not have specific funds for smoking-cessation clinics, they must take practice nurses away from other clinics. If the Government could provide money for the grass roots without having to cut other services, we would be even more impressed by their efforts.

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made an important point about the use of cigarettes in films and on stage, and in the fashion industry. I want to hear what steps the Minister is taking in terms of persuasion—it is difficult to do this by means of legislation—to educate the fashion industry, women's magazines, the film industry in Britain at least, and television. All the work done to secure a tobacco ban through direct advertising can be undone by the visible portrayal of cigarette smoking as in some way cool in the media to which young people pay attention.

The Government had some good things to say about the health of young women, particularly girls, and their body image, but they now seem to have gone quiet. The two issues are linked: many young women and girls smoke because they think that it will help them to lose weight. It is sad that the Government have gone quiet about the dieting fad, and I hope that they will not be deterred by the scurrilous coverage of their initiative.

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made many points that I had intended to make. That is one of the problems of the Chamber and the status of my party here: we always have to follow learned and useful contributions such as his. He made an interesting point about the question of a tax on production. He knows that that is a rational policy, but he also knows that it would cost jobs in the United Kingdom. Perhaps that is the price we must pay for a moral policy on tobacco products. We have export licence controls on arms, and we are, or should be, seeking diversification of the arms industry. The tobacco industry has had plenty of warning, and I hope and believe that a similar approach is not far away.

The Conservative arguments were shocking. Smoking policy is a litmus test of public health policy, and the Conservatives' justification for their opposition was wholly unconvincing. That is not surprising, because I suspect that the Opposition spokesman's heart is not really in his objection to the Bill. It may be said that that is good for the hon. Member for Woodspring, but I think it is worse politically to say something one knows to be wrong than to stand firm—whether in the shadow Cabinet or elsewhere—and say that this policy is right and the policy of one's party and its leader stinks.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): The hon. Gentleman obviously was not listening when—with, I thought, enormous conviction, and certainly with my support and that of all my hon. Friends—my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) made it clear that not the ends but purely the means were in dispute. We have serious doubts that the means on offer will achieve the ends that we all want. That is the point, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He is trying to make mischief by suggesting otherwise.

Dr. Harris: Not at all. My point is that the opposition expressed by the hon. Member for Woodspring to the means was wholly unconvincing, and that the Conservatives' argument against the means proposed in the Bill stinks. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton)—from whom I am happy to take interventions, although his hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring was not happy to take them from me—will have to defend his party's policy to the parents and children of people who will die from smoking in years to come if his party has its way. There were 18 wasted years under the Conservatives; the Government can confess to only four.

The argument about individual liberty was advanced. Clearly there are restrictions on individual liberty, but as a liberal I believe that the state has the right to restrict it if that prevents harm. The hon. Member for Woodspring refused to debate that. When it comes to the protection of individual liberty, the Conservatives pick and choose, according to their prejudice and their interest groups. He demonstrated that by his wilful refusal even to engage in debate on the example I gave him.

Mr. Hunter: I am not picking and choosing. I ask the hon. Gentleman to include in his speech a reference to the Department of Health's own assessment of the Bill's impact, which it said could be from zero to 5 per cent. In other words, the Department acknowledges that the Bill may have no impact.

Dr. Harris; A basic understanding of statistics—which I suspect the hon. Gentleman has—leads to the recognition that, even on the basis of that evidence, the Bill is likely to have an effect. He may think that the reduction of 2.5 per cent.—saving 3,000 lives—is not sufficient cause for this action; he may think that the saving of 1 per cent., or something over 1,200 lives, is not sufficient cause; he may think that the saving of only one life is not sufficient cause. That is where he and I disagree. I believe that when there is clear evidence of harm, it is reasonable to restrict the liberty of businesses to sell, or at least to advertise, a dangerous product.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): If the hon. Gentleman believes that it is right for the state to interfere to prevent harm, why does his party believe that cannabis should be legalised?

Dr. Harris: I was going to deal with that. I have no qualms about defending our policy of seeking to decriminalise cannabis as a first step towards its legalisation.

The point made about the Smee report did not surprise me. We know that the Conservatives are prepared to ignore expert advice. When it comes to the measles, mumps and rubella vaccination, for instance, they call on the Government to disregard the advice of experts. It is

easy for them to do that in opposition, but responsible politics means accepting the advice of experts even if it conflicts with earlier policy. The Conservative party seems to be unable to do that.

My party's position on cannabis is entirely rational. What is irrational is allowing the legal sale of a product—tobacco—that kills hundreds of thousands of people every year while seeking to restrict the sale of cannabis, despite the harm done by thus driving cannabis users into the clutches of those who want to push more dangerous drugs. The irrationality lies in supporting the legal use of one and not the other. That is an important point. My party does not promote the smoking of cannabis. It certainly does not want the advertising of cannabis to be legalised. Nevertheless, the argument that cannabis is more dangerous than cigarettes is ridiculous.

Again, the Conservative opposition to the decriminalisation of cannabis, and the conservative opposition to it in the Government, is based on politics: they believe that a substantial number of the population do not wish it to be decriminalised. They do not have a rational drugs policy. We believe that drugs policy should include tobacco and alcohol. The committee advising the Government on these things should have a wider remit. The current situation is nonsense.

Conservative Members may not agree with us, but at least we have no qualms about saying it from the Front Bench. We do not rely on siren voices from the Back Benches such as the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who has called for even wider legalisation, including not just cannabis.

I turn to the lessons to be learned from the Ecclestone affair. This is not necessarily the place to pick over that sordid business again.

John Robertson: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will.

Dr. Harris: I will not. However, it is another example of the way the system of funding political parties, even if it is not corrupt, gives the appearance of corruption. It makes it very difficult for the Government to make policy on tobacco when such amounts of money flow backwards and forwards. It certainly makes it impossible for their tobacco policy to appear to be free from influence from donors.

It is no good the Government saying that they publish their donors. Saying to the British people, "We will tell you when you are being conned," is not an argument to which they will respond. It is not sufficient to say, "If we are found out, or if there is some question about propriety, we will give the money back," because the damage will have been done to the image of politics. That is yet another good example of why funding of parties should be restricted to small individual donations and to state funding, which should be proportionate to popular support.

On the European Union and its tobacco subsidies, I agree with the hon. Member for Woodspring. It is a scandal that a third of the product is burned and a third exported to developing countries. My party's approach to the EU is critical where we disagree. I believe—indeed, I have been told this by independent observers—that criticism of the EU and particularly the policy on tobacco subsidies comes better from parties that do not automatically dismiss everything that the EU stands for. I wholeheartedly share the hon. Gentleman's view that it is an outrage. I wish that the Government could do more to change that policy—they seem to be able to get their way in Europe when blocking more progressive measures.

The Bill is at least four—and perhaps 20 or 30—years behind schedule. It is a pleasure to support it on Second Reading. To all intents and purposes, the Bill, which was introduced by my colleague, Lord Clement-Jones, in the House of Lords, is the same as that which the Government previously attempted to introduce. It is rare that the Liberal Democrats can support our own Bill on Second Reading. In fact, it is perhaps a unique occasion. I look forward to the measure reaching the statute book as quickly as possible.

6.14 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I think that it has already been said: here we are again with the legislation. I remind the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) that it has been around not for four years but for many more than that. I tried to introduce a private Member's Bill on the subject in 1993–94.

To say that this Bill is four years behind schedule is a bit of a harsh analysis of what has happened in the past four years. The first issue that the Labour Government faced on coming to office in 1997 was whether to take off the block of many years that had been placed by the Conservative Government on a Europe-wide Bill. The Labour Government decided that that was the right thing to do in relation to public health, not just here but in the EU. I wholeheartedly agreed with that tactic. The fact that it fell at the European Court of Justice years later meant that we had the delay.

I owe Lord Clement-Jones a great debt of gratitude, as do all who want the legislation to be introduced. He stewarded the Bill in the other place; we were told that it would be difficult for the Government to get it through there when the Bill went to the Lords before the last general election. I am pleased to support the Bill in the form that it is in today.

On the issue of smoking cessation and the criticism of Zyban and everything else, Zyban must have been one of the quickest drugs to come to this country from America. It was immediately put on the lists for people who want to go on smoking cessation programmes. I say that as someone who has been not just actively involved in the subject for many years, but as chair of the all-party group on the pharmaceutical industry, also for many years. I know from being lobbied that the Government moved with great swiftness. There was a good response.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon was right about one thing: we must ensure that people who are going to prescribe Zyban have some experience of smoking cessation. It is not just about writing a prescription. It takes a lot more than that eventually to get people off nicotine addiction. However, one or two of his comments were a bit hard.

The Opposition amendment has survived from January last year. It says of the Bill that

"there is insufficient evidence that its provisions will lead to a quantifiable reduction in tobacco consumption".

I said in the debate in January last year that that was not true. We all know the findings of the Smee report, which was put together in 1992. It gave figures for the reduction

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of tobacco consumption in countries that went for a ban for public health reasons. In Norway, it dropped by 9 per cent., in Finland by 6.7 per cent., in Canada by 4 per cent., and in New Zealand by 5.5 per cent. Cigarette consumption falls by an average 7 per cent. when advertising is banned. I emphasise that it should be banned for the right reasons. Italy banned it to protect its home-grown tobacco industry. It did not have the effect there that it had in those other countries, which banned it for the right reasons.

Smee's report also said that the fall in smoking was on a scale that

"cannot be reasonably attributed to other factors."

He concluded:

"The balance of evidence thus supports that advertising does have a positive effect on consumption."

The Government said last year that we could expect a possible 2.5 per cent. reduction in consumption if advertising were banned in this country. Conservative Members seem sceptical. They say the reduction may be nil, or it may be 5 per cent. If it is nothing, what are they opposing in terms of the Bill? If it is 5 per cent., are they genuinely saying that they are right to oppose the prevention of many deaths from smoking-related diseases?

I just cannot understand the opposition to this Bill from Conservative Members—I never have done in the many years I have been involved in the issue. Even if there were a 2.5 per cent. reduction, it would stop 3,000 premature deaths a year. That is roughly eight deaths a day—more than the total death toll on our roads at the moment. The Government have put millions into finding out exactly how to reduce casualties—for example, through putting seat belts in the back of cars. What do the conservatives have against a measure that will not ban tobacco but will give people an honest chance of getting off a drug that kills 120,000 people prematurely in this country every year? Their position is very difficult to accept.

Opposition Members use the word "quantify". Many years ago, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) chaired the Health Committee, which published a report in 1993 on the European directive that the Conservative Government were blocking. The report concluded:

"The Government cannot continue to procrastinate on the issue of an advertising ban on the grounds that it is awaiting a level of proof about its effectiveness—which is in the nature of things unobtainable."

That goes to the heart of what we see in the reasoned amendment—and there was a Conservative majority on that Committee.

In 1993, the Smee report was discussed in Government. I got all the leaked evidence showing that the Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, was in favour of banning tobacco advertising. I have with me the leaked letters that were sent to the Prime Minister. I read them out ad nauseam in the debate in January last year. It is evident that many people have favoured a ban for many years, but not the Conservative party as a whole.

The then Government's response to the Smee report came to the conclusion that

"tobacco advertising does affect total tobacco consumption, not just brand share. Further restrictions on tobacco advertising up to and including a ban could therefore be expected to reduce smoking".

That is still being denied by Conservative Members, yet it was the only sensible conclusion that anyone could have come to after seeing the evidence.

The report also concluded that

"other countries have introduced bans which have had a useful effect in their particular circumstances";

and that

"from the evidence available, it is not possible to quantify the size of the effect of a ban in this country with any degree of certainty."

That does not give us a licence not to implement one, though. We have certainly failed on teenage smoking.

Richard Ottaway: A report in *The Times* on 22 January 1993 said that Smee had

"looked at the conflicting evidence of bans in other countries and made no estimate for the UK."

How does that fit with what the right hon. Gentleman is saying?

Mr. Barron: The estimate that the Government have considered is an average of the reduction in consumption in countries that took the decision to ban tobacco advertising for public health reasons, rather than to protect home markets. The evidence is irrefutable.

We have to ask why Conservative Members continue to oppose the legislation. They give great credence to voluntary codes and ask us to rely on voluntary agreements to protect teenagers and other vulnerable groups from the influence of tobacco advertising. I have long believed that the voluntary arrangements have failed to deliver the gains in public health that we have a right to expect.

A good example of that came in the evidence taken by the Health Committee before it published its report "The Health Risks of Smoking" in 2000. In the second volume, at page 318, we can see an attempt to show that advertising supposedly designed to encourage 18 to 24-year-olds to switch brands had no effect on young people's smoking habits. Advertising agencies were giving evidence on how they pitched their advertisements at different age groups, claiming that they affected only adults, not children.

The voluntary arrangements say that no advertising will be targeted at people below the age of 18. We have heard about billboards not being near schools, but the whole point of the voluntary codes is that advertising should be pitched only at adults.

Referring to evidence submitted by a company called TBWA GCT Simons Palmer Ltd., Audrey Wise—hon. Members will recall how assiduous she was in questioning witnesses, just as she was assiduous in questioning Ministers in the House—asked the company chairman, Mr. Paul Bainsfair, to explain how he could be sure that an advertisement that would appeal to an 18-year-old would not have the same appeal for a 14 or 15-year-old.

Audrey Wise asked:

"What do you think characterises an 18-year-old male, their aspirations and things that appeal to them which would not also appeal to 14 and 15-year-old males?"

Mr. Bainsfair replied that advertisers had to stick within the bounds of the voluntary code,

"which prevents us anyway doing anything which might be seen to be deliberately attractive to children—not that we would want to . . . it would be pretty unlikely that the kind of advertising we come up with would particularly appeal to a 15 year old."

She pressed him on how a distinction is made under the voluntary code between someone under 18, or under 15, and an 18 to 24-year-old. He said:

"there is a very detailed code to which we have to submit all our ideas to make sure we are not straying into an area which could be seen to do the very thing you are suggesting we might accidentally do."

She pursued this line of questioning for several minutes until he finally admitted:

"Perhaps if I say that it is common sense that there is going to be an overlap. Some 15-year-olds are going to be more sophisticated than others. It is impossible to say that something which appeals to an 18-year-old will not appeal to a 15-year-old. If that is what you are getting at, obviously you are right."

There we have it. Mr. Bainsfair begins by stating categorically that the voluntary code prevents advertisers from doing anything to target children, goes on to say that advertising is unlikely to appeal to a 15-year-old, insists that the code prevents advertisers from targeting children, and finally admits that it is common sense that there is bound to be an overlap, thus turning his own argument on its head.

Conservative Members have referred to the voluntary code. What say they about a man who makes a living advertising the products of tobacco companies and says that he works within the guidelines of the voluntary code? The code has failed our young people for years. That is the truth. Until Conservative Members recognise it, they will never be able to understand the tobacco industry, which was well described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) as targeting our young people.

People start smoking between the ages of 11 and 15; 20-year-olds never start smoking—it is not an adult choice, and never has been. I started smoking at the age of 10. That was not an adult choice. People are cynically aware that it is not an adult choice, and they exploit the voluntary codes to overcome the restrictions. It is about time the Opposition got their act together and decided to tell some of the truth about why they are again using weasel words in their amendment.

The Opposition say that this all boils down to the issues of teenagers and other vulnerable groups, and illegal imports. It is true to say that tobacco smuggling is a major problem, but it is not true to say that the Government are not doing anything about it: far from it. At least one tobacco company is still under investigation by the Department of Trade and Industry, and some of us are not convinced that when tobacco produced in this country is sent abroad and then—sometimes within seven days—arrives back in this country illegally, thereby avoiding taxes, the industry does not know about it.

I was tempted by what my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said about issuing export licences, as we do for weapons made by the defence industry. Tobacco kills a lot more people than weapons do, and the manufacturers should not be allowed to get away with that.

When my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury outlined the pre-Budget report on 27 November last year, he gave the first results from the "tackling tobacco smuggling" strategy set up by the Government about two years ago, which was designed to stop the growth in tobacco smuggling and reverse it by 2003. The results were that Customs and Excise had achieved their key 2000–01 target of holding the share of the UK market taken by smuggled cigarettes to 21 per cent. Also in 2000–01, they seized 2.8 billion cigarettes destined for the illicit UK market—almost 1 billion more than were seized in 1999–2000. They have also cut cross-channel smuggling by 76 per cent., massively exceeding their target of a 10 per cent. reduction.

In just six months, the new network of X-ray scanners has detected about 80 million cigarettes and 4.5 tonnes of hand-rolling tobacco. Customs investigators have broken up 43 major organised crime rings involving the large-scale smuggling and supply of cigarettes. Also in 2000–01, Customs and Excise seized more than 10,200 cars, vans and lorries used by smugglers—almost double the number seized in 1999–2000.

Let me put that in context: of the 14 million people who entered the UK through the channel ports in 2000, 99.8 per cent. passed through without a problem. That is what the Government are doing about smuggling. We know that smuggled tobacco finds its way to young people, and that it avoids taxation, but the Government are taking action; they are spending millions of pounds at ports now.

As a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, I can tell the House that a lot more is done about tobacco smuggling and other serious crimes in our ports, and throughout our country, than has ever been done before—and more than was even dreamed of by the Conservative party when it was in government. We will take no lessons from the Conservatives on this subject.

The Opposition amendment says that there should be

"a mechanism for testing and reflection upon the assumptions upon which the Bill is based".

The Conservatives had 18 years in office and never offered one sunset clause to us when we were in opposition, yet they want to put a clause into the Bill, which they will vote against at 10 o'clock tonight, so that if, in two or three years' time, it is not working, we can do something about it. It is extraordinary that they should make that suggestion. We could argue that case on every piece of legislation that comes before the House, but we never have done—

Tim Loughton: What about terrorism?

Mr. Barron: I know that we do that with the Prevention of Terrorism Act, because of the issues involved, and that is right and proper—but it is nonsense to say that any other legislation should have a sunset clause.

Tim Loughton: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman acknowledges that sunset clauses have now become an issue. He says that tobacco kills more people than terrorism, so by his own logic, why will he not accept a sunset clause for this Bill in case, as we contend, the means that it uses are not right?

Mr. Barron: If the means are not right we will be able to sort that out pretty quickly, because as the hon. Gentleman knows, a lot will be done by regulation;

[Mr. Barron]

the detail is not on the face of the Bill. That often happened under the Conservative Government, and it means that when people try to avoid the restrictions on promoting their products, we will be able to take swift action rather than having to come back to the Chamber and put up with amendments such as the one that the Conservatives have tabled to the Bill, which is spurious to say the least, and does not deal with the consequences of tobacco consumption.

Tobacco products have enjoyed an unprecedented degree of freedom from the safety regulations that apply to virtually all the food and drug products available in Britain today. I have never heard Conservative Members arguing that prescription drugs should be available everywhere so that people can use their freedom of choice to go out and buy them. We have always restricted the availability of things that are bad for public health. Why do the Conservatives not go along with this sensible suggestion, which will reduce cigarette consumption, just as the taxation imposed by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer reduced it?

I do not know the answer. Perhaps the Conservatives' historical link with the tobacco industry is still there. I had a private Member's Bill talked out when the Conservative party and the tobacco companies linked up to ensure that public health measures did not make progress in the Chamber. If Opposition Members could answer my questions about how one can advertise something to an 18-year-old without affecting 15-year-olds, they might even get me thinking as they do—but as things are, they have to defend their position.

6.37 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I begin by declaring the fact that although I am a non-smoker, I am a member of the all-party Lords and Commons pipe and cigar smokers club. I also have a registered interest in connection with the Tobacco Manufacturers Association. Indeed, I was once described by Mr. Simon Hoggart, in his column in *The Guardian*, as having the most politically incorrect entry in the Register of Members' Interests: not only had I been invited for a day's shooting, but it was the tobacco industry that invited me. I am happy to say that *The Guardian*—for which, incidentally, I used to work—allowed me a right of reply and paid me for my article. I declared that in the register, too.

Before dealing with a rather legalistic point, I want to refer briefly to something that the Secretary of State and I talked about during his opening speech.

Mr. Barron: I am a bit confused. The hon. and learned Gentleman says that he is a member of the all-party pipe and cigar smokers club. That group never appears on a Whip; as I understand it, it is a parliamentary group, not an all-party group. I would love to join it.

Mr. Garnier: I am afraid that I am not a committee member of that club, or on its secretariat, but I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to find a way of joining it if he makes himself known to those concerned.

Before I reach the substance of my speech, I would like to raise something that I mentioned during an intervention on the Secretary of State. I am talking about the section 19 statement under the Human Rights Act 1998. I asked the Secretary of State what had allowed him to make that statement, and he referred me to evidence before the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

In particular, I looked at the letter sent to that Committee by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), dated 17 January, which is to be found in the appendix to the Committee's 14th report:

"Paragraph 21 of your"—

the Committee's—

"Report states that there should be clear evidence to support the contention that only a comprehensive advertising ban would be sufficient to bring about the desired reduction in tobacco consumption. I believe that such evidence exists. A 1999 Report from the World Bank stated . . . that 'policymakers who are interested in controlling tobacco need to know whether cigarette advertising and promotion affect consumption. The answer is that they almost certainly do, although the data are not straightforward. The key conclusion is that bans on advertising and promotion prove effective, but only if they are comprehensive, covering all media and all uses of brand names and logos.'"

That gives rise to two points. First, the Under-Secretary's belief does not constitute evidence; secondly, as the quotation that she cites makes clear, only bans that cover all media and all uses of brand names and logos prove effective, if one assumes that such data can indeed be considered straightforward. As I understand it, the Bill does not do what the report suggests is required: it does not cover

"all media and all uses of brand names and logos."

I therefore suggest that the Secretary of State have another think about his section 19 statement.

Setting aside the reasons offered by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Conservative Front Bench, which are outlined in the amendment, I should like briefly to encourage the House to deny the Bill a Second Reading for an albeit somewhat technical, but none the less valid reason that relates to our European law obligations. Although I appreciate that, these days, discussing legal obligations in the very place where laws are made is guaranteed to empty the Chamber, it is worth making the point—

Mr. Dobson: It depends who is discussing them.

Mr. Garnier: It does depend on that, and I am happy to empty the Chamber because doing so would enable me to continue without being interrupted. Nevertheless, given that a Minister from the Department of Health is present, and given that, in terms of the Bill, the Government's attitude to our obligations under European Union law has changed, I shall briefly outline my arguments.

The purpose of the EU's directive on technical standards and regulations, which applies to all industrially manufactured products and agricultural produce, is to prevent the creation of technical barriers to trade. Under it, member states are required to notify the Commission about proposed technical regulations, so that within a three-month standstill period before their coming into effect, other affected states, the Commission itself or interested bodies can make representations and, if necessary, ensure through the Commission that any harmful provisions are deleted or amended. That presupposes that the regulations are put to the Commission in a form that can be amended, and at a stage of their legislative development at which they can be amended.

It is not controversial that the Bill, if enacted, will provide the Secretary of State with considerable powers in terms of making secondary legislation. There is not time today to set out my arguments against the growing habit in government of creating criminal law through secondary legislation, which is drawn up and passed into law by members of the Executive without adequate scrutiny by the Legislature. However, as recently as 28 March, the Government changed their mind about the need to notify the European Commission of the regulations that will come into existence under the Bill. From the outset, the Government had argued that the Bill did not require notification, and that they had received from their lawyers what Lord Filkin—the Government spokesman in the other place—described as "strong advice" to that effect.

When I say "from the outset", one must remember that, although the Bill was introduced in the Lords last November—by Lord Clement-Jones—as a private Member's Bill, it is virtually identical to the Government Bill that fell victim to the Dissolution of Parliament in June 2001. For the Government to have admitted that the Bill needed to be notified would clearly have created an inconvenience. The one thing about which this Government do not like to be reminded is their connection with the tobacco industry, motor sport and money. The Ecclestone affair, the first of many such scandals that have come to haunt this self-righteous Government, hurt the Prime Minister personally and began the list of scandals that have dogged the Labour party and the Government, and which—even in last weekend's newspapers—continues to sugar the pill of Opposition life and activity.

It was therefore understandable that a three-month standstill was undesirable for the Government. Not only would it prolong the period in which the links between the Government, a Labour party donor and public policy would be in the public eye, it would also remind the public, health professionals and those who believe that a ban on tobacco advertising is essential for the promotion of public health that, far from this apparently all-powerful Government being able to make laws as they wish, they must dance to a tune and to a timetable set by an extra-territorial and unelected political power: the European Commission.

Mr. Hunter: I wonder whether my hon. and learned Friend might explain one point to those of us who lack his legal expertise and experience. In Denmark and Norway, legislation along those lines was introduced and was subjected to that three-month standstill. What will happen if the Commission decides in due course that that standstill should be imposed, and we have started—and perhaps concluded—our deliberations in Committee?

Mr. Garnier: I begin by gently reminding my hon. Friend that such legislation was introduced in Denmark and the Netherlands. Norway is not a member of the European Union, so it is not susceptible to EU directives. None the less, his general point is perfectly reasonable. I can only assume that the EU would have to strike down the legislation, or at least that the courts would refuse to enforce the secondary legislation through which regulations were made under the Bill.

My argument that the Government should delay agreeing to the Bill's Second Reading has nothing to do with the merits of the arguments for or against advertising, or of those for or against smoking—I happen to think that smoking is a disgusting and filthy habit—but it has everything to do with behaving in a communautaire sense, and of being acutely aware of our treaty obligations. The Government have only just become aware of those obligations. They must follow the logic of the notification date of 28 March and allow the Commission the necessary time—be it three months, which may be extended—to receive representations from other affected bodies or member states, so that it can give an opinion to the Government and invite comment. It is silly, to say the least, to embark on a legislative process with an end-date that pre-dates the end of the three-month standstill period, which could be extended in certain circumstances.

Mr. Dobson: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman's point derive from the depth of his legal knowledge, or has he been briefed on it by someone from the tobacco industry?

Mr. Garnier: There are two answers to that question. First, yes, I did think of it myself, because I am interested in the way in which this Government apparently claim that they are hugely enthusiastic about the European Union and all that flows from it. Secondly, as the right hon. Gentleman has doubtless done, I have read the *Official Report* of the Lords debate, and the issue of notification was raised in the other place both on Report and at earlier stages. He will doubtless have read the letter from seven Members of the House of Lords to the European Commission, a copy of which is in the Library of both Houses, asking whether the Bill is notifiable legislation. No doubt he has discussed the matter with his colleagues on the Front Bench, and has read the Commission's reply, which confirms that the Bill is indeed notifiable. The Commission wonders why the Government have not done what they ought to do: to notify, just as the Governments and Parliaments of the Netherlands and Denmark did.

Mr. Dobson: What about the tobacco industry?

Mr. Garnier: I have declared my relationship with the tobacco industry. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that, while shooting with tobacco industry representatives, we do not talk only about shooting; we also talk—surprise, surprise—about matters of legislation that affect the tobacco industry. There would be little point in the tobacco industry asking me to come along purely for a bit of outdoor relief, as the right hon. Gentleman put it. It has a huge interest in the Bill, and I sympathise with the concerns that it, and many others outside the tobacco industry, have about the way in which this Government bully and nanny and seek to control every inch of our daily lives. I know that the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is a kind-hearted fellow and he will perhaps wish to consider the tiresome and technical issues of notification to see how they will affect the progress of the Bill. However, if he is like so many other Labour Members, who have decided that they are right and nothing that anybody else can say will change their minds or shade their opinions, that tells us more about him than it does about the tobacco industry, or even me.

The Government do not want to admit that the three-month standstill is not the limit of the Commission's power to delay. If during that time the Commission or a

[Mr. Garnier]

member state delivers a detailed opinion that identifies in the Bill, or any regulation under it, any provision that will or could create obstacles to the free movement of goods or services within the internal market, the standstill period could be extended by a further three months. Furthermore, under the technical standards and regulations directive, the member state whose legislation is under scrutiny—in this case, this country—is obliged to consider and respond to the detailed comments made on its legislation. However, it gets worse. The total standstill period can be extended for as long as 12 months if, within the initial three months, the Commission announces that it has found that the legislation in question concerns a matter that is covered by a proposed directive, regulation or decision of its own. There can even be circumstances in which the standstill period goes on for a total of 18 months.

The purpose of the delay periods is to ensure legislative harmony throughout the European Union, which I would have thought was something that this euro-friendly Government would wish to see. Whether one is pro or anti the European Union, or for or against the making of criminal law outside this Parliament, it is surely sensible that if we are part of a single market governed by the European Union and its laws, the laws of individual member states should not conflict with each other, create unlawful barriers to trade or give member states unfair advantages over other member states. After all, as soon as the Chancellor's five economic tests are met, the Government want to enter the single European currency. The Prime Minister can see no constitutional reason for not doing so and does not believe that the UK's accession to the euro can have any deleterious consequences for our national sovereignty or our independence.

If the Prime Minister is sure about that great issue, he surely must have no qualms about adhering to European law in relation to tobacco advertising and the technical standards and regulations directive. The Danes notified the Commission and were content with a standstill, as were the Government of the Netherlands. What is so special about this Government and this Bill that allows them to give it a Second Reading, and complete its remaining stages, before the expiry of the initial—and, possibly, only—three-month standstill period, which is due to happen on 1 July?

If the Government have the courage of their European convictions and genuinely believe in the process that they began by belatedly notifying the Commission on 28 March, they should have no trouble in agreeing to the suggestion in my amendment, which of course has not been selected by the Speaker, or in undertaking that they will not complete the legislation until the Commission has completed its work. In fact, the Government should fervently grasp the opportunity with new Labour gusto and tell us that it was all their idea in the first place.

6.53 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I would normally begin by making some remarks about the previous contribution, but I lost the drift of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) after his third sentence. I apologise for not being able to comment on the detail of his speech, although I note that he and his two hon. Friends who have signed the reasoned amendment that was not selected have registered interests, presumably related to the tobacco industry. I can only assume that the hon. and learned Gentleman is attempting to wreck a positive and long overdue measure.

Mr. Garnier: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not understand what I was saying. Perhaps the problem was that my remarks were not addressed to him but to Ministers. The purpose of the reasoned amendment that my hon. Friends and I tabled was not to wreck the Bill but to bring it into compliance with this country's European obligations under the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for that brief summary of what he took half an hour to say.

It has been a privilege to listen to some of the contributions in tonight's debate. In particular, I wish to pay tribute to the contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and to praise the efforts that he has made over many years to address the issue of tobacco consumption. I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who year after year has attempted to get a similar measure through the House. I have been present on many occasions when such Bills have been wrecked and talked out by tactics not dissimilar to those behind the reasoned amendment that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough has tabled.

I welcomed the Bill in the last Parliament and it was a deep disappointment to me and, I suspect, to many Ministers that the measure was not included in the Queen's Speech. I welcome the Lords' initiative, regardless of the political background. It is a sensible measure, and I pay genuine tribute to the peer who has worked hard to ensure that the Bill has got so far.

Several hon. Members have mentioned the fact that 120,000 avoidable deaths every year are directly related to tobacco consumption. We bandy those figures about without any real consideration of what they mean for all the bereaved families. I represent Wakefield, and to me the fact that double the number of people living in that city die every year nationwide puts the figure in perspective. It is a scandal and a disgrace that we should accept those deaths as inevitable. They are not, and I am grateful that the Government are doing something about them.

David Taylor: When counting the dreadful losses that happen every year, perhaps we could reflect that 15 people an hour die prematurely from diseases linked to smoking. So far in the debate, that is about 40 deaths, several of which may have occurred while we were listening to the interminable speech from the Liberal Democrats' Front-Bench spokesman. They were probably a merciful release.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend makes his point in an interesting way. I might add that Professor Sir Richard Peto, who advised the Health Committee in the last Parliament during its inquiry into the tobacco industry and the risks of smoking, has calculated that 1 billion people will die worldwide from smoking by the end of the present century. How can that be allowed to happen? History will judge us all on that figure.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I apologise for not being here earlier in the debate, but I was attending a

Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation. As my hon. Friend knows, eight out of 10 people who smoke wish that they had never taken it up and seven out of 10 would like to give up if they could. Does he believe that advertising is a major factor in people taking up smoking in the first place?

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend served on the Health Committee in the last Parliament and was present for many sessions of evidence—and saw the written evidence—that clearly demonstrated the obvious connection. The Committee reached an all-party consensus that there is a clear connection between advertising and consumption. The link is obvious to all of us who have looked in detail at the issue.

Tomorrow the Queen will visit Parliament to address Members of both Houses in Westminster Hall, as part of the golden jubilee celebrations. Unfortunately, I have alternative engagements. Interestingly, it is also 50 years since Parliament was first informed by a predecessor of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health of the clear connection between smoking and ill health. One has to ask why it has taken so long for us to get round to taking this obvious and sensible step. In relation to tobacco consumption, what does the golden jubilee mean? To me, it means 50 years of denial of clear evidence of a link between smoking and ill health; 50 years of premature and avoidable deaths; and 50 years of marketing tobacco to attract new consumers to replace those who have died. To me, it means 50 years of this Parliament bowing to the squalid commercial interests of the tobacco companies.

It is a political fact that the Conservative party has been funded by the tobacco companies over a long period. When in office, they wrecked every attempt to control tobacco advertising. I have referred to the attempts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley and others to introduce such controls.

I am interested in the Tories' reasoned amendment, and in the arguments of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) about freedom. I strongly suspect, as others have said, that the hon. Gentleman does not believe in the reasoned amendment. I also strongly suspect that the others who have put their name to it do not agree with its content. I say that because the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who unfortunately is not in his place, signed up to the Health Committee report, which said:

"We welcome the Government's commitment to end all forms of tobacco advertising and sponsorship".

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford, who is himself a smoker, for his efforts on the Committee regarding this important inquiry. I suspect that he, too, does not really believe what the reasoned amendment says.

I was proud to see a different direction taken by the new Labour Government in 1997. For the first time in many years there was a clear and important public health agenda. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), who has left the Chamber, talked about four wasted years. I was astonished that the hon. Gentleman appeared to pass over some crucial public health measures that related directly to smoking. An advertising ban was proposed in the Government's first Queen's Speech in 1997. To the great credit of my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, the very important "Smoking Kills" White Paper was produced. It pointed us in a fundamentally different direction, which I actively supported as long overdue.

We also had the Formula 1 aberration. It is interesting to note that the first report of the Health Committee in the previous Parliament was highly critical of the exemptions allowed to Formula 1. I was reminded of that watching the television news last night. I am not particularly interested in Formula 1—frankly, I would prefer to watch paint dry—although I understand that some people find it attractive. I saw Schumacher being interviewed on television, his jacket plastered in Marlboro signs. It was a fairly obvious point, which reminded me of what we had discussed at the beginning of the previous Parliament. The Formula 1 issue typifies the way in which the tobacco companies have conned politicians for the past 50 years. I suspect that there were many on the health team in government during that time who believed that we were being conned and had nothing to do with it.

Sport and sponsorship are important areas of concern. My sport, the great game of rugby league football, has been heavily involved with the tobacco industry for many years but has successfully weaned itself off tobacco. I was reminded of that last Saturday at Murrayfield, at a game which, incidentally, was the first ever attended by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scotland Office, who is now a convert for life to our great game. It is possible for a sport to move away from its dependence on tobacco. We have some excellent sponsors in rugby league by the name of Kellogg's. The only downside of an excellent day out on Saturday was having to spend the best part of eight hours in a GNER smoking compartment on the train up to Scotland, because that was the only compartment where I could get a seat. I found it frankly impossible, but smoking compartments are getting smaller and smaller and I hope that before too long we will not have any at all.

Richard Ottaway: In the light of what the hon. Gentleman says, does he share the view of Max Mosley of the FIA that there is no reason why a ban on advertising in motor sport should not be introduced without delay?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I certainly believe that there is no justification for not moving in that direction. I felt at the time that the arguments for exempting Formula 1 were questionable; other sports could have made similar arguments. Interestingly, the Health Committee had Mr. Bernie Ecclestone and Mr. Max Mosley as witnesses, and I did not find them particularly convincing. I believe that there are no arguments for not moving away from tobacco sponsorship, as rugby league and other sports have done.

Let me refer briefly, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley did, to the Health Committee inquiry into the tobacco industry that took place in the previous Parliament. It is well known that we were able to obtain documents relating to advertising and marketing that had not previously seen the light of day. There was clear evidence from that information that the voluntary code on advertising was meaningless and long overdue for replacement with something much more robust. Among other things, the voluntary code, requires companies to ensure that

"Smoking should not be associated with social, sexual, romantic or business success . . . advertisements should not link smoking with people who are evidently wealthy, fashionable."

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

It goes on to say:

"Advertisements should . . . avoid employing any approach which is more likely to attract the attention or sympathy of those under the age of 18 . . . no advertisement should exaggerate the pleasure of smoking or claim that it is daring or glamorous to smoke."

We found no explicit evidence that tobacco companies knowingly and deliberately targeted children, but there was plenty of evidence, which can be seen in our report, that they went to great pains to portray smoking as cool and glamorous in a way that was certain to entice youngsters to take it up. For example, the aim of a 1998 CDP/Gallaher promotion was to

"boost Benson and Hedges image with style-conscious 18-24s."

A creative brief for Rothmans suggested:

"we want to engage people's aspirations and fantasies"

so that they think:

"I'd like to be there, do that, own that."

To me, that is in direct contravention of the voluntary code. The all-party Committee concluded that it was difficult to see how this material, intended to engage the fantasies of 18-year-olds, would leave 14 or 15-year-olds unmov[illegible]

I welcome the Bill. One of the great tragedies of our time is seeing youngsters, particularly young girls, take up smoking. I see it happening every day, and I feel profoundly sad because although I smoked at that age, I did not know the consequences of doing so.

I welcome the proposed European Union directive, which is crucial. I also argue strongly, as others have done, that worldwide initiatives are needed as the tobacco companies move increasingly towards poor, third-world countries to find markets for their product. The Bill is a step in the right direction.

As the Health Committee argued, we need to anticipate the tobacco industry's tactics. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras talked about being prepared. The Health Committee felt that there was a need for a tobacco regulatory authority that could anticipate the tactics of the tobacco companies in years to come.

I hope that the Bill is successful and that we can look back and say that we in this Parliament did something that should have been done 50 years ago.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. In the interests of all hon. Members who want to catch my eye, I urge brevity.

7.9 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), whose work on the Select Committee on Health has been instrumental in developing policy on smoking. I hope to touch on some of his points.

I want to make a brief speech that will set out a dissonant, and possibly solitary, view among Conservative Members. I welcome the Bill and hope that it is given a Second Reading. When I spoke in the debate on the Queen's Speech nearly a year ago, I commented on the Government's priorities in finding time to ban foxhunting, but not to ban tobacco advertising. There is simply no comparison in the consequences for society of those two activities. It was absurd for the Government to get into a muddle on that, and I am glad that a private Member's Bill is putting things right.

I am afraid that I cannot support the Opposition amendment. Each time this debate is raised within my party, there is a serious discussion between the libertarians and those committed to public health policy. The right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) touched on an exchange when the Conservatives were in government between Lord Heseltine and the rest of the Administration, which amplified the existence of that debate within the Conservative party. On this issue, I come down firmly on the side of public health.

It is worth reminding the House that important policies, such as the compulsory wearing of crash helmets and seat belts, both of which raised the same moral issues about the freedom of the individual and public health policy as a ban on smoking does, were introduced under a Conservative Government. It was a Conservative Government who consistently allowed the addition of fluoride to the water supply, so my party is not a stranger to such debates, nor does it always come down on the libertarian side as opposed to the public health side.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Wakefield said: when people look back at the development of public health policy in this country, they will be amazed at the time it has taken for us to come to terms with smoking-related diseases. This country led the world in combating water-borne diseases, in tackling poor housing, in developing a clean air policy and in developing and promoting vaccination. Smoking-related diseases, however, have not been tackled effectively by public policy since the early 1960s and the publication of the Royal College of Physicians report.

As a former Health Minister, I am prepared to accept my share of responsibility for that, although we had a strategy for putting the measure on the statute book some 20 years ago. Having said that, it is a little difficult to accept the assertion from a party that has had a majority of more than 160 for five years that it is somehow our fault that the Bill's provisions are not already law.

The debate needs to be put in the broader context of health policy, and in particular of the investment of huge resources in conventional medicine. Last week, I re-read the Secretary of State's speech in the Budget debate and found no mention of preventive medicine, health education or public health. The emphasis was entirely on acute medicine, primary care and social services. I very much hope that some of the huge sums that we debated last week will filter through to public health and to health education and prevention. I also hope that the new primary care trusts will be able to focus on public health, given all the other targets that they have been set.

So far as the investment of money in conventional medicine is concerned, we are reaching the point of diminishing returns. There is widespread concern that the huge investment in acute medicine will not result in corresponding outcomes. The gains in the quality of life that we all want to see are more likely to come from people voluntarily making sensible decisions about their lifestyle.

On the nanny state, as a Conservative I believe that people should voluntarily come to informed decisions about their lifestyle. Rather than telling people what they

should do, I prefer people to want to do it. If people are to make valid decisions about lifestyle, however, they need all the relevant information in front of them to come to a rational decision. The problem with smoking is that if we leave it to the tobacco companies, consumers—especially young consumers—get a one-sided picture. So we either have to balance the commercial budget with a public budget of comparable size, or restrict the commercial budgets and the promotion of a legal, but lethal, product. The first option would be unaffordable. The second has been the policy since television ads were banned in, I think, the 1960s, but it has never been followed through effectively.

The argument that advertising simply promotes brand awareness is strictly for the birds. I remember an advertising executive justifying the huge sums that used to be spent on advertising toothpaste. He told me that advertising promoted not just the brand, but an awareness of oral hygiene. I think he was right. Intuitively, we know that to be the case. We have all seen television advertisements for holidays and thought that the place featured looks nice, but we often do not absorb the name of the tour operator, or we forget it pretty quickly. The image of a nice holiday remains with us, however. Advertising cigarettes creates an aura of legitimacy and acceptability, which is just what the tobacco companies want to create.

I am not a fan of legislation if there is an alternative. I have examined the voluntary agreement and became convinced some 20 years ago that such a policy would never work because the industry would not agree voluntarily to measures that damaged it. I spent many weeks in direct and frustrating negotiations with the Tobacco Advisory Council. At one point, I suggested that the health warning should be printed not just on the cigarette pack, but on each cigarette. I was told that the ink was carcinogenic and might damage the smoker's health. The industry did not fear individual measures such as the increase in duty, the ban on smoking in public places or the health warnings, though it disliked them all heartily; what it minded was the depiction of smoking as an anti-social, uncool and dirty habit, and its advertising is aimed at establishing smoking as acceptable social behaviour.

Some 20 years ago, the then Government had a strategy for introducing a measure such as that set out in the Bill. In 1981, there was going to be a miscellaneous health services Bill with nothing in it about tobacco advertising, but with a long title that was broad enough for an amendment to ban advertising to be in order. That would have been moved as the Bill went through Parliament and the Secretary of State for Health, Lord Jenkin of Roding, and I would have voted for it on a free vote, together with a substantial number of Conservative MPs. I have no doubt that the House would have supported it and the measure would have reached the statute book. However, there was a shuffle of key personnel as the strategy was being developed and the Bill was dropped from the legislative programme, which I very much regret. This Bill gets us back on target.

I do not claim that banning advertising will solve the problem, but together with upward pressure on prices through tax, growing restrictions on smoking in public places and better health promotion and education, it will form part of a solution that may have a bigger impact on public health than the Budget measures we discussed last week.

7.18 pm

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): This is the second time that we have debated such a Bill and I want to address my remarks to the positive effects it will have if it becomes law, especially on tackling the take-up of smoking among young people and on breaking the habit among pregnant women.

The Bill's provisions are crucial for the health and well-being of future generations. If the Bill is enacted, future young adults will become smokers only through informed choice, not through the malign effect of advertising and the disingenuous linking of tobacco products with sporting prowess. Michael Schumacher's Formula 1 supremacy will not be challenged by the forced removal of the corporate tobacco logos that festoon him and his car. If an altruistic tobacco company—if such an oxymoronic concept exists—is sufficiently committed to a particular sport or event, the Bill allows donations from the corporate source as long as there is no reciprocity in the relationship that leads to the promotion of tobacco products.

The tobacco-stained Conservative party has decided, astonishingly, that there is no evidence that a ban would discourage young people, or anyone else for that matter, from taking up smoking. Conservatives seem to be saying, "It can't be banned outright, so it's not worth doing anything about it." Indeed, they have tabled an amendment to that effect. Naturally, that begs the question: why spend hundreds of millions of pounds a year on advertising and promotion if it has no influence at all on the take-up of such an addictive product?

The answer is that there is, of course, a causal link between advertising and smoking prevalence, which has been demonstrated, as previous speakers have made clear, by the drop in the number of smokers following advertising bans in other countries. Finland banned the advertising of tobacco products in 1978, and saw a 34 per cent. drop in consumption. The Norwegians reduced the tobacco-smoking proportion of their population from 40 per cent. in 1975, when a ban was introduced, to 33 per cent. by 1999.

There are several other continental examples, but I suspect that the Conservatives, with their social and cultural antipathy towards Europe, will accept only home-grown examples as valid illustrations of the link between advertising and cigarette consumption. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) said a moment ago, 83 per cent. of the more than 12 million smokers in the UK would not, given their time again, take up smoking because of the knowledge that we now have. According to Action on Smoking and Health, the vast majority of smokers took up smoking in their teenage years. What made them start?

Of course, it is rarely one thing that causes people to take up such a dangerous habit, but it is clear that tobacco advertising and promotion is a factor in obscuring the health risks inherent in tobacco consumption. Young people, quite naturally, are less concerned about mortality and more concerned with image and a projection of adult status as early as possible. Smoking is perceived as one way of achieving that, hence the fact that the vast majority of UK smokers start in their teens. This is an archetypal smoke and mirrors approach by a tobacco industry that obscures the medical facts by stressing the street image, and no matter what is said it is specifically aimed at young people.

[David Taylor]

Although the current voluntary restrictions on advertising in magazines aimed at the early and late teen market are welcome, it is obvious that those are not the only magazines read by people in that age group. Just as smoking is perceived as an adult recreation, so are the magazines that no doubt litter the table of the Conservative Whips Office, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Marie Claire*, *GQ*, *Loaded*, *Viz* and *FHM*, and there is nothing to stop young people flicking through those magazines. The tobacco industry is fully aware of the subversive and anti-authority appeal of smoking, and it exploits that in its advertising. Those who venture to working class suburbs south of the river in London will see billboard adverts by Lambert and Butler that intentionally use puerile humour to promote a product that kills 120,000 people annually.

What I have said should not be taken to suggest that young people are not sophisticated and intelligent—far from it—but society often tells them that they are not, so many young people cannot resist buying into something that is designated as adult, and which cannot be resisted on grounds of obscenity or anything else. Of course, the habit, once established by physical or psychological addiction, will cause damage as long as the person is a committed smoker, which may be many years.

According to the Tobacco Manufacturers Association, tobacco companies advertise for only three reasons: to reinforce brand values and sales to existing smokers to support their continued choice; to invite smokers of competitive brands to switch; and to introduce existing smokers to new brands and new developments in the market. Frankly, however, that is not even half the story. British American Tobacco, Imperial and Gallaher make the vast majority of the 300-plus brands available in the United Kingdom, and their annual aggregate marketing spend has been estimated at more than £120 million, which seems excessive merely to accommodate consumer choice and awareness of the different brands made by the same manufacturer.

There are plenty of examples of the complacent and medically mendacious culture and history of tobacco products that existed before the ban on TV advertising was introduced in 1965, and these should act as a spur to create a political consensus, which I believe is present in the House, although we are reluctant to acknowledge it, to consign to the bin of history the helping hand that advertising gives tobacco.

The American researchers Saffer and Chaloupka, who contributed to the 1999 World Bank report on tobacco consumption, "Curbing the Epidemic", stated after studying data from 22 countries that

"tobacco advertising increases tobacco consumption. The empirical research also shows that comprehensive advertising bans can reduce tobacco consumption . . . A limited set of advertising bans will not reduce the total level of advertising expenditure but will simply result in substitution to the remaining non-banned media."

We need to address that, but it remains to be seen whether we will do so in this Bill or in future legislation. It has implications for the development of the technologies provision of the Bill, and e-commerce in particular.

I say in all honesty to the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), whose work as the first public health Minister in any western European Government all Labour Members admire, that there is a loophole in the Bill that tobacco companies will be quick to exploit once a ban covering all media apart from the internet comes into effect, as I am sure it will. That, I predict, will lead straight to the e-mail accounts of young people in the form of unsolicited junk, or spam, mail because the Bill does not make sufficient demands on internet service providers to monitor content. That is an area to which we will have to return in the near future. We may need separate legislation governing internet content of a prohibited nature; otherwise members of another generation will be beguiled by the same images that created the appalling statistic of 120,000 premature deaths each year.

The current system of self-regulation simply hands the power to the tobacco giants to make token changes and present them as major concessions. The fact that they do not advertise on billboards within 200 yd of a school but simultaneously dismiss the link between advertising and taking up smoking is proof enough that self-policing does not work. Voluntary agreements have been good for the industry but bad for the public. The dubious awareness campaigns indulged in by tobacco companies are cynical exercises in lip service and false concern. In the words of one legal drug baron, the expenditure on schemes to prevent young people from smoking

"will damage us very little."

What of the success of the cessation campaign launched on MTV last April by BAT, Philip Morris and Japan Tobacco? The campaign ran until June, and as yet there has been no move by any of the companies involved to assess and publish its effects on the take-up of smoking by young people, so let me briefly turn to that. In the UK, according to figures released by BAT, the MTV campaign ads were seen at least once by 33 per cent. of 16 to 34-year-olds living in houses that receive MTV and four or more times by 17.7 per cent. That means that two thirds of the target audience did not see the ads at all. Those figures do not account for the fact that only 40 per cent. of UK households receive MTV, so only 13 per cent. of young people in the UK, fewer than one in seven, encountered the campaign once during its life.

Tobacco advertising is particularly prevalent in low-income and high-unemployment areas. Figures from ASH show that, in 2000, 34 per cent. of men and 29 per cent. of women in manual occupations smoked, compared with 23 per cent. of men and 22 per cent. of women in non-manual occupations. There has been a slower decline in smoking among manual groups, so it has become increasingly concentrated in those groups.

The use of marketing strategies promoting relatively low-cost cigarettes that ease the anxiety, embarrassment or perception of inferior quality associated with smoking cheaper cigarettes creates a false solidarity with low-income consumers, whom the tobacco industry increasingly sees as its core customers. The names of the lower price cigarettes—Mayfair, Sovereign, Royals and Richmond—ooze exclusivity and affluence. The concentration and variety of tobacco adverts in working-class areas is further evidence of demographic targeting, and proof that a higher rate of tobacco consumption is a major factor in the statistically poorer health experience of people in those communities.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that 6,000 people in Wales die as a result of

smoking-related illnesses? Given the relative deprivation of Wales compared with the rest of the United Kingdom, does he agree that it is deliberately targeted by advertising promotions?

David Taylor: The appalling conclusion from all the evidence in the public domain is that urban and deprived areas in the UK, including Wales, are specifically targeted. It is not solely the third world that is seen as a market to which tobacco companies can transfer their products as smoking declines among the adult population.

Teenage girls are more likely to take up smoking than their male counterparts. The presumption of sophistication and the perception of cigarettes as a method of keeping weight down are a factor in their starting to smoke, which suggests that our society is sending mixed messages to young women some years off adulthood. Thirty-three per cent. of pregnant women continue to smoke during pregnancy—a figure that increases dramatically to 51 per cent. among pregnant women in low-income households. The Royal College of Midwives says:

"High rates of smoking in pregnancy are prevalent in women from households experiencing unemployment, poverty, poor housing conditions, social isolation and lone parenting."

The high incidence of teenage pregnancies in the UK, combined with the higher incidence of smoking among teenage girls on low incomes, is a major problem that is not helped by misleading tobacco advertisements; the health warnings on cigarette packets specifically targeting pregnant women are obviously not sufficient to tackle the problem. Smoking has dramatic effects on women's reproductive health: ectopic pregnancy, where a foetus develops outside the uterus, is two and a half times more likely; primary and secondary sub-fertility increases; the risk of spontaneous abortion, particularly of normal foetuses, is increased, as is the risk of placental abruption. Foetal health is compromised, with the oxygen supply reduced, the risk of low birth rate doubled, lung function and foetal development affected through the passage of heavy metals—lead and cadmium—and an increase in foetal heart rate.

Cigarettes are wrongly seen as a way of dealing with stress; in fact, they act as a habitual crutch and lead to the storing up of stress. Pregnancy, like life, can be incredibly stressful, as my wife has told me on five or six occasions. Some pregnant women regard cigarettes as a form of personal reward, but the stress of pregnancy is as nothing compared with the stress of a child with behavioural difficulties or the premature loss of a parent.

In conclusion, the Bill is not about puritanical non-smokers dictating the lifestyle habits of a significant minority, but is a call for a halt to the voracious appetite of huge tobacco corporations, which last year made pre-tax profits of about £3 billion from the beguiling effects of advertising and their endless pursuit of higher profits at the expense of people's lives and health. The tobacco industry has more than sufficient residual scope to push its drugs even when the Bill is enacted. It can do so through product placement on television and films, the use of public figures and celebrities, continued advertising in tobacco retailers' premises and supermarket kiosks and the internet loophole, which is the only regrettable aspect of the Bill. With that exception, the Bill is a vital step in improving the nation's health and I commend it to the House.

7.34 pm

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Listening to the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor), who said that brand names portrayed an aura of luxury, I could not help but think of the slogan of Camel cigarettes—"You can with a Camel." I had a vision of Arabs sitting around an oasis thinking, "Oh gosh, this is a life of luxury." I hope that that demonstrates the balderdash that he has been talking for the last few minutes.

I confess that I am in danger of falling into the category of tainted Conservative—tainted by the tobacco industry—as twice in my life I have been closely involved with the city of Nottingham, for which I was proud to be a Member of Parliament from 1983 to 1987. The tobacco industry was the largest employer in the city, and played an important part in the local economy. I am also a graduate of Bristol university. Anyone who knows that university will know that it was built entirely by tobacco money. Indeed, the main building is called the Wills Memorial building. The hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire therefore portrayed the tobacco industry rather unfairly, as it has created jobs, prosperity and opportunity for generations of people for centuries.

David Taylor: Developing the hon. Gentleman's argument a little, one could almost suggest that the occasional philanthropic gestures of slave traders were sufficient to justify their evil activities. His argument does not hold water at all.

Richard Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman is right; the tobacco industry succeeded the slave trade in Bristol, but before we go into the rights and wrongs of Wilberforce and others, we should stick to the principle of debating the Bill.

I support the reasoned amendment. I cannot support the Bill because I am simply not persuaded by Government Members that it will have the effect that they say it will. Listening to today's debate, I could not help but have a sense of deja vu, and was reminded of our foxhunting debates over the years. The argument involves morality versus freedom, and, as a member of the liberal wing of the Conservative party, I favour the case for freedom. It also involves pragmatism versus idealism. There is no easy answer to the problem, although there is in the eyes of the Government—"Ban it"—but I am uncomfortable with such intervention.

Miss Begg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Stoate *rose—*

Richard Ottaway: I am mindful of the Deputy Speaker's request for brevity, so I shall accept one intervention.

Dr. Stoate: Does the hon. Gentleman really believe that tobacco advertising has no effect whatever on the consumption of tobacco? Does he honestly think that young people are not in any way seduced into smoking by advertising?

Richard Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman prejudges my speech. I intend to address both points, if he will bear

[Richard Ottaway]

with me. I share the view that a reduction in the consumption of tobacco is desirable. Unusually, I agreed with 80 per cent. of the trenchant speech made by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), but he was talking about the evils of tobacco, about which few would disagree. The question is whether the Bill will achieve its intended effect. I do not believe that it will. Adults should be free to make an informed choice.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) asked whether tobacco would be banned if it were discovered today. That is a fair question, but I do not think that it would be. The Government are relaxing the rules on cannabis and, in my view, are heading for decriminalisation, which is also favoured by the Liberal Democrats, who support the Bill. It is therefore unlikely that tobacco would be banned if it were discovered today.

John Robertson: If tobacco were discovered today and we were told that it would kill 120,000 people, would we ban it?

Richard Ottaway: I do not know. Let us not get into an argument about cannabis and its dangers. The truth of the matter is that we have to take life as we find it.

At the moment, the ban on tobacco sales to children under 16 is not working because high taxation is driving up smuggling. Twenty-one per cent. of all tobacco sales in this country are illicit, and many are sales to children.

The Government claim that the Bill will result in a 2.5 per cent. reduction in consumption. To be fair to them, the estimates fluctuate between nil and 5 per cent. Earlier today, the figure of 7 per cent. was mentioned. There have been many studies into the effects of legislation of this sort, and in my judgment none is conclusive.

The Smee report was not conclusive. The evidence was incomplete and it was a report of limited scope. There was no proper analysis of the market. It reported a study that found that advertising had no statistical significant effect. In 1993, as I said in an intervention, the author was reported as saying that the report

"made no estimate for the UK"

of the effect of a ban.

The second report, to which the Secretary of State referred in his opening remarks, was that of the World Bank, entitled "Curbing the Epidemic". The report stated that the most effective way of curbing tobacco consumption was through managed price controls. As my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said in his excellent introductory speech, the multi-prong strategy is the most effective. The World Bank report was based on other reports by the same authors, who found that although public health advocates assert that tobacco advertising increases cigarette consumption, there is significant empirical literature that finds little or no effect of tobacco advertising on smokers. That is from the author of the report on which the Secretary of State is relying.

The KPMG report found that in Norway, Iceland, Italy and Finland the trends were not affected by the tobacco advertising ban. Contrary to what has been said, the trend in Norway and Italy, despite bans, remains upwards.

In the UK, in the 25 years up to 1997, consumption fell by 37 per cent. That reduction was based on a voluntary code, which worked. It was better than the compulsory codes that were introduced by many other countries. However, since 1997, consumption has risen. That is because of the increase in prices and the growth in smuggling.

Will the Bill make a difference? Will it reduce smoking among children and teenagers? In its report of 1990, the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys set out a detailed analysis of the characteristics of what makes children smoke. The first characteristic was gender. Women and girls are more likely to smoke than boys. If they have brothers and sisters who smoke, they are more likely to smoke. If they have parents who smoke, they are more likely to smoke. If they are the children of single parents, they are more likely to smoke. Children who leave school earlier than others are more likely to smoke. Those who have less negative vibes about smoking are more likely to smoke.

Given that evidence, I am not necessarily persuaded that advertisements cause people to take up smoking. I recognise that there are some studies that state that they do. However, the tobacco industry says that it is going for brand marketing. It is fighting for its market share. If there is no brand marketing, the UK will see a flood of cheap imports from eastern Europe. I would rather have our low-tar branded products than the camel dung that is likely to come into the UK.

Pete Wishart: Does the hon. Gentleman think that tobacco is the only product throughout the world that is advertised not to increase consumption?

Richard Ottaway: As the Irishman said, "If I were trying to get to there, I would not be starting from here."

There is huge consumption of tobacco throughout the globe. We are debating whether an advertising ban will have an effect on that consumption. Such is the momentum of the tobacco industry round the globe that I do not think that such a ban will make a difference. What is more, I maintain that there is little or no evidence to support the contention.

In a review of all the studies that have been carried out, Colin MacDonald states that there is no evidence in any of the studies to suggest that if advertising were banned, it would make the least difference to the propensity of children to smoke. Of course, stopping children smoking is an aim; it is an objective. It is illegal for children under the age of 16 to smoke. We should be targeting an attempt to limit such children's access to tobacco sales. I would warmly support the requirement that anyone wishing to buy tobacco should be able to prove that he or she is aged 16 or older. We can marry when 16. We can have sexual relations when 16. We should be able to decide whether we are a fit person to smoke cigarettes at the age of 16.

There is rising consumption of tobacco. There are rising sales. Taxes have risen by 5 per cent. above the retail price index over the past five years. During that period, the Government have tried to change behaviour, and a morality tax has not worked.

To introduce the ban that is proposed is a breach of human rights. It is not illegal to manufacture or import tobacco products. It is not illegal to sell such products. It is not illegal to buy and smoke tobacco products. I choose not to smoke, and that is my right. It is a free country and we live in a free society. However, I believe that a tolerant society should respect minority interests.

We are faced with an unprecedented ban. I know that ASH will say that there are other precedents, but there are weaknesses underlying the arguments for them. We are discussing a ban on something that is a legal activity. It is a breach of commercial freedom. It is a breach also of the ability of markets to function. That is the reason why my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) dwelt at length on the EU standstill. It requires a standstill so that it can consider the proposals to ensure that we have a functioning market.

The Bill offends the principle of freedom of speech and reduces personal liberty. It does nothing to help the citizen make his own choice, and nothing to educate the citizen. The Bill is a paternalistic intervention in a personal lifestyle. It claims to protect others and it assumes that others are incapable of making their own choices. I suspect that that is the difference between the two sides of the House.

7.47 pm

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Last week, I went to the funeral of a dear friend of mine, Veronica. None of us knew that she had cancer. We all knew that she smoked. It was obviously an emotional day for me and everyone else who was there. For every 1,000 20-year-old smokers, six will die from motor accidents and 250 will die in middle age from smoking. Another 250 will die later in life. I will do anything and support anything that can help us cut the killer that we are debating, and that is what we must do.

I welcome the Bill, but deplore the fact that it was not enacted before the general election. It is deplorable also that the Opposition are opposing it this evening. Sixty per cent. of people say that there should be a total ban on advertising, including half of all smokers. I did not receive any answer from the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who was really struggling, while speaking from the Opposition Front Bench. He could not explain what individual liberty was being removed by the Bill. I do not think that my friend Veronica would have felt that her freedom was being taken away by a ban on the right of cigarette manufacturers to persuade her earlier in her life to smoke. She would not have thought that that was a ban on her freedom.

On Thursday, I visited Loscoe primary school in my constituency. I went because it had won an achievement award for getting good results as a consequence of its hard work. I did not realise that, as part of Derbyshire's health promoting schools scheme, it had brought in a poet to help the school to write poetry about smoking. Young Ashley Mellors put the effects of smoking as clearly and briefly as one can. His poem read:

"Breath Taker
Lung Destroyer
Skin Blackener
Money Waster
Career Spoiler
Smoke Maker
Heart Shaker
Life Taker".

The school is producing some posters for a local company in the constituency of the Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), a neighbouring constituency. The posters will be made in the factory to try to persuade its workers not to smoke.

A six-year-old girl spoke to me and said, "I'm trying to get my daddy to give up. My mummy's also trying to get him to give up, and he won't." A similar sentiment was expressed by someone slightly older, in the Amber Valley secondary schools year 7 project, who has been desperately trying to throw away his daddy's cigarettes to try to stop him smoking. He said, "I'm very angry. My grandad died last week from smoking."

This is very emotive, but it raises an interesting question. We all agree that we should try to get people to give up smoking. Younger children are antagonistic to smoking, so what happens in the next few years, or even just a year later, that can make those same children take up smoking? I have relatives and friends who were vehemently anti-smoking early on, but took it up later. The question is how that happens.

I was pleased with the support of the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) for the Bill, but disappointed that he thought that the money going to the health service was not going towards public health. One of the big improvements in my area has come from the Amber Valley primary care trust, which has put a great deal of effort into smoking cessation. On Thursday night I went to a smoking cessation clinic in Amber Valley. The group was in the third week of the programme. Members of the group had given up for a week and were recounting all their strategies for making sure that they kept on giving up. I was pleased that most of them agreed to have their photo taken at the end. I thought that it must mean that they were really committed if they were prepared to put themselves on the line in a photo.

One couple there had started smoking at the ages of 12 and 13. She was pregnant. They started when they were a year or two older than the second boy whom I mentioned, and just a few years older than that six-year-old girl. How did that happen? We would save a huge amount of money for the health service if we stopped pregnant women smoking. How much better if we did not have to put in the effort to get them to give up later by stopping them earlier.

What happens to those younger children? That is the dilemma. We know that there has been a big increase in the proportion of 11 to 15-year-olds who smoke. For girls it is even more marked. In 1988, one in five 15-year-olds smoked. Now the figure is one in three. The Amber Valley smoking cessation clinics have had an impressive success rate: from what we know, about 65 per cent. of participants continue to have given up smoking. However, we will not stop youngsters experimenting with tobacco. How will we stop that developing into a habit? How do we prevent them from going through the agony of giving up smoking?

I got a clue when I looked into the secondary school project in my area, which I mentioned earlier. In a theatrical-type exercise, the children are encouraged to think about what makes them smoke. As in "Big Brother", they can go into a video booth and have a private video conversation after the group session and say what they think. A boy in year 7 spoke about why he was getting involved in smoking. Children clearly know intellectually that it is not cool to smoke, but they still feel that it is.

[Judy Mallaber]

In the truth booth he said that he had not smoked and that he thought that it was dangerous and stupid. Then he paused for some time and said, "But I do think I'll smoke when I'm older and I don't know why." He seemed to have gone into his own thought world and he continued, "Yes. It's been bugging me, that."

That boy is in a state of vulnerability and confusion which make him susceptible to advertising campaigns. That is when advertising can add to the problem and perhaps make him take up smoking. He thinks that he will, but he does not know why. In the secondary school project, the children set out a range of factors that might lead them to want to take up smoking. Many of those related to peer pressure, family pressure, the image of smoking as cool and attractive, and the desire to lose weight. Many of those factors can be influenced by advertising. I am not saying that that is the only influence, but it is a potentially important one.

I am not suggesting that putting all our effort into controlling advertising will work, but an industry would not spend all that money on advertising if it did not have an effect. The brands that are advertised the most are those that are smoked the most, especially by children. It could be argued that that proves what the tobacco companies claim—that their advertising is designed simply to make people switch brands, not to entice new groups into smoking. However, one has only to read the string of quotations from tobacco companies to know that that is nonsense, and that for decades they have exerted deliberate pressure on young people to take up smoking. The quotes are endless. For example, one states:

> "Evidence is now available to indicate that the 14-to-18-year-old group is an increasing segment of the smoking population. RJR must soon establish a successful new brand in this market if our position in the industry is to be maintained over the long term."

That was written in 1976, and there have been quotes ever since from all the companies that show that they deliberately targeted young people. That is where their market is, as has been pointed out by a number of speakers.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Surely it is disingenuous for anyone to argue that advertising does not entice young people into smoking. Of course it does. That is simple common sense. Does the hon. Lady agree that it would be irresponsible for parents to encourage their child to smoke? Does it not follow that all parents should welcome any measure that the House can take to help them stop their children smoking?

Judy Mallaber: I entirely agree. As we know, one of the major factors in whether people smoke is whether their parents smoke. I was lucky. For some reason, the people with whom I went round in my teens did not smoke very much. My mother did not smoke; my father did. He smoked a pipe most of the time and gave it up when he had his first stroke. Because I did not have the family pressure or the peer pressure, I probably was not as vulnerable to the advertising images that feed into those factors.

I agree that if the parents did not smoke, the children would be less likely to do so. If the parents discourage smoking, that may help, but there are other pressures on children that present smoking as fashionable and as something that they ought to try. The pressures on young people are maintained, despite what their parents say.

I do not want to overstay my time, but there is plenty of evidence of very young children's awareness of brands and of the tobacco companies' advertising. The Camel cartoon character is better known by four to six-year-olds in America than Mickey Mouse. It seems extraordinary, but that is what the evidence shows. We know that young children are susceptible, and that advertising can make a difference.

There are various studies of the effect of advertising but, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out, the overwhelming majority of surveys show that there is a substantial relationship with advertising. Seventy per cent. of smokers want to give it up. Surely we should help them not to get into that awful addiction in the first place and do everything that we can to stop it. We all have friends and relatives who have suffered from that terrible disease.

I have many constituents who are former miners, who have been struggling to get compensation for lung diseases. We get them their compensation, then it is dramatically reduced because of the liability arising from the fact that they have been smokers most of their lives. For members of that generation, it was normal to smoke. It would have been surprising if they had not smoked. For goodness' sake, let us do anything that we can which will help at all, even if not in a massive way, to stop the next generation of young people experiencing the same problems as people of our generation and previous generations. Let us support the Bill and try to stop that happening.

7.59 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I should like to begin by declaring an interest similar to the one mentioned by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), as I am a member of the Lords and Commons pipe and cigar smokers club, which is supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I have also accepted hospitality from the Tobacco Manufacturers Association, as declared in the Register of Members' Interests. Unlike my hon. and learned Friend, however, I was not invited to write an article for *The Guardian* on that subject.

I agreed with a considerable amount of what the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) said about why young people take up smoking. She had some very intelligent ideas about that, but she concluded by saying that young people could be influenced by advertising. That gets to the nub of what the Opposition are talking about. We do not believe—at least, I do not believe—that it is right to take away an important liberty on the basis of evidence as inconclusive as that which she gave about how people can be influenced.

I say to the House that it is very easy to nod a Bill through Parliament to ban an activity that is considered antisocial by many hon. Members. Indeed, that has often happened under the current Government, who like to interfere in people's lifestyles. However, once a freedom or liberty is taken away, it is extremely hard to get it back. That is why it is essential that the House examine in detail any move to restrict personal liberty and freedom. That is

what we should be doing, and we should not be blinded by the prejudice and dislike that so many Labour Members have shown in this debate.

Judy Mallaber: Will the hon. Gentleman tell me—I have not yet had an answer to this question—which individual liberty is removed by the Bill, as opposed to the liberty of the tobacco manufacturers to influence the individual? Which individual liberty does the Bill take away?

Mr. Atkinson: The answer is simple and is summed up by freedom of speech. If the hon. Lady wants a better example, she might look at article 10 of the European convention on human rights, which states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers".

That is what the Bill proposes to limit.

Pete Wishart: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman out. Is he referring to the individual liberty of tobacco manufacturers?

Mr. Atkinson: Tobacco manufacturers have precisely the same right to individual liberty as anyone else, including the hon. Gentleman and me. The Bill does indeed interfere with a legitimate business activity: the advertising and promotion of a lawfully available product. In that sense, it is an extremely serious measure. However, it also interferes with my right to receive information that tobacco companies might want to send me and with my right to privacy in my correspondence. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) spoke about legislation on motor cycle helmets and safety belts. Certainly, I can see that that legislation was necessary and ultimately sensible, but it interfered with personal liberty far less than this Bill seeks to do.

Dr. Evan Harris: I should like to ask the hon. Gentleman the same question as I asked the Conservative spokesman. Although I disagree with him on this issue, I agree with him and other Conservatives about people's right to go about their business with regard to foxhunting, for example. Can he explain his position on restricting the liberties of consenting adults on what they do in the bedroom, where no harm is caused? He could advance his arguments with far greater conviction if he at least recognised their inconsistency, or preferably spoke more consistently.

Mr. Atkinson: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for foxhunting. I hope that he will join me in the Lobby when the time comes. As a matter of interest, I say to him that what people do in their bedrooms is of no concern to me. If I am considered to be on the libertarian wing of my party, I am pleased about that; indeed, it explains why I object to the Bill.

There is a mystery about the Bill, as it was not announced in the Queen's Speech. A Bill of considerable significance in terms of the freedom of individuals has come to the House as a private Member's Bill promoted by a Liberal peer in the House of Lords. If the Government had wanted such a measure, they should have stated their aims and objectives in the Queen's Speech and introduced their own Bill, so we could have followed all the procedures in this House. When we had dealt with it, it could then have passed through the public Bill process in the House of Lords, and not been dealt with as a private Member's Bill on a Friday.

It would have been much more honest for the Government to have taken that approach. Of course, they had no intention of introducing such a Bill, but were suddenly put under pressure—perhaps in order to fulfil one of the manifesto promises that they made in 1997 but would rather have forgotten—as they realise that such a Bill could upset 15 million smokers in this country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) asked why people advertised. The answer is that tobacco consumption in this country is declining. It increased recently, for reasons that I shall mention later, but it has fallen considerably overall since 1971. The companies therefore need to advertise in order to maintain a share of a diminishing market. That is what drives them, not a desire to increase the market.

Bob Spink: Surely the market is not declining among young people. It should be our aim to stop young people taking up smoking, which is what advertising encourages them to do.

Mr. Atkinson: I agree that the recent problem is the increase in the number of young people who smoke. The increase in other parts of society, such as among manual workers and those on lower incomes, has also been referred to. Much of that increase, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) and others, relates to the smuggling of tobacco.

The right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) said how well the Government had done in controlling and reducing the amount of cigarettes smuggled into this country, but that is patent nonsense. Of course the number of confiscated cigarettes has increased, but that is because the country is being swamped—I hope hon. Members will forgive me for using that word—by an ever increasing amount of illegal tobacco. It is not being brought into the country by white van man at Dover, but is transported in containers through major ports. If people want to know whether the Government have been successful in their prosecution of smugglers, they should consider the price of cigarettes on the streets, which is about £2, whereas previously it was slightly more, at £2.50, which suggests that suppliers of bootleg cigarettes are plentiful. That probably explains to some extent why young people are smoking. They have to pay, not more than £4 a pack, but £2 or £2.50, which only encourages them to smoke.

The House will clearly nod the Bill through, but by doing so, it will do a considerable disservice to the freedom of individuals—not only tobacco companies, but all of us. If we continue with the measure, we will be failing as a Parliament to stand up for individual freedoms and rights. That is why I shall support the reasoned amendment.

8.7 pm

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): I welcome the Bill. I spoke on Second Reading of the Bill that was introduced in January 2001, and nothing that I

[Mr. Adrian Bailey]

have heard or seen since has persuaded me that the comments that I made in that debate were anything but correct.

Many contributions have been made. I found incredible the logic that the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) used in trying to adopt some sort of philosophical rationale for opposing the Bill. It is odd that he seems to find it acceptable to introduce legislation designed to prevent tobacconists and retailers from selling tobacco products to children under 16, but also to support tobacco manufacturers' advertising that is designed to seduce such children into buying cigarettes and tobacco products illegally. We must be aware that the evidence that has been given by a number of speakers on the basis of documents produced by the tobacco manufacturers themselves makes it clear beyond all doubt that the manufacturers promote their advertising in a way that is designed to get young children who are under 16 to buy tobacco products.

Many statistics have been cited. Some 330 people a day are killed by cigarettes. That in itself does not convey the wider damage done by cigarette smoking—the reduced quality of life that people suffer as a result. One has only to hear the hacking coughs on the trains in the morning. Those people are trapped in a nicotine hell, and they want to get out. In addition, there is the suffering of people who do not smoke cigarettes, and have never wanted to, but are trapped in enclosed spaces with those who do. That has done great damage, and continues to do so. Asthma has increased, and the whole range of health statistics clearly demonstrates that respiratory illnesses are increasing as a result of active and passive tobacco smoking.

There has been much dispute about the number of deaths that the Bill will prevent, but even under the fairly low estimate given by the Government—I think that they deliberately pitched it low, at 2.5 per cent.—3,000 more deaths a year will be prevented. Bodies such as the World Health Organisation have produced estimates of 7 per cent., which would more than double that number. It has been estimated that in my local authority of Sandwell, 672 people a year die as a result of smoking, so 2.5 per cent. would represent only 17 people. However, if I were to stand here and oppose a measure that would prevent the deaths of 17 people in my local borough, I would rightly be heavily criticised. I cannot understand the logic of Conservative Members who are doing just that, given that people in their constituencies will live longer as a consequence of the Bill.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I am following the hon. Gentleman's arguments closely. He will be aware of a report published in 1996 which surveyed four countries that had introduced an advertising ban, two of which subsequently experienced an increase in smoking. How does he account for that?

Mr. Bailey: The Smee report, which detailed death rates after advertising bans had been introduced in Norway, Finland, France and New Zealand, clearly demonstrates that the Bill will be very effective as part and parcel of a package of measures. I welcome it as part of the Government's anti-smoking drive and have every confidence that it will be effective. I could mention one or two other measures that should have been included in the Bill, but I shall try to take a disciplined approach to the debate.

A local smoking cessation policy in my area has weaned about 1,000 people off smoking for a year. My local health authority estimates that the cost of so doing was £700 per person. By contrast, the cost of clinical intervention to deal with people who are trying to give up smoking or suffering the consequences averages £17,000 per person. So the taxpayer pays either £700 to wean someone off smoking in the first place or an average of £17,000 when they have reached such a state that clinical intervention is required. Such policies not only enhance the lives of individuals but save money for the taxpayer.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) said clearly and decisively, in contradiction of the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, that advertising pays and that tobacco companies would not spend money on advertising if it were not effective. My personal experience of rearing a stepson, and seeing his and his friends' attitudes to smoking, suggests that advertising is a very effective way of weaning people who were opposed to smoking when younger on to smoking once they are older, and who find that the social pressures on them to do so are so overwhelming that they are compelled to conform to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) gave an eloquent and informative discourse on those pressures. My son and his friends were completely opposed to smoking when they played in football and rugby teams as young lads. Then, when they got a bit older, they became part of wider social circle and gradually succumbed to the seductive lure of the odd cigarette. Some of them are now addicted—they have entered that tobacco-lined death row that cigarette manufacturers offer everybody.

Young people succumb because it seems to be cool behaviour. It is an easy way to appear to be an adult among their peers that requires no great sophisticated skills—all they need do is succumb to the proffered cigarette. If they become addicted, they will reckon that they probably have 30 years before having to face the consequences. Eighteen-year-olds tend to feel indestructible, and the threat of cancer in 30 years' time seems a far distant penalty for something that enables them to be cool and acceptable.

I approve the measures in the Bill to end sports sponsorship. I have always thought it ironic that sportsmen—icons who are looked upon by many teenagers as the epitome of fit athletes—can find themselves willingly or unwillingly having to promote a product that is intrinsically unhealthy and damaging compared with the sports in which they participate. Hon. Members have talked about freedom. The Bill will enhance athletes' freedom to avoid becoming involved in that situation. The measures are especially welcome in relation to Formula 1 racing. There is no doubt that young lads see motor racing as a glamorous and cool sport, and its association with cigarettes and tobacco is highly effective in promoting the acceptance of smoking among that group.

I welcome the Bill above all for doing something that I did not at first appreciate, but have gradually become more aware of. It is another step towards making smoking non-normal and non-acceptable. Sometimes I go into public buildings and see people disregarding "no

smoking" signs with total impunity. If one protests or asks the management to do something about it, one is almost made out to be in the wrong, yet all one is doing is upholding the regulations of that place, which make it acceptable to everyone else. Tobacco advertising billboards convey the impression that smoking is a normal part of life. It is, for 28 per cent. of the public, but most people do not want it to be. Even some of those who make up that percentage do not want to smoke. By banning adverts, we remove an element of the social geography that conveys that smoking is normal.

The Bill alone will not be hugely successful. *[Laughter.]* It will make an impact on the 17 people in my borough who will live as a result of it. For them, it will be profoundly successful. Conservative Members laugh, but the measure will prove important for families who will not have to watch their loved ones die a painful, unpleasant death from smoking. It ill behoves hon. Members to make mocking and cynical comments.

The statistical difference that the measure will make is marginal but significant. It is part and parcel of a process that will make smoking less acceptable and thereby gradually transform people's social habits. We hope that it will change people's quality of life and health and also benefit the Exchequer. I therefore support its Second Reading.

8.21 pm

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): We in the SNP and Plaid Cymru warmly welcome Second Reading. We agree with the Government's contention that if the Bill is adopted, it will significantly reduce smoking-related disease, illness and death. We have long argued for a rigorous tobacco advertising ban that covers everything including billboards, the internet, brand-stretching and sports sponsorship. However, for it to be successful, it must work in tandem with a general anti-smoking policy. Although we are relatively satisfied with the progress that the Government have made since "Smoking Kills", we remain worried about the levelling off of the number of people who stop smoking and the increase in smoking among young women and girls, which several other hon. Members have mentioned.

Like other hon. Members, we have examined the experience of other countries, especially those where partial bans or voluntary agreements exist. We remain disappointed by the rate of the fall in tobacco consumption there because we found that tobacco companies simply switch from banned media to non-banned media. We prefer the examples that the Secretary of State and other hon. Members gave of Finland, Norway, Canada and France where there is a total, all-encompassing ban, which has led to a fall in consumption of between 15 per cent. and 34 per cent. We therefore encourage the Government to continue to be rigorous and to introduce an all-encompassing ban.

The Bill must be perceived as a process, not a one-off event. There is no doubt that tobacco advertisers will try to challenge the measure and push it to its limits. They are in an industry that loses a significant amount of consumers every day through a smoking-related illness, or a combination of them, and they therefore do all that they can to find new recruits. We must remain vigilant and if necessary re-examine the measure.

I pay tribute to Lord Clement-Jones for persevering with his Bill in the other place. We should also be generous and congratulate Nicola Sturgeon and her colleagues in the Scottish Parliament on promoting a similar Bill.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Before the hon. Gentleman goes off on the normal SNP trip, does he accept that the House of Commons is the place to legislate for United Kingdom bans, and that we must focus on Europe to gain the strength of the European Union behind any measure to change people's view of smoking? It is a waste of the Scottish Parliament's time to deal with a subject that is not devolved.

Pete Wishart: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, with which I agree. Of course, a UK-wide, and indeed, a Europe-wide ban would be more effective. Nicola Sturgeon promoted her private Member's Bill when the Government appeared to be prevaricating on the issue, and there was no mention of it in the Queen's Speech. Perhaps that was impatience on our part and the Government always intended to introduce the Bill. However, I contend that we would not be debating Second Reading if it were not for the efforts of people such as Lord Clement-Jones and Nicola Sturgeon and her colleagues in the Scottish Parliament. Although we have withdrawn that Bill in the Scottish Parliament, it remains on the table in case the Government prevaricate again, or Conservative Members have their way, which is unlikely.

Having such a Bill considered in the Scottish Parliament has given us a clear picture of the state of smoking in Scotland, which has an especially atrocious record on incidence and smoking-related disease and illness. We were shown the role that advertising plays in that.

In Scotland, more than 1 million people smoke—almost a third of the adult population. A Scottish health survey showed that 13,000 people a year die through smoking. In Glasgow, 37.5 per cent. of people smoke. That proportion rises to approximately 50 per cent. in areas of poverty and social deprivation. In Scotland, our tobacco problems may be more acute because of the high levels of poverty and social deprivation, especially in west-central Scotland. In disadvantaged communities, smoking can be a majority, and hence a sociable activity.

It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that, despite the Chancellor's best efforts to try to tax cigarettes and put them beyond the easy reach of our poorer communities, tobacco remains a protected and necessary purchase even in times of financial hardship. That is a major dilemma for the tobacco industry. On the one hand, its product is expensive. If it were reintroduced, it would probably be classified as a luxury item. On the other hand, the core market—the people to whom it needs to sell cigarettes—is made up of the poor and the socially deprived.

The industry has come up with many ingenious ways in which to deal with that problem. It uses all manner of cheap gimmicks to try to ensure that there is no embarrassment about buying cheaper products. In the written media, premium brands are inevitably advertised in broadsheets and style magazines, while cheaper cigarettes are always advertised in the tabloids.

Tobacco advertisers specifically target the most socially deprived.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Is not the hon. Gentleman advancing the argument that the tobacco manufacturers are advertising to win or maintain brand share? My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) advanced precisely the same argument earlier, but the hon. Gentleman appeared to disagree with it.

Pete Wishart: As I said to the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), if he was right, the tobacco industry must be the only one that would try to advertise without trying to increase consumption. That is unfeasible.

John Robertson: Perhaps I can assist the hon. Gentleman. People keep dying and they have to be replaced only to mark time. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) is therefore right in his way, but so is the hon. Gentleman. People are dying and the tobacco advertisers have to get the young to take their place.

Pete Wishart: I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman. The tobacco industry needs a massive recruitment programme to make up for the natural wastage that occurs through smoking-related diseases.

The tobacco industry targets the socially deprived and the poor. The excellent "Keep Smiling; No One's Going to Die" survey examined documents from five of the agencies that have advertising accounts with tobacco companies. It found an appalling cynicism and many attempts to flout the rules. It also discovered that the industry had no great concern for the health and well-being of its consumers or potential consumers. It was worried only about minimising health concerns. Regulation was there to be challenged. It found that the poor could be reached by all manner of gimmicks and cheap promotions and making sure that people were comfortable with cheaper brands. That fits with the general aims of tobacco advertisers.

The aims of tobacco advertising are threefold: first, the recruitment of young smokers; secondly, rallying the troops to encourage adult smokers to ignore the health risks of tobacco and continue to smoke; thirdly, encouraging people who have already quit smoking to lapse. Perhaps the last point is the most cynical because people who stop smoking at any point can gain significant health benefits.

However, hon. Members on both sides of the argument are worried about young people. I believe that they are more vulnerable to the pernicious advertising of the tobacco industry. I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber), who remains in her place.

It is easy to persuade a 10-year-old not to smoke. Young children can be pious about smoking. My 10-year-old son will recoil at the thought of someone lighting up and quote chapter and verse about why it is not good for you. It is quite easy to convince someone in their early 20s not to smoke. Life experience dictates that it does not make much sense to take up something that will clearly curtail one's life and might lead to any number of diseases. It is a lot more difficult to convince teenagers not to smoke. That is the target group that concerns me most. I worked voluntarily with a national agency that tried to promote healthy lifestyles among young people. We always found that "healthy" had to vie with "cool", and that there was inevitably tension among young people between what adult society said was good for them and youthful experimentation.

Almost all new smokers begin before their 18th birthday. The literature shows that young people's smoking behaviour is linked with their awareness, and that they pay significantly more attention to tobacco advertising. The tobacco industry knows that. It also knows that if it does not get its new recruits before they reach their early 20s, it will not get them at all. Young people are also confused by the mixed messages from adult society, which can appear hypocritical. They are told not to smoke, and that smoking may eventually kill them, yet there are adverts everywhere, as though tobacco were some benign domestic product.

Several hon. Members have talked about their own experiences, and their relationship with the dreaded weed. I shall briefly mention mine. I started smoking as a teenager. I played in rock bands for 20-odd years and smoking was what people did. I wanted to emulate my heroes, as did all my peers. Sometimes role models do not behave like model citizens. Sometimes they do not do what we want them to do, and a celebrity with a fag in his or her hand is worth more than a thousand billboard adverts to the tobacco industry.

Dr. Evan Harris: On that point, does the hon. Gentleman agree that we are fighting a continuous battle for the hearts and minds of young people? The fact that this country spends £13 million on health promotion in relation to tobacco while the industry spends £130 million helping to flog it shows the tenfold discrepancy between the efforts that we are making in public health and the efforts that the industry is making to sell its product.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. A similar analogy has been drawn using another example, which is that it is like putting a baby in to fight Mike Tyson. We just do not stand a chance when we try to put the message across. We are always going to be at a disadvantage, when we consider the amounts of money that the tobacco industry has available.

If there is one aspect of the Bill with which I am disappointed, it relates to celebrities and promotion. I would like the Bill to have more to do with product placement, especially in films and dramas. The regulations could also be tightened up for television, where celebrities and personalities can appear willy-nilly in normal television programmes smoking cigarettes or freely and frankly discussing their tobacco use. Overall, however, I support the Government on this measure. This is a very good Bill and it will go some way to reducing the amount of smoking-related diseases and deaths.

8.32 pm

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): By this time of night, it is quite difficult to say anything that other speakers have not already said. I pay tribute to the many Labour Members who have explained, more eloquently than I could, why it is important that this Bill should be on the statute book. I, too, reckon that it is an important Bill. I have detected some confusion, however, from the official Opposition—I call them that so that Liberal

Democrat and SNP colleagues do not think that I am including them—as to whether the Bill is important. The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) said that it was important, but that we were just going to nod it through tonight. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is a great deal of passion about the importance of the Bill on this side of the House. I was astonished to hear that the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) thought that the Bill was a diversion, and more than one Conservative speaker has linked it to the hunting Bill, suggesting that both were somehow unimportant and a waste of the House's time. I find that incredible.

I can understand that some Conservative Members who are well-known smokers would not have received the kind of lobbying and information that I did. The Bill was not originally in the Queen's Speech. Almost every cancer charity and organisation working in the field of public health has written to us in the most graphic terms, giving the most detailed arguments as to why this is a very important piece of legislation. They reckon that it will save 3,000 lives each year in Britain—300 in Scotland—and that an additional 830 people a year in Scotland will not be admitted to hospital if the measure becomes law.

As I said, I can believe that some Conservative Back-Benchers who are well-known smokers would not have been sent that information. I cannot, however, believe that the Opposition spokesman on health, the hon. Member for Woodspring, was not deluged with the same information that I and other Labour Members were sent. For him to have ignored it is irresponsible and a real disappointment. I had always thought better of him, and I have to agree with some of my hon. Friends who suggested that he was struggling to make his points. In fact, I do not think that he necessarily believed many of the points that he made.

The hon. Gentleman's argument seemed to rest on the premise that, because banning advertising would not stop everybody smoking, it was not a valuable thing to do. Of course, if tobacco advertising were banned tomorrow, everyone would not stop smoking. I would love it if they did, but that is not going to happen. There is no doubt, however, that if we ban tobacco advertising, we shall take away the oxygen of publicity—and respectability—from the tobacco manufacturers.

We are sending out a clear message to young people that society does not think that tobacco can be advertised in the way that other household products are. It is a dangerous product; it kills people, and the advertising of it should be banned. I have to say that I would probably ban smoking as well, but that proposal is not before the House tonight. Perhaps my attitude to that is rather more Stalinist than that of some other hon. Members.

This measure has to be part of the wider endeavour by the Government and—I accept—the Opposition to ensure that people cut their tobacco consumption. During his speech, I intervened on the hon. Member for Woodspring to ask him a question about tobacco smuggling. He seemed to suggest that the prevalence of smoking in young girls had gone up because of an increase in tobacco smuggling, which made tobacco more cheaply available. Perhaps people are encouraged to smoke more when tobacco is cheaper. I was very specific in my question to the hon. Gentleman, asking whether he was referring only to younger teenage girls of 13, 14 or 15 years old. If that group is taking up smoking at a far greater rate than any other group, it cannot be only because the incidence of smuggling has gone up.

Before I was elected to this place, I was a secondary school teacher. One of my great concerns at the time—this was long before the Labour Government came into power—was that that specific group of young teenage girls was being sucked into taking up smoking for the first time. As a lot of Members have said, once people start smoking it is difficult to give up. In fact, the best way to stop is not to start in the first place. As the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) and, very poignantly, my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) said, advertising does its wicked best when youngsters are most vulnerable, encouraging young girls in particular to take up smoking.

Why do young girls start? There are a number of myths going round as to what smoking can do. Young girls believe that they will lose weight—perhaps their appetite will be suppressed, so they will eat less—but that is based on a fallacy. The other big fallacy among the young girls I taught was their belief that smoking reduces stress. They did not always believe me when I explained that they were feeling stress because they smoked; they had withdrawal symptoms because the substance is very addictive. Had they not started smoking, they would not have been under that stress at all.

Young girls are often vulnerable when they go into their first set of exams; my niece is taking her standard grade exams next week. At that stage, 15-year-old girls take up smoking—an image is created by smoking, advertising and product placement involving models, and they are susceptible to taking on and believing those messages.

Of course, young girls also think that smoking is cool. I pay tribute to the Health Education Board for Scotland advertisements, which have been effective in encouraging young teenage girls not to take up smoking. A song plays over the group of young girls who are trying to chase the boys—it says, "Why do you keep running from me, boy?"—but the girls cannot keep up because smoking has left them with no breath. Those advertisements have turned on its head the image of the cool, sexy smoker who attracts the boys. In fact, smoking often drives them away.

A number of Members have said that the tobacco industry spends 10 times more on promotion than the Government spend on preventing tobacco use. Conservative Members say that they want an informed choice, but how can that choice be informed when 10 times more is spent on promoting tobacco through advertising than is spent by either the Government agencies or the other agencies working on smoking cessation?

I pay tribute to the Bill's prohibition of free distribution, which has not been mentioned. I was horrified to discover that a tobacco company gave away cigarettes during a recent freshers' week at a local university. That was outrageous, and I am glad that such promotion is to be outlawed.

I hope that Nicola Sturgeon introduced her Bill to the Scottish Parliament for the best of reasons, but I suspect that political expediency may have been involved, as nothing would be dafter than banning tobacco advertising in Scotland without banning it in England and Wales. How on earth could we prevent glossy magazines

[Miss Anne Begg]

carrying tobacco advertising from being sold in Scottish newsagents? That Bill was nonsensical, but I am glad that the Scottish National party is supporting the Government tonight, and quite right too.

A ban on tobacco advertising is not the whole story, but it is an important step that will help those who want to give up this evil habit. I encourage all Members to support the Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Several Members hope to catch my eye. If contributions are brief, more may succeed.

8.43 pm

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): I apologise for not being present during all the opening speeches. I was requested to be elsewhere. I also draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests.

John Robertson: Which is?

Mr. Flook: As Labour Members want to know, I worked for a company that has since been taken over by an advertising company.

Mr. Connarty: Does it still pay you?

Mr. Flook: It might well do; that is in the register. More interestingly, I was a heavy smoker—up to 30 fags a day for 13 years—but I quit because of the damage that I know smoking does to the liver as opposed to just the lungs. My uncle, prior to his death, was a heavy smoker and a non-occasional drinker; people cannot be both. Being the son of a wine merchant, I thought it wise to do my bit to repay my father's generosity, so I decided to give up smoking a few years ago. I do not have the zealotry of the convert, however, even though the subject is extremely emotive. I was impressed by the strong emotions displayed by the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron).

I looked at all the information before the debate, and a number of figures have been bandied around. In particular, I received a briefing note from ASH, which means Action on Smoking and Health. At first glance, it makes strong arguments for the Bill, especially with reference to low-cost and effective health measures. Closer reading, however, reveals a number of hoary old chestnuts. Apparently, banning advertising would stop children being encouraged to smoke; it would persuade smokers to quit; where advertising bans have been introduced, they have led to a fall in consumption. The Government have said that, in their view, a ban would reduce consumption by 2.5 per cent., and that the voluntary restrictions have failed.

I am sorry to say that I am not sure we can trust the well-intentioned but poorly presented information provided by organisations such as ASH. ASH says that advertising encourages children to smoke, but a tough voluntary agreement has existed for some years, and it was peer pressure rather than the much flashier ads of the 1970s that forced me to take up smoking. I was allowed to smoke in the sixth form, for instance. I smoked Gauloises. I had a Saturday job, I could afford to buy cigarettes, and I got fed up with handing them out to others. Interestingly, they did not want to smoke Gauloises, and consequently I was the one who did not have to hand out the cigarettes.

We took up smoking to cock a snook at authority. Getting rid of advertising will not make the slightest difference in that regard. The smuggling of cheap cigarettes is more likely to make kids continue to smoke.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): The hon. Gentleman may have been a heavy smoker, smoking 30 a day. I used to smoke 80 a day. If there is a risk that advertising will create just one smoker, would it not be useful to ban it in order to save that one life?

Mr. Flook: As I have said, ASH thinks that advertising encourages children to smoke. The cigarette advertising companies have said that they will not advertise to those children—*[Interruption.]* Let me put it another way. A voluntary agreement has been reached by Ministers. Why have they repeatedly refused to listen to the advertising companies and the tobacco manufacturers when they have approached them since 1997 asking them to toughen up their own voluntary restrictions?

Mr. Bailey: I worked in the advertising industry. Can the hon. Gentleman explain how an advertisement can be produced that appeals to those over 18 and not to those under 18?

Mr. Flook: I do not know why the hon. Gentleman is concentrating on the age of 18. As was said earlier, at the age of 16 it is possible to marry—to choose the person with whom you will live for the rest of your life. Should it not be possible for people to decide voluntarily at that age whether to smoke?

Labour Members often quote statistics, but one fact we have not heard is that it is possible to smoke until the age of 30, then give up and suffer no long-term health consequences. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members may not agree with that; I do not agree with the facts and figures that they have bandied about.

ASH says that where advertising has been banned, consumption has fallen. In Italy, it has continued to rise during the 20 years following a ban. In Norway, it has increased in line with the pre-ban trend. The situation in Canada is interesting. Between 1989 and 1995, when the supreme court kicked the ban out, consumption remained steady, just as it had been before. In this country, where there has been a voluntary agreement, consumption has declined faster than it has in any other country I know of.

Dr. Evan Harris: Does the hon. Gentleman's argument allow for the possibility that the pattern of consumption, whether it rises or falls, is a complex issue affected by many factors, and that the presence or absence of an advertising ban may reduce the rate of increase in consumption where it might otherwise have been greater, or increase the rate of reduction where it might otherwise have been less? Does the hon. Gentleman accept that

several factors may be involved? According to evidence from reviews, an advertising ban would be at least a contributing factor.

Mr. Flook: Considering the time left to me and the fact that my hon. Friends and others wish to speak, perhaps we could continue that discussion elsewhere, probably over a cigar.

The adoption of Lord Clement-Jones's Bill reinforces the view of where the Government and, I am afraid, some of my hon. Friends are coming from. Individuals are never grown up enough in the eyes of some to be able to look after themselves. I find it unfortunate that the Bill will lead to increased censorship, enhance red tape and restrict freedom to make one's own decisions. It will not reduce smuggling, lessen smoking by children or lower total consumption.

8.50 pm

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): I am delighted to participate in the debate. Like many Conservative Members, I wish to register my own interest: when I was younger than 16, I was a smoker. To this day, I have never admitted it to my family. *[Interruption.]* I expect that they are not listening and watching this evening. My mother and father would not be very happy.

I have no idea why I took up smoking. I think it had more to do with the music that I listened to and the image I wished to identify with. I caught the tail end of the punk era. I was keen on ska music. As part of that overall image, smoking was de rigueur. I then became a new romantic. Smoking did not go with pastel pinks or pastel yellows. I took up smoking as a teenager and ended smoking while still a teenager. It was to do with my warped sense of fashion at that time.

We have rightly heard that smoking kills 120,000 people a year in this country. Everyone has tried to break the figure down, but to give it some relevance, during this debate, 80 people have died from smoking or a smoking-related illness in this country. To an extent, that puts the figure into perspective.

There has been a debate across the House about the role of advertising. I may be wrong, but I do not believe that the primary role of advertising tobacco products is to maintain existing smokers as smokers. Advertising does no harm in terms of maintaining them as smokers, but I do not think that the primary role of advertising is to keep smokers smoking or to increase their level of smoking. I believe that the primary role of advertising is to grow a new generation of smokers. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) and others have said why: the tobacco industry kills 120,000 people a year. The role of any market is to find new customers. It kills 120,000 customers; it has to create some more. Advertising performs that role simply to feed the conveyor belt of addiction.

The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) made a number of points based on voodoo health. In response to his point about tough self-regulatory measures, like everyone, I hope, in the debate, I took time to read the self-regulatory measures that have been signed up to. I quote from those:

"Advertisements should never suggest that smoking is safe, healthy, natural, necessary for relaxation or concentration, or popular."

Almost every advert that I have seen conjures up images of at least three of those. I have never seen an advert that has said, "Smoking this cigarette is dangerous, deadly, unnatural and antisocial." Not once have I seen an advert for a cigarette or tobacco product that describes what the product is or what it does to the person. Instead, advertising tries to tap into the vain, desperate desire for fashion, trends and coolness.

I am delighted that the Bill will ban cigarette coupons. People may say that smoking is a human frailty and human weakness, but I grew up in an environment where grown adults collected cigarette coupons in the same way that children collect football stickers. It was an encouragement to smoke more and collect more, at the end of which not only would the person's health be poorer but they had six cheap whisky glasses in return for product loyalty.

In response to the points made by the hon. Members for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) and for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), I am absolutely amazed by the cavalier attitude of the majority—but not all—of Conservative Members, who broadly divide into two categories. Some pursue reckless opposition for opposition's sake. Their bold rallying call is that they oppose the Bill because it might not work. They say that we should not do anything because it might not work, while proposing no alternative whatever. The others are more dangerous, ideological and libertarian. They think that the Bill is a fundamental curtailment of a basic adult freedom of choice that should not be limited in any circumstances. Taking that to its logical conclusion—and I do not support this—the Government should legalise all the drugs that are currently illegal. I am not aware that that is official Conservative party policy.

This ideological bunch of Conservatives talk about individual liberty. What individual liberty is being sacrificed by someone not having to read cigarette advertisements every time they open a fashion magazine or a newspaper? What basic human right is curtailed by that? It is not a basic human right to be forced to read cigarette adverts, and even if it was, I would happily sacrifice it to save the life of just one of the 80 smokers who will die during this debate.

The Tories are not representing the views of the people: the majority favour a ban. They are not even representing the views of smokers, 80 per cent. of whom would love to give up because they are hooked and they realise the damage that it is doing to them and their families. I do not want to be uncharitable, but most Conservative Members are not even representing their own constituents. Sadly, all too many are merely representing the vested interests of the tobacco industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) talked about the internet. We must be extremely careful about that. The audience for tobacco advertising on the internet is clearly a lower age group and the advertisers would like to penetrate that market. Unlike my hon. Friend, I am delighted that clause 7 undertakes to keep pace with technological changes. I hope that the companies concerned, the web designers and the internet service providers will note that. Clause 3 speaks about anyone in the chain, from commissioning to selling, being guilty of an offence. Clearly, internet companies would be included.

[Mr. Jim Murphy]

We all accept that an advertising ban on its own will not solve the problem. Personally, I would favour compulsory licensing for any establishment that sells tobacco products. The licence would be revoked if there was proof of any sale of cigarettes to under-16s. Perhaps the Bill could be a little firmer in its provisions concerning the set-up of shops and the display of cigarettes so close to confectionery, where young people will be looking. I would like cigarettes to be further from the cash till, although there may be security issues, because their siting there encourages impulse buying.

I would like to see the supposed celebrities of this country break their silence on cigarettes and tobacco. For too long it has been perceived to be cool and acceptable to smoke and take other drugs. Until celebrities, be they actors or other entertainers such as singers or musicians—those whom the younger people in this nation respect—say loudly and clearly that it is not fashionable, desirable or cool to get involved in that deadly habit, we will face an uphill struggle.

I hope that it will be part of the overall package surrounding the Bill, and other health improvement measures, that the Government will be able to enter into a dialogue with all stakeholders and other interested parties to ensure that celebrities break what, for the vast majority of them, has been a shameful silence on this matter.

9 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): As membership of the Lords and Commons pipe and cigar smokers club is a declarable non-pecuniary interest, I emphasise the fact that I am an enthusiastic member. In view of the lack of time, I must inevitably be selective, so what I say may be a little disjointed.

My first point is addressed to the Minister, and it relates to the amendment that appears on the Order Paper in the name of three Conservative Members, including me. I ask her for clarification. During its proceedings in the other place, the Government insisted that the Bill was not notifiable under the technical standards and regulations directive of 1998. The Conservative Opposition emphasised the fact that they had a different opinion, but that was disregarded. However, on 28 March, a month or so ago, the Government acknowledged that the Bill was notifiable and duly made a notification.

My understanding of article 8 of the directive is that there must be a standstill period of three months from the date of notification. I tried to understand what would happen—indeed, I asked my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), but even he was not quite able to answer with authority. According to the schedule, the Bill must complete its course through Committee within weeks—certainly well within three months. However, article 8 states that the measure to be adopted must remain amendable for the three-month period. How do the Government reconcile article 8 with their programme for the Bill?

My next point is a general one, and I make it in answer to the argument put sincerely and eloquently by the many Labour Members who expressed incredulity that there could still be some of us on the Conservative Benches who opposed the Bill as a matter of principle. I put myself in that category, and I wish to explain to hon. Members that I do so because their arguments fail to convince. If they will bear with me for a few moments, I shall point to some of the "paragraph headings", as it were—things that I would say more about if I had a little more time to explain my position.

With some reluctance, I shall first make a somewhat personal point: I do not need any lessons about the horrors of cancer. This year my wife has had two operations for cancer, and she is currently embarking on her second course of chemotherapy. I would not wish that experience on anyone. My wife's cancer is unrelated to smoking, but we all know that smoking causes cancer, and if I were really convinced that banning advertising would irrefutably and demonstrably result in a decrease in smoking, I would not hold the position that I do.

In my view, this Bill, although well intentioned, is misguided and unnecessary. I have done my reading, and I do not believe that there is any conclusive, irrefutable evidence linking a ban on tobacco advertising with a decrease in tobacco consumption.

The Bill is also unnecessary because the previous Government found a formula for decreasing smoking that worked. Goodness knows how many studies have considered whether tobacco advertising affects consumption, and whether the tobacco market has been affected by the introduction of an advertising ban. Indeed, there have been studies reviewing those studies. Is not the essential point that all those studies are inconclusive? None has reached a conclusion that has not been contradicted by another; nor am I aware of any study that has attempted to predict, rather than to analyse after the event, the consequences of an advertising ban.

The considerable emphasis placed on the Smee report during the debate exemplifies the problem that we face. We approach such reports selectively. Labour Members have selected those statements from Smee that suggest that an advertising ban would be effective, but that is not the whole story. I am sure that, like me, they have read the report, so they will know that a central feature of Smee is that it is a somewhat superficial review of other studies. As Smee himself acknowledges in the report, its use of evidence is selective. Interestingly, it is precisely because some people imposed on the report an interpretation that suited their preconceived conclusions that Smee went public post-publication. He felt obliged to say that people were overlooking the fact that conflicting evidence exists, and that the report makes no estimate of the impact on the United Kingdom of an advertising ban.

We should look more closely at the experiences of other countries. According to my reading, the truth of those experiences is that they provide no evidence that a ban on tobacco advertising reduces consumption. In some countries, the introduction of a ban has been followed by a reduction in consumption, but in others it has been followed by an increase. In fact, a closer inspection reveals that, although a ban has in some cases accentuated an existing trend, in others it has had a different impact. The instances of Italy and Norway come to mind. In both cases, consumption increased after the introduction of a ban.

Labour Members choose the Smee report as their text of almost divine authority, but a KPMG report of 1996 paints a very different picture. The point is that the various reports offer no conclusive evidence; for every

conclusion reached, a different one can be found in a different report. However, what I find most unacceptable and unpersuasive about the argument of Labour Members is the way in which they skate over the reality of what happened in this country between 1971 and 1996. As they know, the first agreement was reached in 1971. For the next 25 years, we had one of the best records in the world for reduction of tobacco consumption.

Labour Members fail to convince in their condemnation of the voluntary agreement, which demonstrably worked. Over that period, total consumption in this country fell by 37 per cent. and the prevalence of smoking by 40 per cent.

Since 1996, a new factor has entered the equation—the extraordinary increase in smuggled tobacco products. I know that the Government are, somewhat belatedly, trying to come to terms with that problem. Measures are being taken and credit must be given for that, but the increase in smoking, especially among young people, is significantly due not to advertising but to the fact that those smuggled products have been entering the country.

The Government have not made the case for the Bill. We have had a voluntary code of tobacco advertising and, while that was in place, tobacco consumption decreased dramatically. The Government dictate the terms of that voluntary agreement, as the Minister will know. She will also know that her predecessors and other Ministers have declined to discuss with the tobacco industry whether the voluntary agreement should be tightened. I remain firmly convinced that the way forward is not through legislation, but through pursuing the proven, successful course—a mixture of policies of education and voluntary agreement—that led to a decrease in tobacco consumption in this country. I support very strongly the reasoned amendment, because the Government have not made their case.

9.12 pm

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I shall be very brief, because I know that some of my hon. Friends are keen to speak in this debate. The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) is right to say that we can use statistics in any way we wish, and we all garner the arguments that support our point of view. The reality is that the evidence firmly shows that a ban would have the positive effect of reducing smoking habits. However, I shall put that to one side, because one piece of evidence proves that preventing the advertising and promotion of smoking will reduce it: the tobacco industry actively opposes the Bill. The industry knows what effect it will have and understands that it will affect trade. Even if we leave aside all the statistics, we should keep that thought in mind.

I shall not use statistics; instead, I shall use one of the most powerful arguments in favour of the Bill. It is not just about reducing an irritation or interfering with the rights of others—as Opposition Members seem to suggest. Smoking is an addiction that kills 120,000 people a year. We are not talking about stopping the advertisement of Kellogg's Cornflakes because we do not want people to over-eat them. No, we are talking about something that is a disaster for our community in many ways.

I was a nurse in the NHS for 25 years and I had to care for people suffering from the effects of smoking. I was sad to hear from the hon. Member for Basingstoke about his wife, and I hope that she is making a good recovery, but out of the 120,000 who die every year only 46,500 suffer from cancer. There are many more nasty ways to die from smoking-related diseases, most of which—sad to say—I have witnessed. It is for those people that I wish to make this argument.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): As a nurse, my hon. Friend will have witnessed much. I share her concern, and am sorry for the tragedy that has blighted the life of the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) and that of his good lady.

My mother passed away six weeks ago today. She started smoking as a teenager, and continued for 56 years. It was not cancer that took her, but the tragedy of emphysema—her lungs were shot through. I support the Bill because if we can save one individual or one family from going through that tragedy, we should do so.

Laura Moffatt: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. In the middle of all the intellectual debate about civil liberties, it is easy to forget why we are here today. It is for my hon. Friend's mother that we are here debating this important Bill. I have sat with people who are gasping their last and need oxygen when, unbelievably, they say, "Please take me to the day room so that I can have a cigarette." What informed choice is there for them? Where are their civil liberties when they know that they are addicted to something that is killing them? We need to be realistic about the real effects that smoking has on people.

I have sat with people whose circulation has died in their legs and who have had to have awful amputations. I make no apology for mentioning these matters, because we can forget that that is the result of smoking. That is where it leads many people. That is why the House is right in attempting to reduce the number of people who will take up smoking.

This is a difficult issue. The Government are assisting people to stop smoking in other ways, including the use of drugs and cessation classes. We have heard many examples this evening, and they are superb. However, we must not mix the message for young people. We tell them in school that smoking is dreadful, yet they walk out of school and see fabulous advertisements for smoking. I admit that I do not understand half of them—I am obviously far too old. We must not allow that to happen; the House must do everything that it can to reduce that effect.

Similarly, despite the message about having safe sex to avoid the risk of HIV, some people still do not have safe sex. We must not let people think that smoking is glamorous either.

I have seen the effects of smoking and the way in which people die, and it is not good. I firmly believe that the arguments of those who oppose the Bill tonight will be discredited. In 20 years' time, Members will be asking how anybody could try to prevent a ban on advertising. The Bill will be an important part of a programme to stop people from dying of smoking-related diseases.

9.18 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt). She, like me, has spent a great part of her professional life treating the end stages of tobacco usage.

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) said that Sir Richard Doll's longevity was due to being a lifelong non-smoker. The House of Commons Library tells us otherwise. Sir Richard was, in fact, a 20-a-day man until his research pointed him in the right direction and he gave it up. He said earlier this month that it is never too late to give up. He said:

"At 30 the risk is almost totally eliminated and at 50 to 60 you can live a more enjoyable life as well as a longer one. My message is, stop smoking, enjoy life more and enjoy more of it."

Amen to that.

I spent the best part of two decades treating customers of the tobacco industry. Like the majority of my medical colleagues, I have invested heavily of my time and of taxpayers' money in advising people to stop smoking. Many right hon. and hon. Members were palpably delighted by recent spending commitments in the Budget, but our enthusiasm should be tempered by the limited evidence for a link between the number of doctors and nurses and life expectancy, as much as it pains me to say so. In contrast, a direct link between mortality and tobacco consumption is undisputed.

Logically, we might reasonably expect an Administration who are serious about improving the health of the nation to focus on the latter. Yet the Government's record on addressing tobacco consumption has not been particularly edifying. Bernie Ecclestone's donation to the Labour party was linked to its compliant handling of tobacco sponsorship of Formula 1, and the Bill failed in the last Parliament because the Government did not give it sufficient priority. The initiative this time has come from the other place.

European Union directives on tobacco have been drafted and annulled, and we have seen the EU attempt to extend its remit to public health via a circuitous route on the ground of regulating commerce. The whole thing has been tawdry and cynical. My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) was right to underline the scandal of EU tobacco subsidies, and withdrawing those would have a far greater impact on tobacco consumption worldwide than the Bill.

Opposition to the Bill would sit uneasily with previous highly effective public health measures, such as the compulsory wearing of seat belts, many of which restrict freedom more immediately and directly. No one could be more opposed to the Gout's stealthy introduction of the nanny state than me, and there is little doubt that this measure will assist in that remorseless process. However, the British Medical Association and the Cancer Research Campaign tell us that the voluntary code has not worked but merely spawned a cunning new arsenal of sophisticated marketing techniques. If someone has supported a voluntary code and finds subsequently that advantage has been taken of one's good nature, that person is entitled to consider more assertive action.

One in two long-term smokers will die prematurely as a result of smoking and half of them will die in middle age. In terms of public health, smoking is truly the captain of the men of death. The sheer scale of the devastation caused by smoking means that I am prepared to lower the threshold of proof that I would ordinarily expect in assessing the likely impact of an intervention, whether medical or legislative.

This sector is full of interest groups with amusing and imaginative acronyms. Both ASH and FOREST have used human rights legislation to support their position, which just goes to show how fertile the arena of human rights is for lawyers. FOREST, in its March edition of the imaginatively styled "Burning Issues", considers that the European convention on human rights justifies tobacco advertisements because it protects the freedom

"to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority."

The defence of advertisements on the ground that they provide information is, frankly, a little thin. Very few would see tobacco adverts as an important vehicle in the exchange of ideas. Furthermore, the literal interpretation offered by FOREST would logically lead us to permit the unrestricted advertisement of a whole raft of potentially harmful products, from pharmaceuticals to firearms.

Meanwhile, ASH takes a more considered approach, arguing that the fact that tobacco is legal does not confer unlimited freedom on its purveyors. It cites the Human Rights Act 1998, which states:

"The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of the protection of health".

Given the extent of the damage done by tobacco, we are entitled to ask that the burden of proof be allowed to rest with the industry. It must show that bans are not effective and that their adverts are aimed purely at building brand loyalty. The contrary argument that there is no evidence that banning adverts will be effective is frankly counter-intuitive and gives evidence-based decision making a bad name.

The brand loyalty argument would be more convincing if each manufacturer produced a single brand. I imagine that many people still think that that is the case. The truth was brought home to me in the early 1980s during a medical school tour of the Wills tobacco factory, then in Bristol. Several brands were produced side by side, and the only difference between them was the proportion of leaf sucked up from one hopper or another which went to make this brand or that. What was really important was the label and marketing subsequently attached to each brand. Given the relatively small number of firms peddling the myriad brands that exist, it seems unlikely that they would play one brand off against another.

Of course, what distinguishes one brand from another is the spin put on them during marketing. One packet suggests that the consumer can be a Marlboro cowboy, and another makes him into Lawrence of Arabia. The industry casts its net wide, and in so doing it increases the size of the market, not just the way in which it is apportioned. All the while, the folk who are drawn in are the young, the impressionable and the impoverished—the very groups on whom the lion's share of our public health effort should surely be focused.

The Smee report of 1992, among others, provided compelling evidence that tobacco advertising increases smoking overall. This is not the place to enter into a detailed appraisal of the criticisms, notably by the Henley Marketing Group and the Institute of Economic Affairs, which were subsequently levelled at Smee. Suffice it to say that many of them were semantic. Any study of this sort will have its detractors, and it would be extraordinary, given the highly charged nature of the field, if the Smee report were not controversial.

The Opposition, while supporting the aim of reducing deaths from tobacco, have proposed a reasoned amendment, and their position is fair and honourable. Indeed, we must admit that a ban on advertising might actually increase the level of tobacco consumption as consumers are deprived of the attendant health warnings. This was suggested by Stewart in his investigation of OECD countries, but sadly his study failed to attain statistical significance.

Nevertheless, given the element of doubt, a sunset clause may be a prudent compromise. Indeed, with other hon. Members I recently argued for such a thing in Committee and in the House in respect of the Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill. We did so because we felt that although action was needed, the evidence base was insufficiently robust to legislate without qualification given the swingeing restriction of individual liberty that the Bill would introduce. In this case the restriction on individual liberty does not apply in the same way and the evidence base is much more compelling.

A sunset clause that anticipates proof or otherwise of the effectiveness of intended legislation at some future date supposes such a dramatic effect that it could be teased out from the veritable soup of variables that impact on tobacco consumption. The Government have estimated a 2.5 per cent. reduction and the saving of 3,000 lives a year, and the World Bank more than doubles those figures. If that were to happen, no doubt we could say with a high degree of confidence that the measure we are debating today was the cause of the improvement and we would all be delighted. But it could be that a smaller, if important, number of lives are saved, and that would make a sunset clause appraisal much more difficult.

The Secretary of State said that the Bill forms the core of his strategy for addressing smoking. I hope that that is not the case because I feel that it will not have a big impact on tobacco consumption in this country, but I hope that it will help a little. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) for giving me some top cover, and I am happy to follow his lead tonight.

9.28 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): This has been a very good debate, often heated but very informative. It has been characterised by an enormous number of confessions from ex-smokers, nearly all on the Back Benches.

Perhaps none was more shocking than the virgin confession from the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy), who had not admitted to his parents that he had smoked at an early age. It was nearly as shocking as his confession that he was also a new romantic in his youth. He established a link between smoking and alcoholism by saying that the tokens that he kept from the cigarette packets that he bought went towards cheap whisky glasses. We had confessions too from my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook), whom we always suspected of having been a teenage smoker. In his case, he said, he was cocking a snook at authority.

The debate has been characterised by a sense of deja vu because the Bill has been round the block several times, both in this House and in another place, where it was fully debated. The only difference now is that, after the general election, the Government appeared to lack the courage of their convictions and had to be forced into this measure by Lord Clement-Jones.

I remind the right hon. Members for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who accused the Opposition of wrecking the measure, that the general election was called a year early. With a majority of more than 170, it was entirely in the Government's power to get the Bill passed if they had been fully committed to it. I may differ from my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) about the emphasis of the argument, but he put it succinctly when he said that it is a strange set of priorities to include in the Queen's Speech the Hunting Bill, but not something that Government Members keep telling us is an important measure. It is rich for the Secretary of State to begin his speech by claiming that the Government are now delivering on their election promise—five years late, I must add.

The measure was thoroughly debated in the House of Lords. Debate covered whether the minutiae of sniffing should be included in clause 1 and the relative safety of passive snuff sniffing. Members also queried whether they would be able to wear a tee-shirt with the logo, "I love to kiss men who smoke cigarettes" without falling foul of a prosecution for promoting smoking.

Like their lordships' debate, ours has been characterised by detailed contributions on the perils of smoking and its implications for our health. We heard moving contributions from the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber), the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt), who spoke about her experiences as a nurse, and the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey), who discussed statistics relevant to his own constituency. However, he let the cat out of the bag when he ended by saying that the measure would not be hugely successful in attacking smoking.

As a confirmed non-smoker who has battled constantly but unsuccessfully with a father who has been addicted to the foul weed for the past 50 years or so, I share many of the concerns that have been expressed and agree that smoking is a foul pursuit, both for the person engaged in the activity and people in the vicinity forced to share the smoker's air space. Both sides of the House are agreed on that, but the Bill has nothing to do with banning smoking altogether or outlawing tobacco. Some say that if the Government, let alone the Liberal Democrats, are to be consistent, they should go the whole hog and ban tobacco products altogether, but that is an extremely regressive anti-libertarian step that I and, I am sure, most of my hon. Friends would not support.

In the Bill, we are dealing with whether it is helpful or legitimate to ban the advertising and promotion of tobacco products, and the extent and definition of such a ban. The most important aspects of the debate are whether the Bill will effectively lead to a reduction in tobacco consumption, especially among minors; whether a ban could have the reverse effect of giving rise to increased consumption because manufacturers would turn to other marketing measures such as price sensitivity to compensate for the absence of advertising; and whether the Bill will make no difference at all, in which case we may ask why we are spending valuable parliamentary time on it when other legislation is being squeezed out.

I therefore approach the Bill with a genuinely open mind, albeit with an in-built libertarian scepticism towards yet more legislation which threatens to swamp our citizens with yet more regiments of state-registered nannies peering into our cigarette packets, our newsagents, our magazines

[Tim Loughton]

and our post, and censoring our advertising hoardings. Such a measure has been introduced by a Government keen to tell people what not to do, rather than liberate people from yet more regulations—a point well made by my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) and for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson). If we can prove beyond reasonable doubt that the Bill will lead to a net reduction in the number of smokers, especially teenagers, and a reduction in overall consumption, it will merit our support. However, no such incontrovertible evidence has been produced.

Evidence such as the Smee report in 1992 or "Curbing the Epidemic" in 1998 is inconclusive, gives rise to many questions and can be matched by other reports with contrary conclusions. It should not be forgotten that in the four countries that have banned tobacco advertising outright in the past 30 years—Finland, Sweden, Norway and Holland—the per capita consumption of cigarettes is higher in all cases than in the United Kingdom, which can boast a 37 per cent. fall in tobacco consumption and a 40 per cent. fall in smoking prevalence. The hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) gave the example of Finland, but consumption there since tobacco advertising was banned in 1978 has fallen to 59.1 per cent compared with the UK, where it is down to 57.2 per cent. In Norway, it has gone the other way since the ban in 1975. It has increased from 91.7 per capita to 114.5. The record in the UK is hardly bettered anywhere in the world. That is the result of voluntary agreements and regulation between Government and the tobacco industry, rather than of blanket banning of advertising and promotion.

Of course, we all want consumption further to decrease. That is why the Opposition support a reasoned amendment that challenges the absence of clear and sound evidence on which to base the Bill, which concentrates exclusively on using the untested club of an outright ban while other more pressing measures to reduce tobacco smuggling are completely ignored.

Last year, the Government cut the resources that they spend on campaigning against smoking. The advertising budget was cut from £8.97 million to £7.79 million, at a time when the Government's total advertising bill increased enormously, and on causes rather less beneficial to the public interest.

In the unlikely event that the House is unswayed by the forceful arguments of those on the Opposition Front Bench and my right hon. and hon. Friends, we shall seek in Committee to add a sunset clause to the Bill if the measures so trumpeted by Labour Members turn out to be more of an article of faith than a tangible improvement in outcomes. Unlike the right hon. Member for Rother Valley, I hope to see more sunset clauses in legislation, especially when we deal with the untried and the unscientifically proven.

Many questions are outstanding. We shall table detailed amendments in Committee so that we can scrutinise the supposed evidence on which the Government base their claims. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier)—

Mr. Barron: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: If the right hon. Gentleman does not mind, I shall make some progress.

The Government refused to address the EU notification issue. They may well find themselves in a mess.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham raised the important issue of brand awareness, which was not touched upon by Labour Members.

Mr. Barron: As I said in my speech, nine years ago the then Deputy Prime Minister, the then right hon. Member for Henley, Mr. Heseltine, favoured a total ban on tobacco advertising. Does the hon. Gentleman think that Mr. Heseltine was as wrong as he thinks Labour Members are today?

Tim Loughton: One member of a Government does not constitute a complete refutation of the points that we have been making. Labour Members know that they will not have 100 per cent. support of some of their measures. The right hon. Gentleman should know that, given the experience of the Government over the past five years, during which more than one Member has actively voted against many of their measures.

The greatest fear is that if advertising is banned, the recourse of tobacco manufacturing companies will be to compete on price, starting with savings of £130 million from their advertising budgets. Tobacco companies will not pack up and go home if we enact the Bill. It is clear from the Government's research that pricing has a significant correlation with consumption.

It is right to tax as a deterrent, and it is a legitimate way of raising revenue. It is well documented that that continued through the 1990s until the tolerance threshold was reached. That coincided with the abolition of duty free and the opening up of the single market to alcohol and tobacco products. Despite all the warnings, however, the Government have been largely complacent about that. The explosion in smuggling since 1997 has led to an increase in total consumption of cigarettes and hand-rolled tobacco of more than 5 per cent. It is estimated that 22 per cent. of all cigarettes and 70 per cent. of hand-rolled tobacco are smuggled.

Increasingly, these products end up being flogged from car boots outside school playgrounds to those whom we are most trying to deter from smoking, from completely unregulated car boot sales or from pubs, contrary to the statements made by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg), who thinks that they are not frequented by teenage girls.

After all the progress that was made up to 1997, we have seen a reversal of more than 5 per cent. in combating smoking. However, the Government predict that the Bill will result in a 2.5 per cent. reduction in smoking. There is no evidence for that. We know that it is an arbitrary figure. The Smee report anticipated—the point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter)—a net fall in consumption of between zero and 5 per cent. The Bill is just as likely to have zero impact as it to cause a 5 per cent. fall. That was admitted in the regulatory impact assessment in the explanatory notes to the Bill.

Price cutting is a major concern, but there are also implications for the ability to convey health information about less harmful brands of cigarettes. All tobacco products are harmful, but for the confirmed and irrecoverable smoker, like my father, lower tar cigarettes are better than higher tar. In the future other innovations

will no doubt come about which will lessen, though not eradicate, the effects of smoking, but there will be no way that those can be marketed without breaking the law.

I am all for making the warnings of the hazards of smoking bigger, bolder and more grotesque. Let us have hoardings, paid for by the tobacco companies, with the words "Smoking makes you die a slow and lingering death" occupying three quarters of the entire poster, and the obscure lacerated purple silk design that is the advertisement relegated to a corner. Let us swamp cigarette packets with skull and crossbones and photographs of cancerous lungs. After all, the £130 million that the industry spends compares with the sum of less than £8 million spent by the Government on smoking cessation.

The Government have made no attempt since 1997 to engage in dialogue with the industry about tightening further the terms of the voluntary agreement, be it on the terms of reference of advertisements and their location, the nicotine content or additional measures to clamp down on under-age sales. I would have sympathy with any such measure. Instead, we have a blanket proposal to ban advertising and promotion which leaves many questions unanswered and more pressing issues unaddressed.

I was impressed with the mention by the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) of the role of product placement and the fact that celebrities with fags in their hand are worth a thousand billboards.

Many questions have not been resolved. What have the Government achieved since the international summit on smoking in July 1997? What action is being taken to end the absurd situation whereby the EU tobacco scheme spends £600 million on subsidising tobacco production, more than three quarters of which is produced in Italy and Greece, with the latter presumably protected by the Greek legal system threatening a three-year jail sentence for anyone in an anorak and brandishing a camera caught within 100 yds of a tobacco field?

Exactly what proportion of smuggled cigarettes is intercepted by Customs, and how many real criminals have been prosecuted? What progress has been achieved by the tobacco taskforce in helping sports find alternative sources of revenue, and why has it not met since October 1999?

Those are all important considerations that are not addressed by the Bill. What we need are effective measures that will not just talk the talk about reducing tobacco prevalence among young people, but walk the walk and encourage a comprehensive mix of measures to tackle the problem at its roots. The Bill is a limited attempt at that. The Government have failed to produce a convincing evidence-based approach. Nothing would delight me more than proper comprehensive measures that would really reduce cigarette take-up and make the job of tobacco companies more difficult, but the Bill is not one.

Yet again, the Government have opted for a soft target and come up with another gimmick which, like the latest onslaught on parents of young hooligans, may look good for the headlines for a few days ahead of elections, but does little to address the underlying problem. We in the Opposition are not so easily taken in and I urge hon. Members to vote for the reasoned amendment.

9.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): We have had a largely thoughtful debate on an important issue. In the end it is about saving lives, and we should not forget that. Many of those who spoke today have worked hard for many years on smoking-related issues, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who gave a powerful account of the strategy of the tobacco industry for many years. I pay tribute to his work on the White Paper "Smoking Kills" and on launching the Government's strategy on smoking.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) set out the impact of tobacco advertising on children and argued that it is inconceivable that advertising aimed at 18-year-olds would not affect 14-year-olds as well. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) spoke about 50 years of evidence. I pay tribute to the work of his Committee in expanding and adding to that body of evidence, particularly on the intentions of the industry with regard to advertising.

I welcome the speech by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young). I wish that he had been successful in his attempts to ban tobacco advertising 20 years ago. It might have saved all of us an awful lot of time, as well as saving lives in the meantime.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) spoke about smoking and pregnancy. My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) spoke about the attitudes of children and young people in her constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) referred to the impact of smoking on asthma. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) said that we should take away the oxygen of publicity from smoking. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) referred to deaths in Scotland. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) spoke of the importance of protecting the freedom of children and young people.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) gave an apparently philosophical speech on the nature of liberty, but with respect, it was really a smokescreen and he avoided many of the important issues relating to why his party is choosing to ignore the strong views of the medical profession. I shall return in a moment to many of the points that he made.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I thank the Minister for giving way. May I put it to her that she is living in a slightly surreal world? The real problem with tobacco smoking is smuggling. Three years ago, one in seven cigarettes were smuggled. Today, the figure is nearer one in five, yet the Government go on pushing up duty year in, year out, as they have done in the Budget. That will merely encourage more and more smuggling.

Yvette Cooper: If the hon. Gentleman cared about smuggling, he might have been present to discuss it during the debate. Frankly, the smuggling issue is a red herring. This is not an either/or question. Of course, we should have both action on smuggling and action to prevent tobacco advertising.

The hon. Members for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) and for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) protested about freedom. The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) claimed that the voluntary code was tough—I wish. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) gave a long list of red herrings, including an example involving a photographer in Greece.

[Yvette Cooper]

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) supported the Bill, which is good, but I have to say that his remarks about smoking were probably the most whingey that I have heard for ages in response to a policy with which somebody agrees, even a Liberal Democrat. Faced with a Government who are for the first time in history providing smoking cessation, nicotine replacement therapy and Zyban on the NHS, way ahead of most other countries, in what has been a massive change over the past five years, what is his response? It is to complain that we introduced the policy in health action zones. Yes, and we were right to do so, because those are the areas where people are on the lowest incomes and smoking prevalence is highest. We have now extended that smoking cessation approach across the country, but it was right to introduce it in health action zones first.

Dr. Evan Harris: I must tell the Minister that I do not feel chastened by her remarks, because they still reflect some complacency on an issue that she understands is very important. Although the Government have done well, they could have done more by making the therapies available throughout the country to all smokers, not just in a few selected areas.

Yvette Cooper: Yes, which is why nicotine replacement therapy and Zyban are available on prescription for people across the NHS—and it is right that they should be.

Many Opposition Members seemed to suggest that smoking prevalence had increased in the past few years, whether because of smuggling or something else. That is simply not true. Smoking prevalence fell among adults from 1948 to 1994, and then stopped falling. It then increased until 1996 and has fallen again since then, to 27 per cent. Among under-16s, it increased from 1988 to 1996, from 8 to 13 per cent., and last year it was down to 10 per cent. again. Among 16 to 19-year-olds, it increased from 27 to 31 per cent. between 1992 and 1998—the very period in which the Conservatives were trumpeting their voluntary restrictions on advertising—while the latest figures for 2000 show it dropping again, to 29 per cent. Even among 15-year-old girls—many hon. Members spoke about young girls—it rose from 1988 to 1996, but has fallen since then, from 33 per cent. in 1996 to 25 per cent. last year.

It is right to say that smoking rates are still too high, but 70 per cent. of smokers say that they want to give up. We think that those rates should come down, but that is why we disagree with the Opposition's view that voluntary agreements are sufficient. We need this ad ban and we need further support for people who want to give up smoking.

Dr. Fox: As the Minister says, over a long period we achieved great reductions in tobacco consumption and smoking prevalence rates—37 per cent. and 40 per cent. respectively. Of the three strands of policy—health education, price mechanism and restriction of advertising—which contributed in what proportion to that reduction?

Yvette Cooper: All three are likely to have played a role, which is why all three are important parts of the strategy. As the hon. Gentleman said, it can be difficult to separate out the impact of the different factors. That is exactly why a sunset clause is a load of rubbish and would not work. It is impossible precisely to determine the impact of individual factors on smoking rates, yet the hon. Gentleman wants to introduce a sunset clause that would reject an advertising ban if smoking rates went up, despite the fact that that could be due to one of many different factors. An advertising ban could be all that will keep rates down, but he wants to get rid of it because of the other factors involved.

Dr. Fox: The Minister's argument is very much in line with the points that we made. However, the Secretary of State said earlier that the advertising ban was not only the most important factor in reducing prevalence, but that it will be the "core" of anti-smoking policy. There can be only one core.

Yvette Cooper: My right hon. Friend made it clear that this is one part of an important strategy. The Government have done more than any Government in this country's history to provide support for smokers who want to give up, which plays a vital part in bringing smoking rates down.

The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) tried to persuade us that he had significant legal and technical objections to the Bill—first, that it was not comprehensive enough to comply with the Human Rights Act 1998. If he can identify a loophole that we have missed, I assure him that we will strive hard to close it in Committee, to ensure that the Bill is as comprehensive as he would like.

His second concern, voiced by other hon. Members, was that the Bill is notifiable. Our view remains that it is not notifiable. We have notified it without prejudice, but that is no reason not to continue to legislate. Other countries have done that, and so shall we.

Several hon. Members mentioned the common agricultural policy regime. We strongly disapprove of tobacco subsidies—a view that is shared on both sides of the House—and we shall continue to argue against them and to oppose them whenever we have the opportunity.

Some hon. Members referred to sponsorship. The Bill sets out the policy as agreed with our European partners some years ago. We shall consult on the details in the course of the Bill's passage. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State clearly explained the position. The ban will be comprehensive: it will include billboards, coupons, sponsorship, free gifts, brand-sharing and the internet. That is as it should be.

Much of the debate has been about freedom and individual rights. I strongly believe that people have a right to smoke. The hon. Member for Woodspring talked about freedom and informed choice. People have a right to smoke, but they also have a right to choose whether to smoke. Nothing in the Bill removes people's right to smoke. We must recognise that there is no comparable legal product in terms of harm caused and addictiveness. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) said, the addiction factor makes debates about freedom of choice rather more complicated. People have a right to smoke, but they also have a right to the chance to give up.

Smoking is addictive. Seventy per cent. of smokers say that they want to give up, and giving up can be hard. People therefore have a right not to be pressurised by

manipulative, seductive advertising into starting smoking at an impressionable age. They have a right not to be bombarded with advertisements and free gifts when they are trying to give up.

I support people's right to smoke, but I do not support the tobacco industry's right to spend £100 million of the profits it gains from addiction to promote its product and try to hook new smokers. That is what opposition to the Bill is about. It is about maintaining tobacco advertising—not to protect individuals' freedom, but to protect the right of a big corporate body to use its considerable financial muscle to promote a product that kills. The Bill will not prevent journalists from commenting on smoking and tobacco products, nor writers and artists from writing about them, but it will stop them being paid by the tobacco industry to do so.

The hon. Member for Woodspring set out the traditional, right-wing libertarian view that any action by Government is a restriction on freedom. In the real world, many people, especially children, depend on the Government to protect their rights and freedoms. In the real world, power matters: the power of the tobacco industry to use its profits to promote its product on billboard, leaflets and giveaways. That power is considerable. Set against that is the power of an impressionable 13-year-old girl, whose health and life may depend on the ban. I do not believe that we should protect tobacco advertising and the interests of the tobacco industry. That may be the Conservative view of freedom; it is not mine.

Dr. Fox: If the ban is such an absolute principle, why did the Government offer an exemption to Formula 1?

Yvette Cooper: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government's position has been to ensure that sport has an appropriate time to make transitions and find other forms of sponsorship. We want not to hurt sport, but to ensure that we have a comprehensive ban on sponsorship and advertising.

Conservative Members have consistently opposed a ban. They did that when they were in government and when they were in Europe. They are trying to block it now. Let us be clear: the ban would have been in place this time last year if the Conservatives had not blocked it. It would have been in place if the tobacco industry had not blocked it in the European Court. We know why the industry is against the Bill; it has profits at stake.

Why is the Conservative party so determined to block the Bill? Why are Conservative Members so keen to protect the tobacco industry's interests? Evidence has often been mentioned in the debate. In his opening speech, my right hon. Friend set out much of the evidence for the links between tobacco advertising and smoking.

Mr. Connarty: Before the Minister moves too far from discussion of time, will she give a commitment on when the Bill will become law? Will she assure us that it will not be delayed by the discussions of the directive that are taking place in Europe? That directive would have been introduced in 2001 if, as the Minister said, the previous Government had not blocked it.

Yvette Cooper: I assure my hon. Friend that we had decided to introduce the Bill in this Parliament and not to wait for the European decisions.

It is curious that Conservative Members want to claim that the decline in smoking since 1971 is somehow due to the wonderful voluntary ban and the restrictions on advertising, while also claiming that introducing a complete ban would be ineffective. That position is inconsistent.

It is clear that tobacco advertising is targeted at young people. Brands are explicit about targeting 18 to 24-year-olds with aspirational, sexy products. British American Tobacco, Japan Tobacco and Philip Morris said last September that they would keep their adverts in publications with more than 75 per cent. of adult readers and their sponsorship for events with more than 75 per cent. adults in attendance. What about the other 25 per cent.? Are they supposed to shut their eyes, turn the page and avert their gaze from the sponsoring logos? The tobacco industry claims that it is all right to expose children to tobacco advertising as long as many more adults are exposed to it at the same time.

Conservative Members argued for a sunset clause. That is purely a wrecking tactic by which no one should be convinced. It means that if smoking rates were affected by a wide range of factors, they would want to get rid of the ban and make matters worse. It is like banning BCG vaccinations because of a worldwide resurgence in tuberculosis.

We should remember what out discussions are all about. Smoking kills 120,000 people every year. The tobacco industry makes profits from products that kill. Its advertising and promotion reach not only young people but children. If the tobacco industry believed that the ban would make no impact on smoking prevalence, why is it fighting it so hard? After all, it would save £100 million from marketing budgets. Tobacco companies oppose an advertising ban because they fear that it would cut their sales and profits.

Why are the Tories so keen to back the tobacco industry? Why are they so keen to oppose a measure that health professionals support? Smoking is the biggest cause not only of preventable death but of health inequalities. Those on low incomes are far more likely to smoke. They have most to lose from continuing tobacco advertising in this country. By contrast, those who have most to gain are those who share in the profits of the tobacco industry.

There are winners and losers from a tobacco advertising ban. Let us be clear about the side on which Conservative Members have decided to stay tonight. The Opposition have set out their priorities; we have set out ours. The choice is between the interests of the tobacco industry and public health and the health of the next generation.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 130, Noes 349.

Division No. 220] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*	Bellingham, Henry
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael	Bercow, John
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James	Boswell, Tim
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*	Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bacon, Richard	Brady, Graham
Baldry, Tony	Burns, Simon
Barker, Gregory	Burnside, David
Baron, John	Butterfill, John

Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and Mr. Julian Brazier.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cator, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher

Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spink, Bob
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Fraser Kemp.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on second or third reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

TOBACCO ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION BILL *[LORDS]* (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill *[Lords]:*

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

(2) All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any other messages from the Lords) may be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

(3) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 14th May 2002.

(4) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(5) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

(6) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(7) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

The House divided: Ayes 346, Noes 140.

Division No. 221] **[10.13 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary

Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnham, Andy
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Sloate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry

Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Fraser Kemp.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugo *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

TOBACCO ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION BILL *[LORDS] [MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State under the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LEGAL SERVICES COMMISSION

That the draft Criminal Defence Service (Representation Order Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 26th March, be approved.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

FOOD HYGIENE

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 10427/00, four draft Council Regulations and a draft Council Directive relating to food hygiene, and No. 15475/01, Commission Communication withdrawing one of the draft Council Regulations relating to food hygiene, and supports the Government's aim of securing effective, proportionate legislation throughout the food chain to protect public health in relation to food.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the remaining motions relating to delegated legislation.

Ordered,

PENSIONS

That the Occupational Pensions Schemes (Minimum Funding Requirements and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 380), be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 648), be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

PETITION

New Hereford Hospital

10.27 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Having presented more than 20,000 signatures to Downing street last week, it is a great pleasure to present this petition to the House now:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition of the concerned residents of Herefordshire.

Sheweth

That the New Hereford Hospital is 120 beds short of the number required for it to operate at maximum efficiency.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable house will urge the Government to bring forward the 2007 hospital review to this year so that the desperate situation can be remedied.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Social Services (Surrey)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

10.28 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I have requested this debate because many of my constituents face problems in getting the care that they need in Surrey. First, however, I pay tribute to the enormous amount of work undertaken on behalf of the people of Surrey by those who work in adult social services, their colleagues in the national health service and those in the care sector.

We are indeed fortunate that, despite the enormously high cost of living in the area, those people work so effectively with the scarce resources that we have, not only to provide the services that they are required to perform, but to ensure that the money is spent as wisely as possible. Their work has already been assessed by the social services inspectorate as making significant progress against Government targets. However, from time to time their best efforts are not enough, and people are badly let down because the needs in Surrey are greater than the resources we have.

It is important that before I go into specific issues, I make the Minister aware of some of the good things that we have been doing in Surrey social services. We have not been allowing a problem to develop in the hope that the Government will bail us out. Far from it: in social services we have secured the country's first and largest private finance initiative contract, with the transfer of 17 former county council homes for older people to Anchor Trust, and seven other homes to Care UK to be developed as specialist centres dealing with mental frailty in older people. Joint developments with district and borough councils have supported developments for older people, and a learning disability partnership board. In my constituency, Guildford borough council provides day centres for older people to relieve Surrey of that load. Guildford has also implemented ground-breaking intermediate care schemes—"step up" and "step down"—to provide temporary sheltered accommodation while changes are made to people's homes, so that they can return after hospitalisation. Time forbids me to mention the many other initiatives on which great progress has been made.

The Minister will recall that I briefly raised this issue in an earlier debate. Although I was pleased with the "cash for change" funding that the county received to reduce the number of delayed discharges, I was concerned that we were not yet out of the wood. The large increase in Surrey county council's taxes had Liberal Democrat support, because we are all concerned about the major funding problems that Surrey faces. The people of Surrey have experienced a staggering 11.4 per cent. increase, 5.4 per cent. of which is for social services alone.

We have no difficulty with the provision of national funding for areas where need is greatest, but our social services funding has fallen below the acceptable level. Care costs are inevitably high in an area where property is expensive. Our unit cost of delivery is high, and we need nursing homes to stay in business. Housing costs are also a major issue, as they contribute to employment costs as well as job vacancies. The Government have allocated money for key worker housing, but demand is massive

and, understandably, we keep losing staff. Agencies and homes are unable to bring in people from abroad, because the qualification levels needed for many posts are below that for which work permits would be allocated. High land and property costs also contribute to the problem. To build care home capacity, we need business planning. Building new care homes is almost impossible at the moment however, as land owned by the health service is being sold off at commercial rates, out of reach of the care sector. Sadly, in Surrey it is a case of selling off the family silver.

Staff vacancy rates also give us cause for concern. For care managers, the rate is 15 per cent.; for occupational therapists, it is 16.5 per cent.; and for learning disability residential services care staff, it is 34 per cent. The average vacancy rate for residential care staff for older people is 31 per cent., but in some homes it is 51 per cent. In Surrey, domiciliary care assistants work long and hard to do as much for their clients as possible, often finishing off in their own time, rather than leaving someone in distress. However, the average age of those who do such work is rising, despite training efforts at local colleges.

The Minister will be aware that Surrey hospitals have some of the worst problems with delayed discharges in the country, leading, of course, to unacceptable waits in accident and emergency departments, and cancelled operations. The "cash for change" funding has helped with rebuilding capacity, and in the next year Surrey aims to support an additional 120 people who might otherwise have experienced delays in being discharged from hospital. There is much yet to be done, however. Fee levels must be raised if we are to purchase places for those who need nursing home care. Meeting Government targets to reduce delayed discharges is presenting us with a real challenge.

I hope that the Minister can tell me how patients currently funded through "cash for change" will be funded when the scheme ends.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I am most grateful to the hon. Lady for allowing me to intervene. The Government seem to be focusing on areas traditionally regarded as being in greater need than Surrey. However, does she agree that, if people in areas such as Surrey are unable to access good quality public services, the consensus that underpins provision of those services is in danger of breaking down?

Sue Doughty: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I agree. We have grave concerns about the future of some of those services.

We welcome the additional funding for Surrey that was announced after the Budget, but we are unclear about how much it will really be. The basis of the calculation is 6 per cent., but of which level of funding? Surrey's funding has fallen over the years and to enable wise planning with care providers and the health service, we need to know how much that money will be in real terms. The care business is in crisis in Surrey. We are in competition with London boroughs to get nursing home accommodation, and they have far more money at their disposal. The competition for places with self-funding people is also a constant problem for those who cannot fund themselves.

We share the Government's concern that no one should receive care that falls below acceptable levels, and providers are working hard to meet the new standards. However, inevitably, prices will need to rise to cover costs and Surrey will need to increase the rates it pays. It is a fact that fees are between 20 per cent. and 100 per cent. more than Surrey can realistically afford to pay, and any increase in fees that the council agrees to pay leads to a reduction in the number of people whom it can support.

Finding places that are accessible for family visits and suitable for the individual is a tortuous process. Improvements have been made through the work done by the Surrey ambulance service, which has developed a website listing homes, vacancies and prices. It helps families through some of the process, but Surrey can only pay fees of £450 a week for residents admitted from 1 April this year and £380 a week for existing residents. On 16 April, the most recent date for which I have figures, there were only four beds in nursing homes at less than £450 a week, but the Royal Surrey county hospital alone has 56 delayed discharges, many of whom are waiting for those beds. We cannot reduce those numbers in this financial climate. We are getting one of the lowest SSA settlements in the country, but facing some of the highest costs.

In the meantime, our acute hospitals are regularly featured at the wrong end of lists of those with delayed discharges and delayed operations. We need to gain a greater understanding of what hospitals will charge social services for having people in beds. At the moment, there is the ludicrous possibility of the Royal Surrey county hospital seeking to recover its costs at £200 a night, when Surrey social services does not have resources to place people in the more expensive nursing homes that nevertheless cost less than the hospital beds. The money runs out, and if it is paid to hospitals it cannot be used for nursing homes. If, through no fault of the hospital, patients cannot be discharged from hospital, will the council be required to pay fines from money that it does not have?

Provision to fund places for those with learning disabilities is also a major issue. Several long-stay hospitals in Surrey have closed, resulting in many people—far more than the national average—living in residential care in the county.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The hon. Lady mentioned facilities that have closed. Does she agree that throughout the county, private sector care homes are closing because the people who have run them successfully for many years have chosen, when faced with huge new additional bureaucracy from this Government, to close down completely rather than try to wrestle with it? Does she agree that the Government's policies have directly led to a substantial reduction in the number of care home beds, which is only making the delayed discharges problem—the bed-blocking—worse?

Sue Doughty: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point and I agree that that additional bureaucracy and work is driving people out of business. Indeed, only today, I spoke to the manager of Surrey Care Homes, the umbrella organisation, and he made that point to me. The owners do want to do a good job and to stay in business, but they are finding that the climate is against them.

We have many problems with the places for people with learning disabilities. For example, demand for those places does not follow social need in the same way as

[Sue Doughty]

other problems. We have a very large number of people who need places with high costs, but we have a smaller amount of money to pay for them. We have problems with older parents caring for sons and daughters who should have other accommodation, but it does not exist. I can tell the Minister that Mencap has asked me to raise those concerns.

Many people were on preserved rights which have now ceased, and Surrey has taken over the management of their funding. The Government revenue grant for Surrey is £14.429 million. That covers 1,200 people, of whom 700 are known to the council, and they are already having their fees topped up as Government funding is inadequate to cover the purpose stated, which included shortfall in fees and care assessment costs. A further 500 people are not currently known to social services.

The transfer fund is estimated to be £100 million short. Care providers are already demanding an increase as the rates are not high enough to cover costs. That fee pressure is likely to be a further £1.5 million, but Surrey social services has calculated that if the preserved rights rates were allowed to escalate to the current market level of fees, that figure of £1.5 million would rise to £4.6 million. Not all the information is available because the Department for Work and Pensions has not provided details of the rates paid to individuals, so social services are still hacking through the details.

We want to know how Surrey should deal with this problem. We want our people living in their own home for as long as possible, happy and healthy. To achieve that, and to avoid the problems that send people to hospital in the first place, more resources should be allocated to prevention. We need the total integration of health and social care, rather than costs shunting between providers, to nobody's benefit.

I hope that the Minister will tell us that she has recognised that Surrey is doing as much as it can out of its own resources but is prevented from reaching the minimum standards that are decent, let alone meeting its aspiration to be a top-performing local authority. I await her response.

10.41 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) on raising the very important matter of social services provision in Surrey. Like the Government, she is clearly keen to see high-quality health and social care provided for her constituents.

The hon. Lady made much of her concern about social services funding in Surrey. The Government have already made a considerable investment in social services which has been growing substantially in real terms. Resources for personal social services have increased by 20.4 per cent. in real terms between 1996–97 and 2002–03—an average real-terms increase of 3.1 per cent. per year. That compares with an average real-terms growth of less than 0.5 per cent. per year between 1992–93 and 1996–97 under the previous Conservative Government.

Surrey has benefited from that investment. Last year, it received an increase of 6.4 per cent. in its total personal social services resources, compared with a national average increase of 4.7 per cent. This year, Surrey's personal social services standard spending assessment will increase by a further 4.6 per cent., its carers grant by a further 21 per cent. and its children's grant by a further 12.8 per cent. Increases of that size demonstrate the Government's commitment to social care, throughout the country and in Surrey.

The hon. Lady suggested that when it comes to the standard spending assessment formula, Surrey is hard done by. I am sure that she is aware that the Government are reviewing the SSA formula. The Department of Health has already presented to representatives of local government some of the research that we have commissioned for this process. During the summer, consultation will take place on a range of options for possible changes to the formula, and I am sure that Surrey will want to make its views known. However, I note that Surrey's personal social services standard spending assessment per capita in 2000–01 was the same as that for comparator local authorities. So although I recognise the need for detailed consideration of the formula, we need to be clear about the basis on which that is being carried out.

The hon. Lady raised particular concerns about older people's services.

Mr. Hammond: For all the Minister says about the SSA and personal social services spending, does she believe that the funding available to Surrey county council is adequate to provide satisfactory levels of personal social services to the elderly in particular?

Jacqui Smith: The Chancellor made the decisions that he did in the Budget last week because the Government believe that all local authorities, including Surrey, should get extra investment if they need it. Conservative Members voted against that Budget and it is a bit rich for them to turn up to an Adjournment debate to argue a case for which they were not willing to vote last week.

The hon. Lady raised particular concerns about older people's services, and delayed discharges in particular. She is right that delayed discharges are bad not only for system but, most importantly, for older people themselves. That is why, last October, the Government announced a further £300 million of new funding for social care over two years. That is closely linked to the work of a strategic commissioning group to give greater direction to the commissioning of care for adults. Incidentally, that covers good practice in commissioning residential care for people with learning disabilities as well as focusing on the commissioning of care for older people.

The group published the agreement on building capacity and partnership in care on 9 October, and we expect local social services and health authorities to adopt it. It will lead to real improvements in the planning and commissioning of services and ensure continuing good-quality care for those currently using such services.

The funding was targeted on the 55 councils that have the most severe problems with providing a sufficient range of services in the community to allow people to leave hospital. That recognises some of the concerns that the hon. Lady outlined with respect to Surrey, which is one of the authorities that was targeted for extra support. The money was also to be used to stabilise the care home market, and there is evidence nationally of its being used to increase fees and to buy more places.

Sue Doughty: I hope the Minister understands that Surrey has, with great reluctance, increased prices.

That was in response to the lack of beds and because care homes close when prices fall below a particular level. In addition, I hope the hon. Lady understands that the social services department has done much to work with care homes to ensure that there is ongoing provision. It has done that when the funding has allowed it, but the funding is finite.

Jacqui Smith: Obviously, but the Government have increased funding and will increase it in future. We also need to ensure that the long-term commissioning activity at a local level between the private independent sector and the commissioners allows us both to maintain and to improve capacity.

Of the £100 million available last year, Surrey county council's share was £2.4 million. This year, its allocation is £5.2 million. Those are significant sums, and the council's proposals aim to reduce the number of delayed transfers of care and to sustain the independent sector market. I understand that last year the council utilised its extra funds to provide more long-term residential and nursing home care packages. That allowed 163 people to be discharged from hospital whose discharge would otherwise have been delayed.

The increased investment resulted in decreases in delayed discharge of 15 per cent. in the East Surrey health authority and 18 per cent. in the West Surrey health authority between 2 September last year and the end of the financial year. So the increased investment and the way in which it is being used by local authorities throughout the country and in Surrey has helped to deliver lower levels of delayed discharge.

The hon. Lady also raised the issue of allowing people to remain independent in their own homes. I understand that the rate of households receiving intensive home care packages in Surrey is relatively low, although I am pleased that it increased by 8 per cent. between September 2000 and September 2001. That is an important trend throughout the country, because the people concerned and their families tell us that they want the choice of being independent in their own home. The fact that by September 2001 the number of people receiving intensive domiciliary care had increased by 6 per cent. compared with the previous year is an important sign of how the system is changing to provide the necessary capacity, particularly for older people.

There is also increased capacity in intermediate care. Those important services are key to the prevention of some avoidable hospital admissions and allow a faster discharge for those who are admitted. Further strategic planning is required to ensure that development is carried out effectively, but we have already seen progress in intermediate care in the south-east, including Surrey. In the region as a whole, an additional £21.5 million has been invested in intermediate care since 1999–2000. In Surrey, that means that there are plans for 1,500 extra people to receive intermediate care compared with the figure for 1999–2000. Investment is making a difference in the provision of services for older people.

The hon. Lady raised concerns about preserved rights. The changes that the Government have introduced from this month bring those residents within the existing community care arrangements. They will benefit from local council involvement in their care assessment, management and contract negotiations. The transfer removes anxiety from those who were struggling to pay their fees under the old system, and it promotes independence, giving some people in residential care the opportunity to move to more suitable accommodation, such as sheltered housing.

In 2002–03, councils are receiving £614 million in a special grant to meet the costs of their new responsibilities for that group of residents. As the hon. Lady said, Surrey county council will receive £14.429 million this year to fulfil its responsibilities. Out of the £614 million total, £86 million is to meet the shortfall and assessment costs. That is generous. Councils were already meeting many of the shortfall costs from their existing resources. Consultants Laing and Buisson and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggested in a report that the cost to councils of assuming responsibility for the shortfalls would be less than the money that they were being given for that purpose.

The hon. Lady also raised the important issue of support for people with learning disabilities. I am sure that she is aware that the White Paper "Valuing People" set down for the first time the sorts of services that people with learning disabilities should receive and, importantly, how they should be involved in decision making. People with learning disabilities will clearly benefit from extra health and social care investment, but they will also benefit from much better use of the £3 billion that is already spent on learning disability services throughout the country.

The Government have recognised the need for development money to help to make the changes necessary to fulfil the aspirations set down in "Valuing People". That is why, this year, the learning disability development fund will be £20 million of capital and £22 million of revenue. Surrey has been allocated over £350,000 this year from revenue allocation alone to support priorities for service change. The hon. Lady made an important point about how we ensure that health and social care work together for the benefit of those who need the services, so I point out that that money needs to be spent as part of a pooled budget, emphasising the importance of partnership in ensuring good-quality services.

In his Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was able to put NHS finances on a sustained footing for the next five years and begin to reverse the decades of underfunding. For personal social services, the plans deliver annual average growth in real terms—the hon. Lady asked me whether this was a real-terms figure—of 6 per cent. from 2003–04 to 2005–06. That demonstrates the Government's firm commitment to social care. Details of the way in which the money will be allocated will be made available later this year, but the settlement puts health and social care on a much firmer footing. The people of Surrey will undoubtedly benefit, as will people throughout the country, from increased investment in social services. They will also benefit from other Government actions, including a recruitment campaign.

Sue Doughty: I have listened with great interest to the Minister's figures. While I naturally welcome the increases, does she believe that they are adequate to cover the shortfall and the problems that I described? An

[Sue Doughty]

increase of far more than 6 per cent. is required to deal with delayed discharges, the rise in their number and the problems that we in Surrey face.

Jacqui Smith: I have a relatively short time left, but it is no surprise that a Liberal Democrat Member should argue that a doubling of the annual real-terms increase in social services spending is still not enough.

The new cash includes resources to cover the cost of hospital beds that are blocked needlessly as a result of delayed discharges. Councils will need to use the extra resources to expand care at home and ensure that all older people are able to leave hospital once their treatment is completed and it is safe for them to do so. We will introduce stronger incentives to ensure that people do not have to wait so long to be discharged. Older people and other service users have the right to expect that local services work together as a coherent whole, as the hon. Lady outlined. We are moving in the right direction to a seamless service which, with the extra resources made available by the Government, ensures that people get the right care at the right time and in the right place.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 30 April 2002

The House met at Ten o'clock, pursuant to Resolution [24 April]

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

10.3 am

Mr. Speaker: The House will now suspend in order to enable hon. Members to attend Her Majesty to present a Loyal Address on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of her Accession to the Throne.

MR. SPEAKER *and the House proceeded to Westminster Hall to attend Her Majesty with an Address.*

MR. SPEAKER *resumed the Chair at half-past Two o'clock.*

ADDRESS TO HER MAJESTY

(GOLDEN JUBILEE)

Mr. Speaker: I must report that the House this day attended Her Majesty in Westminster Hall, with an Address on the occasion of Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee; in reply to which Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech.

I will ensure that my words in presenting the Address, and Her Majesty's reply, are entered in the Journals of the House.

MR. SPEAKER presented the Address to Her Majesty in the following words:

Your Majesty: we, Your faithful Commons, offer our heartfelt congratulations on the completion of fifty years of Your reign. We wish to assure You of our loyal devotion and to express our profound gratitude for the unstinting service which You have given to the Nation and to the people we have the privilege to represent in Parliament.

Your long and distinguished reign has seen extraordinary changes at home and in the wider world. The United Kingdom of 1952 would be unrecognisable today. A society where the scars of war had not yet healed has given way to equality of opportunity, to social and geographic mobility and to levels of prosperity and health which that generation could only have dreamed of. The nature of society too has changed dramatically, as today we celebrate the diversity of race, culture and faith that makes this country a vibrant and exciting place to live.

New democracies have emerged across the world which this Parliament is proud to nourish and support. The Cold War has given way to new partnerships, new challenges and new opportunities. The United Kingdom continues to exercise important influence in the counsels of the world and we make a major contribution to securing the peace. 50 years ago this Parliament was at the heart of an Empire. Today we are one of 54 independent members of the Commonwealth, of which You are Head.

Your personal contribution to the development of this unique organisation has been of great significance and millions of people are grateful for it.

During Your reign, Ma'am, this Parliament too has changed. We have chosen to share our sovereignty with our European partners and to delegate powers to the devolved Parliaments and assemblies of Scotland and Wales as well as Northern Ireland. The House of Commons today looks rather different from 1952. We have 6 times as many women Members and it is also a younger House—nearly half our Members have known no other Monarch. You have been served by 10 Prime Ministers and I have the honour to be the 8th Speaker of Your reign.

Amidst this sea of change the monarchy has acted as a beacon of stability and a unifying influence for our people. But it is not simply the throne that we honour today—it is Your personal contribution that we have reason to give thanks for. By Your sense of service and Your devotion to duty, by Your consistent display of dedication and commitment, by Your wisdom and grace, You have demonstrated for all to see the value of a constitutional monarchy in securing the liberties of our citizens and the fundamental unity of this Kingdom and the Commonwealth. In 1952, in a motion moved by Winston Churchill, the House of Commons expressed their complete conviction that You would throughout Your reign work to uphold the liberties and promote the happiness of all Your peoples. That confidence has been amply justified over the last 50 years.

Few monarchs in the history of these islands can match Your contribution. We are supremely grateful to You and to His Royal Highness Prince Philip, whose support for you has been so manifest and whose personal commitment to the Nation has been of such value to us.

In this historic Hall at the heart of the Palace of Westminster, the scene of so much royal, political, and parliamentary history, Parliament salutes its Sovereign. We offer You our respect, our affection and our prayers.

May God save Your Majesty and give You His blessing, both now and for many years to come.

HER MAJESTY'S REPLY

Her Majesty's Most Gracious reply was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

You do Prince Philip and me a great honour in inviting us here today. I am most grateful to have this opportunity to reply to your Loyal Addresses and I thank you both, Lord Chancellor and Mr. Speaker, for your generous words.

It is right that the first major event to mark my Golden Jubilee this summer is here in the Palace of Westminster. I would like to pay tribute to the work you do in this, the Mother of Parliaments—where you, like so many famous predecessors before you, have assembled to confront the issues of the day, to challenge each other and address differences through debate and discussion, and to play your essential part in guiding this Kingdom through the changing times of the past fifty years.

For if a Jubilee becomes a moment to define an age, then for me we must speak of change—its breadth and accelerating pace over these years. Since 1952 I have witnessed the transformation of the international

landscape through which this country must chart its course, the emergence of the Commonwealth, the growth of the European Union, the end of the Cold War, and now the dark threat of international terrorism. This has been matched by no less rapid developments at home, in the devolved shape of our nation, in the structure of society, in technology and communications, in our work and in the way we live. Change has become a constant; managing it has become an expanding discipline. the way we embrace it defines our future.

It seems to me that this country has advantages to exploit in this exciting challenge. We in these islands have the benefit of a long and proud history. This not only gives us a trusted framework of stability and continuity to ease the process of change, but it also tells us what is of lasting value. Only the passage of time can filter out the ephemeral from the enduring. And what endure are the characteristics that mark our identity as a nation and the timeless values that guide us. These values find expression in our national institutions—including the Monarchy and Parliament—institutions which in turn must continue to evolve if they are to provide effective beacons of trust and unity to succeeding generations.

I believe that many of the traditional values etched across our history equip us well for this age of change. We are a moderate, pragmatic people, more comfortable with practice than theory. With an off-shore, seafaring tradition we are outward-looking and open-minded, well suited by temperament—and language—to our shrinking world. We are inventive and creative—think of the record of British inventions over the past fifty years or our present thriving arts scene. We also take pride in our tradition of fairness and tolerance—the consolidation of our richly multicultural and multifaith society, a major development since 1952, is being achieved remarkably peacefully and with much goodwill.

But there is another tradition in this country which gives me confidence for the future. That is the tradition of service. The willingness to "honour one another and seek the common good" transcends social change. Over these fifty years on visits up and down this country I have seen at first hand and met so many people who are dedicating themselves quietly and selflessly to the service of others.

I would particularly pay tribute to the young men and women of our armed forces who give such professional service to this country often in most demanding and dangerous circumstance. They have my respect and admiration. I also wish to express my gratitude for the work of those in the public service more widely—here in Westminster or the corridors of Whitehall and town halls, as well as in our hospitals and schools, in the police and emergency services. But I would especially like to thank those very many people who give their time voluntarily to help others. I am pleased that the Jubilee is to be marked by the introduction of The Queen's Golden Jubilee Award, a new annual award for voluntary service by groups in the community. I hope this will give added recognition to those whose generosity of time and energy in the service of others is such a remarkable tradition in our society.

These enduring British traditions and values—moderation, openness, tolerance, service—have stood the test of time, and I am convinced they will stand us in good stead in the future. I hope that the Golden Jubilee will be an opportunity to recognise these values and to celebrate all that we as a nation have achieved since 1952. For my part, as I travel the length and breadth of these islands over these coming weeks, I would like to thank people everywhere for the loyalty, support, and inspiration you have given me over these fifty, unforgettable years. I would like to express my pride in our past and my confidence in our future. I would like above all to declare my resolve to continue, with the support of my family, to serve the people of this great nation of ours to the best of my ability through the changing times ahead.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Transport

1. **Mr. Frank Doran** (Aberdeen, Central): When she last met the Strategic Railway Authority to discuss transport in Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [51346]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): I do not know whether it is in order to say so, Mr. Speaker, but I thought that your address to Her Majesty was excellent, and I hope that some of the sketch writers heard it as well.

I will shortly be meeting the senior management team at the Strategic Rail Authority to discuss a range of issues affecting rail services in Scotland.

Mr. Doran: A legacy of rail privatisation is a fragmented and confused ticketing system. Recently, one of my constituents, Mr. Bill Naphy, attempted to buy a ticket on the Virgin train which runs directly from Aberdeen to Exeter and in the process discovered that no cheap rail tickets were available to anyone north of Edinburgh or Glasgow. When my hon. Friend meets the SRA, will he take up the issue of that blatant discrimination against all travellers from the north of Scotland, which is a further indictment of the rail privatisation system that we have been left with?

Mr. Foulkes: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. The Tories left the railways in a complete mess, with a lack of investment and fragmentation, and we cannot clear it up overnight, as my hon. Friend knows only too well. I agree with my hon. Friend also about the importance of accurate information not only on tickets but on prices, and particularly on the purchase of through tickets. I give him this pledge: I will discuss the matter with the SRA and other rail bodies, and report back to my hon. Friend who is, incidentally, along with the other two Members for Aberdeen, very assiduous in pursuing the interests of his constituents.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The Minister will be aware that the ongoing chaos on our railways is of great concern as regards Scottish employment and has implications for the future. Will he do better than the Minister for Transport did in questions last week and deny, rather than fuel, rumours that the upgrading of the west coast main line will stop at the border?

Mr. Foulkes: The upgrading of the west coast main line is very important for Scotland, and it is being carried out because of our huge investment in the railways—£64 billion is now available in real terms. That is more than the programme of spending on the railways in any of the last 50 years, during the whole of the Queen's reign.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): My hon. Friend will be aware of the controversy surrounding the rail link between Glasgow and Glasgow airport. Will he allay those fears, give his full backing to that link and ensure that it is built quickly?

Mr. Foulkes: The Government, together with the SRA and the Scottish Executive, are carrying out a study of airport links, both to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports, which will be completed in the autumn. I personally welcome the SRA's readiness to consider the development of direct rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports, which are both vital to the future development of air services out of Scotland. However, I point out to my hon. Friend that there is already a rail link to one of Scotland's great airports, Prestwick, from where he can fly to five centres in Europe.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): In meetings with the Strategic Rail Authority, will the Minister take on board what the hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) said about the problems of being outside the central belt and the railway network, and make it clear that it is not just ticketing that is a problem, but the whole investment in the infrastructure? Electrification stops at Edinburgh. We must make it plain to the SRA that Aberdeen should be part of the strategic rail network. It is important that journey times from Aberdeen southward are as fast as they are from Edinburgh southward.

Mr. Foulkes: I agree with the hon. Gentleman—he is nearly my hon. Friend—on that. It is important to improve the links to Dundee, Aberdeen and the north in general. I am concerned about that and discussed it recently with representatives of GNER, who are thinking about having new trains that run straight through without electrification, so providing a quicker and better service to both Dundee and Aberdeen. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree that the £400 million that is being spent on Waverley station to allow more trains to run through it will also be of assistance. All in all, as far as the north-east is concerned, the rail organisations, with the wholehearted support of the Government, are doing everything possible to improve connections.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): While strongly supporting the plan for a rail link from Edinburgh to Edinburgh airport, may I thank my hon. Friend for his reply, which I received last week, on the proposed Musselburgh Parkway station? Does he agree that one benefit of the proposed station would be that more people would travel from Lothian to London by rail? That would be a good thing, not just on general environmental policy grounds, but also in relation to congestion on the roads and at London airports.

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend makes a good case for the Musselburgh Parkway station. I discussed that with GNER immediately after he raised it at Scottish questions last month. When the franchise for the east coast is re-tendered after the two-year extension, the parties will have another opportunity to submit proposals for a 20-year franchise. The case for a station at Musselburgh can be considered then if a bidder sees the benefit of it to their proposals. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will lose no opportunity in making his case to the bidders.

Manufacturing

2. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): If she will make a statement on trends in manufacturing employment in Scotland over the last 12 months. [51347]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The manufacturing sector continues to be very important to the economy of Scotland, employing around 281,000 people up to December last year and supporting a further 180,000 jobs in the Scottish economy. Both the Scottish Engineering quarterly review and the Bank of Scotland review in March this year reported an increase in manufacturing activity for the second month running, which is very encouraging. However, significant issues still need to be addressed in the manufacturing sector, and the Government, working in partnership with the Scottish Executive, will seek to do that.

Chris Grayling: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. She will be aware that manufacturing employment in Scotland, at the 281,000 figure that she cites, is at one of the lowest levels ever. Does she think that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's decision to charge Scottish manufacturing firms an additional £50 million or more in employers' national insurance contributions will increase or reduce the number of manufacturing jobs in Scotland?

Mrs. Liddell: I have to say to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) that Labour Members take no lessons on manufacturing industry from members of Her Majesty's Opposition. In the years the Tories were in office, 327,300 Scottish manufacturing jobs were lost—some 52 per cent. of the total—as a result of the rape of our coal, iron, steel and shipbuilding industries. It has been the job of this Government to put in place measures that will stabilise and add value to manufacturing employment, and also increase skills. We are working closely with Scottish industry to achieve that.

The hon. Gentleman referred to my right hon. Friend's Budget. The Budget is good for industry in Scotland. It puts in place a framework for stability in the economy and provides assistance through research and development, which is especially relevant to the 100 large companies in Scotland that employ some 40 per cent. of the population. At the same time, it puts in place the framework for enterprise that is needed to stimulate new starts in the economy. That is critical for the Scottish economy, as those who know and understand it accept.

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): Does my right hon. Friend agree that last week's Budget was a Budget for fairness and enterprise? Does she also agree that employers and employees should take a fair responsibility for funding improvements to the NHS?

Mrs. Liddell: I agree with my hon. Friend. Improvements in the NHS are important in Scotland, as anywhere else, and it is significant that employers recognised before the Budget that the cost of ill health in Scotland was between £2 billion and £2.5 billion a year, so anything that improves the health and well-being of the Scottish work force benefits everybody. The procurement strategies of the health service will be important as the increased injection of cash finds its way through the system. An additional accumulated £8.2 billion of expenditure in the health service in Scotland is good news for Scottish business.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Notwithstanding what the right hon. Lady has just said, is it not the case that, according to a report in the *Daily Record* of 3 April, a reputable journal with which the right hon. Lady was once connected, no fewer than 18,374 manufacturing redundancies were announced in Scotland in January and February alone, 7,400 of which were in four companies—Motorola, NEC, BAE Systems and British Petroleum? I know that, famously, the Secretary of State believes that the Scottish economy is performing quite well, as she told us last year, but do not those figures give the lie to that? Before she embarks on her usual anti-Scottish National party rant, will she tell us three things that she is doing as Secretary of State to improve the lot of, and the dismal outlook for, Scottish manufacturing?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman is always good at talking Scotland down, but he never enters into a concrete debate about how, for example, to improve productivity in Scotland. He wants to talk about three things. How about the stable and strong economy, which this British Government have created for all the United Kingdom, and Scotland in particular? How about the reduction in unemployment to historically low levels, which the hon. Gentleman never gives credit for, especially not to those people who have moved from welfare into work, which more and more are doing as a result of the Government's policies? Neither does the hon. Gentleman give credit to those in the hi-tech area of the Scottish economy, for example in the biotech and software sectors, which are experiencing unprecedented growth thanks to the economic conditions created by the Government. The hon. Gentleman is happy only when Scotland is not performing. Scotland is performing and the hon. Gentleman's party's fortunes are declining.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Yesterday, my right hon. Friend visited my constituency and Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, a successful American inward investment company. Does she agree that the SNP seems to spend its time living in the past and does not recognise that the financial services sector in Scotland is of huge importance to the economy of Scotland and the UK?

Mrs. Liddell: What my hon. Friend says is true and I pay tribute to her for her links with companies such as Morgan Stanley Dean Witter. I was greatly encouraged by what it told me yesterday. It came thinking that it would end up employing 200 or 300 people in Scotland, but so impressed was it with the skills and determination of people in Lanarkshire, Dumbartonshire and Glasgow that not only has it expanded in my hon. Friend's constituency, but it is now putting some of its securities operation into Glasgow, employing a further 400 people. The financial services sector in Scotland—not just in Edinburgh, but in places such as Glasgow and Cumbernauld—is going through a period of unprecedented growth. It contributes greatly to our gross

domestic product and it thrives in the atmosphere of economic prudence and competence that the Government have created.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Does the right hon. Lady agree that manufacturing jobs—indeed any jobs in Scotland, but particularly in the telecoms manufacturing industry—depend heavily on a good and solid investment in communications infrastructure, such as broadband? In that regard, is she aware that of the £30 million that had been earmarked by Government for the rural roll-out of broadband only £4 million will go to Scotland, which perhaps has the greatest need of all? Can she assure us that she will speak to her colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that broadband is properly rolled out in Scotland and there is not the social exclusion that will follow from lack of investment?

Mrs. Liddell: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is not aware of the pathfinder projects in Dumfries and Galloway and the highlands and islands that are aimed at extending broadband. Indeed, Wendy Alexander, the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, has made the issue one of her main priorities. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and I look forward to the introduction of the Communications Bill, which will allow us to put the regulation of telecoms and broadcasting together in a much more modern setting. It is important that industry, the Executive and the Government work closely together to ensure the roll-out of broadband, which is just as important for the financial services industry as for other aspects of the telecommunications industry. It is high on the Government's list of priorities.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one factor that is vitally important for the future of manufacturing in Scotland is ensuring that new technologies and developments that are created there result in manufacturing jobs remaining there? To that end, will she join me in welcoming the news on research and development that she mentioned with regard to the Budget of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor? Will she also join me in congratulating companies such as IBM in Greenock on investing millions of dollars in this country so that manufacturing jobs can remain in Scotland, where they belong?

Mrs. Liddell: I had a very enjoyable visit with my hon. Friend to IBM in Greenock only a few weeks ago. It is a well established company in Scotland, as it came there at the end of the second world war. It moved in primarily as a screwdriver manufacturing operation, but has now invested much of its international activity in the Greenock plant. I was impressed with the far-sightedness of IBM and its local management, which has produced a facility that is very good for the local community and exceptionally good for the reputation of the Scottish economy internationally, especially at the high-tech end of the telecoms market.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Is the Secretary of State aware that CBI Scotland states in its industrial trends report 2002:

"The outlook for Scottish manufacturers continues to look bleak"?

Was not that diagnosis confirmed last week, when Foxteq in Renfrew revealed that it was about to dismiss up to half its entire work force? With almost 6,000 job losses in one sector alone in Scotland last year and closure of facilities by Motorola and NEC, when will she show a little humility on this matter and acknowledge that it is her policies of over-regulation, more red tape and higher taxes that are adding to the ever-increasing number of manufacturing job losses in Scotland?

Mrs. Liddell: I would encourage the right hon. Gentleman to come and visit Scotland on occasion, because he will find a very different picture from the one that he paints. Indeed, I met the CBI as recently as last week. Its quarterly industrial trends survey shows that business optimism was positive among Scottish manufacturers for the first time since January 2000, and that export optimism for the year ahead is also positive for the first time since January 2001. Yes, significant problems remain for the Scottish economy—problems that we inherited because of the previous lack of investment in skills and research and development in Scotland. As a consequence of the action that we have taken in the past five years, record low numbers are in unemployment. For the first time ever, we also have record numbers of young people going straight from school into employment—something that we never saw during 18 years of Tory government.

Eurostar

3. **Mr. Tom Harris** (Glasgow, Cathcart): What discussions she has had with the Strategic Rail Authority regarding the provision of direct Eurostar rail services between Scotland and continental Europe. [51348]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): The Government believe that all areas of the country should have good access to channel tunnel rail services. I will discuss this matter, among a range of issues of importance to Scotland, when I meet senior management from the Strategic Rail Authority shortly.

Mr. Harris: I wonder whether my hon. Friend recalls a promise made by a previous Conservative Government, who said that following construction of the channel tunnel, direct passenger rail services would be provided between the continent and all parts of the United Kingdom. Given the potential customer demand and economic benefits to cities such as Glasgow, will he now commit this Government to making good the Tories' broken promises on the issue?

Mr. Foulkes: It would be a very tall order to make good all the Tories' broken promises, but I can be helpful on the issue in question and tell my hon. Friend that later this year the SRA will publish a strategy for facilitating rail services through the channel tunnel from various parts

of the United Kingdom. I am sure that he will welcome that step forward and the ability to take up one of the tasks that the Tories were signally unable to carry out.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Will the Minister now answer the question that he signally failed to answer earlier as to whether the upgrade of the west coast line will be carried across the border? Does he accept that if that fails to happen, it will prove the point made by the Rail Passengers Committee Scotland that the Strategic Rail Authority's 10-year strategic plan is very much south-east centred?

Mr. Foulkes: Yes, I shall answer the question that I failed to answer earlier, having now found my place in my notes.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): That was a straight answer.

Mr. Foulkes: I always find that honesty is the best policy.

The scale of the overspend and underdelivery on the west coast main line is a major issue, and the SRA has had to examine the project to determine what outputs can be delivered and by when. The plan assumes that the west coast project will cost about as much as Railtrack estimated last spring, but that there may be some delay in completing key milestones. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Further to my hon. Friend's answer to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith), will he impress upon the Strategic Rail Authority the importance of maintaining and improving direct rail links between Aberdeen and, if not Europe, at least London? Crucial to that is a major upgrading of the track between Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

Mr. Foulkes: I appreciate that. I have always been enthusiastic about extending electrification beyond Edinburgh. Having spoken to GNER, Railtrack and others involved, I recognise that better services can be provided more speedily through GNER acquiring faster and more efficient trains—diesel trains, which are now as fuel efficient and environmentally friendly as electric trains—and it intends to do that.

The development at Waverley will be of particular advantage to Dundee and Aberdeen. I am keen to see the general upgrading of the east coast main line, and if that involves sorting out the track north of Edinburgh, which I discussed earlier, I shall raise that with the Strategic Rail Authority.

I am enthusiastic about the high-speed link, which was the subject of a study started by WS Atkins and announced by the SRA last year. That should be out in the latter half of this year. We have witnessed the success of the TGV—I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pronounces this better than I do—

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I ask the Minister kindly to allow me to get to Question 4? I call Mr. Eric Joyce.

Tourism

4. **Mr. Eric Joyce** (Falkirk, West): What steps she is taking to promote tourism in central Scotland. [51349]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I had a very successful meeting in Madrid with leading members of the Spanish travel industry, all of whom are actively engaged in encouraging tourists to come to Scotland.

The responsibility for promoting specific areas of Scotland lies with Visit Scotland. That includes all central Scotland, from its historic sites to the ultra-modern Falkirk wheel, which is funded by the Millennium Commission through the national lottery.

Mr. Joyce: My right hon. Friend will be aware that in late May Her Majesty the Queen will formally open the Falkirk wheel. Will she join me in congratulating all involved in the construction of the wheel, especially my constituents at the British Waterways Board and Morrison Construction, for creating a magnificent focus for tourism in central Scotland? Does she agree that it will be important for potential investors along the route of the canal carefully to consider the merits of developing the regenerated parts of the Forth and Clyde canals?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Bringing together the Forth and Clyde canal and the Union canal is an important tourist initiative in central Scotland. We should bear it in mind that the millennium wheel is unique. I have not yet had an opportunity to see it, but my colleagues on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs went away amazed at the feat of engineering that it took. We all look forward to its opening.

The millennium wheel is not the only unique tourist attraction in Scotland. For example, we have the world historic site at New Lanark, the opening of the toll booth in Stirling, and Burns cottage in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Sandra Osborne). I urge people to take the opportunity this weekend to visit as many of those unique sites in Scotland as possible.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I recently visited the refurbished toll booth in Stirling, in central Scotland. I was impressed by the new arts and community facility, which is funded by Scottish Arts Council lottery grants. What is the Secretary of State doing to facilitate meetings between Visit Scotland and the Arts Council to ensure that the tourism potential of such developments, which are funded by lottery grants, are maximised?

Mrs. Liddell: It was a great pleasure to visit the toll booth with my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire) on the day that it opened, to announce that Her Majesty had granted city status to Stirling. I therefore know the toll booth, which is a stunning investment.

Liaison already takes place between the Scottish Arts Council and Visit Scotland as well as the other agencies that are involved in bringing tourists to Scotland. For example, there is currently a major initiative to promote

golf. It is important to play to the strengths of all the niches in the Scottish economy. I hope that the initiatives taken by Visit Scotland will bear fruit.

Mrs. Lait: So as usual, the right hon. Lady is not getting involved in anything that will help Scotland. We have had nothing but a cloud of words about the west coast rail link north of the border. Will she clarify what will happen to it? Will she also estimate the effect on the recovery of the tourist industry in Scotland of the increase in national insurance, which is nothing but a tax on jobs?

The right hon. Lady mentioned golf. Will she give her view of Visit Scotland's inability to promote deerstalking—*[Interruption.]* Deerstalking is one of the most effective tourism industries in rural Scotland. Does she agree that by not promoting it, Visit Scotland is cutting off the noses of Scottish rural people to spite its politically correct face?

Mrs. Liddell: That is what is known as an omnibus question. I know that I am not a good golfer, but deerstalking has nothing to do with golf. Those of us who spend our lives in Scotland rather than doing the occasional day trip acknowledge that important moves are being made to promote tourism in Scotland and improve rail links and direct flight links to Scotland. The hon. Lady's time would be better spent on promoting Scotland's values and the opportunities to visit it rather than on trying to talk it down.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

The Advocate-General was asked—

Devolution

25. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What devolution issues have been raised since 19 March under the Scotland Act 1998. [51312]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): Since 19 March, 30 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me. They have raised a variety of points, such as articles 6 and 8 of the European convention on human rights, which protect respectively the right to a fair trial and respect for private and family life. Some devolution issues have also related to the compatibility of secondary legislation with European Community law.

Miss McIntosh: I am sure that the Advocate-General agrees with an article in *The Scotsman* on 21 January which stated:

"The Advocate-General's post is a crucial part of the devolution settlement . . . The . . . post is likely to continue and become a valued part of the UK constitution."

If she agrees with that, does she also agree that a five-minute Question Time is complete nonsense and does not allow her to be held responsible for the discharge of her duties? Can we have a Question Time of 15 or 30 minutes?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

The Advocate-General: I am delighted that there is so much support for my Question Time. The hon. Lady has been a consistent and effective questioner. It is a credit to my answers that she wants more time.

It is, of course, for the business managers to decide whether to extend this interesting slot in the parliamentary timetable. I agree with *The Scotsman* on this occasion, and I am delighted that the hon. Lady appreciates the importance to the devolution settlement of the Advocate-General's role. I look forward to her next question.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Has my hon. and learned Friend had any discussions about reviewing the performance of the Scottish Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in respect of some of its awards to children who have been sexually abused? Some of its awards have been paid at the lower limit, which is disgraceful when higher levels of compensation are paid in England. Does that not concern my hon. and learned Friend? Could she have a word with her colleagues in Scotland about it?

The Advocate-General: I understand my hon. Friend's interest in this matter, but he must understand that these decisions are made by independent panels, so it would not be appropriate for me to intervene or to discuss them with him.

Court Proceedings

26. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): In how many court proceedings she is scheduled to appear in her capacity as Advocate-General in the next six months. [51313]

The Advocate-General: I am involved in the consideration of court proceedings on an ongoing basis. For example, I intend to appear personally as counsel, representing the Secretary of State for Defence, in the Macdonald case before the House of Lords. This case concerns questions of European law and human rights arising from the dismissal of a service man from the armed forces. I also intend to appear in the investigation, held under the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, into the disappearance of the fishing vessel Trident off the north-east coast of Scotland in 1974. At present, specific dates for these hearings have not been set.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the Advocate-General for her answer. That appears to bring the tally to a grand total of four court appearances since 6 June last year, with the dates of the two further appearances that she just mentioned still to be set. Does she not accept that there is some concern in Scotland that the number of her court appearances—far from not being routine, as she stated in an earlier reply—are rare to the point of extinction?

The Advocate-General: I do not know whether the hon. Lady has ever appeared in such a court as the House of Lords—the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council—or whether she understands the amount of preparation involved in such cases. Law Officers do not always appear personally. Since my appointment, I have made a point of doing this work in court. My last appearance was in the

Appeal Court in Scotland a few weeks ago, when I spent a number of days in court as well as a large number of days preparing the case. Obviously, the timing of these court appearances is not under my control, and they sometimes conflict with parliamentary business. I also have to allow time for all the other advisory work that I do. I think that the hon. Lady is getting good value for money.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Auld Report

29. **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): If he will make a statement on the Auld report and its implications for the work of the magistrates courts. [51316]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): The period of comment on Sir Robin Auld's review of the criminal courts has closed. As the Lord Chancellor has stated, the Government are now considering the recommendations—including assessments of costs and benefits—in detail, and taking into account all the comments that have been received. The Government intend to publish a White Paper announcing their conclusions before the summer recess.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister will be aware that the magistracy has been a bulwark of justice in this country since as long ago as 1195. Does he agree that, if the Government accept Lord Justice Auld's proposals, they would be pandering to their command-and-control tendency, as detailed by the central magistrates court committee in *The Guardian* on 19 April, and that those proposals would present a serious threat of closure to magistrates courts, which would be another severe blow to rural areas?

Mr. Wills: No, I do not agree. If the hon. Gentleman had taken the time to read Sir Robin Auld's report, he would have seen that his rhetoric bears absolutely no relation to the facts. Sir Robin Auld pays tribute to the work of the magistracy. I am happy to repeat that the Government value the work of the magistracy. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is a bulwark of the criminal justice system, and it will remain so.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I commend my hon. Friend and his Department for their thorough consultation and the serious way in which they are listening to all views, but can he at least say that Auld's recommendation of a unified criminal court will go ahead? Within that, can he say that local justice delivered by magistrates will be entrenched as an important part of its role and practice?

Mr. Wills: I am not in a position to announce the outcome of the Government's deliberations on Sir Robin Auld's report. As my hon. Friend will know, we will announce our conclusions in a White Paper that will be published shortly. I can tell him that we have already indicated in our manifesto that we see the attractions of a unified court—that is on the record. It is absolutely clear that, whatever decisions we take, local justice will be very important.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The Auld report says that much of the work of a new district division could, with advantage, be undertaken in magistrates courthouses, reducing the trend of closure. As the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said, the trend is accelerating, not least in my area, with the proposed closure of Frome magistrates court. Given that Lord Justice Auld states unequivocally that the most important factor in these closures is

"the limits placed by central Government on magistrates courts committees' budgets",

will the Minister use his offices to stop the closures, expand the use of local magistrates courts and ensure that local justice stays local?

Mr. Wills: I think that the hon. Gentleman could profitably spend some time reading Sir Robin Auld's report in detail. *[Interruption.]* If he is suggesting he has already read it, I think he should read it again and understand what Sir Robin Auld said.

The hon. Gentleman is rightly concerned with local justice. Of course, we are all concerned with that. If he is asking me to guarantee that a magistrates court will never be closed again, I have to say that, no, I cannot guarantee that. He must recognise that it is important not only that justice is done locally, but that it is done efficiently and effectively, and is available to all. That means having courtrooms that are modern, are accessible to people who are disabled, have the right segregation of facilities between victims and witnesses and have all the other modern facilities that people expect of their courts. We will continue to implement a programme of modernisation to achieve that.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I know that my hon. Friend is aware that the Auld report makes no specific recommendations on specialist courts for domestic violence, but does he agree that such courts would be an important step forward?

Mr. Wills: I certainly recognise the strength of the arguments. We have been looking at that matter carefully in the Department and we will continue to do so. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work in this important area. She will have to await the publication of the White Paper to see what decisions we take in relation to Lord Justice Auld's report.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): May I, first, congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on the Address to Her Majesty, which has received great approbation throughout the country?

As I am sure the Minister knows, much concern has been expressed by local communities, by magistrates and by hon. Members from all parties—including, for example, in a debate in which I took part on the Greater London magistracy—about the proposal in Lord Justice Auld's criminal courts review that local management of magistrates courts should be subsumed into a national executive agency. The Minister will know what I am driving at. I am sure that he agrees—at least I hope he agrees—that such a step would lead to a serious reduction

in local justice and, in the regrettable words of the Lord Chancellor, who also made an admirable Address this morning, create

"the scope to close unnecessary courts".

I am sure that neither development would be welcome in the House. Can the Minister therefore give an assurance that, when the White Paper is published, it will contain proposals that maintain a locally managed and locally accountable structure for magistrates courts throughout England and Wales?

Mr. Wills: Of course I recognise those concerns—they have been expressed frequently over the past few months. We have held wide-ranging consultation and had a large number of roadshows. Those views surface regularly, and of course we take them seriously. However, the hon. Gentleman is going to have to be patient and wait just a little longer for the publication of the White Paper to see what we propose.

Grays Courts

30. **Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): If he will make a statement on the future of the courts in Grays. [51318]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): Decisions on the future of the magistrates court at Grays are for the Essex magistrates courts committee to determine, in consultation with its three paying authorities: Essex county council, Southend borough council and Thurrock borough council.

Earlier this month, Essex magistrates courts committee determined its accommodation needs, and its plans do include the eventual closure of Grays magistrates court. At the moment, none of the three paying authorities has exercised its right to appeal against the determination.

Andrew Mackinlay: May I tell the Minister that we in Grays are not happy about this? In fact, I lie to the House—we are very angry. One reason is that, in a letter to the council, the chairman of Essex magistrates courts committee blames the Minister's Department for insisting that it include the existing Basildon courthouse in its private finance initiative. I want the Minister to give an undertaking today that, when we appeal—as we will—he will get his Department to rethink that requirement. It is grossly unfair to the people of Thurrock, an ancient town with good communication links on the Thames gateway. Nor is it in the interests of efficient, local and accessible justice—the criteria that he repeatedly referred to in response to earlier questions. A Basildon courthouse is not accessible to—

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not an Adjournment debate; it is Lord Chancellor's questions.

Mr. Wills: I can assure my hon. Friend that I will take back to the Department the force of his feelings. More than that, I should remind him that, although there is a deadline of 10 May, we have still not received an appeal from any of the paying authorities. Should they decide to appeal, as he says they will, I am happy to repeat the offer that I made in correspondence to meet him and any other parties involved, so that we can discuss all the questions arising from this inevitably rather complex matter.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): May I tell the Minister that, regardless of what might happen in Grays, the people of Chelmsford are delighted with the proposal—which forms part of the review and the changes to the magistrates court system in Essex—for a brand new, purpose-built courthouse in Chelmsford, the county town, for the provision of justice at the magistrates level?

Mr. Wills: Of course the hon. Gentleman may tell me that, and I am happy to hear it.

I have repeated my offer to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay). These are complex matters and we are happy to discuss them in a meeting, but I should again remind my hon. Friend that we must first receive an appeal. To date, we have yet to receive one.

Knutsford Crown Court

32. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): If he will make a statement on the proposed closure of Knutsford Crown court. [51321]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): The Lord Chancellor has approved public consultation on the proposal to close the Crown court at Knutsford. The group manager responsible for the court began consultation on 10 April, and it will run for four weeks. Once all responses have been received, consideration will be given to whether a formal case for closure should be presented to the Lord Chancellor. The results of the consultation will need to be weighed, along with the opportunity costs and benefits associated with all the available options.

Mr. Osborne: I thank the Minister for his answer. In the light of the Westminster Hall debate and our meeting, he will know of the strength of opinion in eastern and mid-Cheshire about the proposed closure of the court—and we have not even produced the petition yet. I thank him for the courtesy with which he has treated the representations of local people. Will he repeat on the Floor of the House what he intimated to me in private: that he will try very hard to maintain the public character of the courthouse, if the Crown court does indeed leave Knutsford?

Mr. Wills: I am of course happy to do that. As I have said, unfortunately, courts sometimes have to close, and that has always been the case. When important historic buildings such as Knutsford Crown court have to close, the court service will always try to preserve their public character. However, as the hon. Gentleman will know, the service has a public duty to ensure that whatever it does represents good value for money for the taxpayer, and that will be a consideration in this case. Of course, we will always look creatively and imaginatively at preserving public buildings of great historic merit.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not follow him in the discussion of listed buildings, because

the reality is that the balance of justice in Chester, and in Cheshire generally, will require that the closure of courthouses is considered with great care. Courthouses are considerable distances from each other and, before my hon. Friend agrees to the closure of a courthouse, I hope that he will consider carefully the effect on other courthouses and those who need access to them.

Mr. Wills: My hon. Friend's point is well taken. We understand it and we also understand the particular problems in Cheshire. We have to balance a series of complicated factors, including travel times—especially for victims and witnesses. We must also be conscious of the fact that, in this case, the cost of maintaining the courthouse to the appropriate standard is some £5 million. As a matter of good public policy, we must question whether that expense can be justified.

Magistrates Courts

33. **Vera Baird** (Redcar): What steps he will take to improve the quality of justice in magistrates courts. [51323]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): Ninety-six per cent. of all criminal cases begin and end in magistrates courts, which says a vast amount about their importance to the system. Fewer than 1 per cent. of magistrates' decisions are appealed, which says much about the quality of their decision making. We remain, as I have already said, fully committed to maintaining the lay magistracy and our system of community justice as a cornerstone of our criminal justice system.

Vera Baird: I do not want to swap too many statistics with my hon. Friend, but 73 per cent. of not-guilty pleas in the magistrates courts result in a conviction, compared to 57 per cent. in the Crown court. That must be a cause of concern, however one looks at it, and an obstacle to any real redistribution of business between the two courts. Is my hon. Friend aware that practitioners think—and historically have thought—that magistrates over-convict because of their lack of legal skills to deal with legal points and admissibility? Does he agree that while preserving a lay element in criminal trials is vital, the way forward is to limit the role of magistrates to that of fact-finders only, just like the more successful jurors?

Mr. Wills: My hon. and learned Friend has a distinguished background in the law and obviously takes pride in her profession. I do not wish to go into the details of the statistics, but the two court systems try different cases and, therefore, one would not expect exactly the same outcomes. I should also reassure the House, for those who are not already aware of the fact, that magistrates are always advised by fully legally qualified justices' clerks. Therefore, I am slightly surprised that my hon. and learned Friend seems to imagine that no legal expertise is applied in magistrates courts. Magistrates also receive full training before they sit in court and regularly receive refresher training. As I have said—and shall repeat, because it is so important—the Government are wholly committed to the future of the lay magistracy as a cornerstone of our system of justice.

PRIVY COUNCIL

The President of the Council was asked—

Parliamentary Recesses

39. **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): What plans he has to introduce further changes to the length of parliamentary recesses. [51331]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons is currently considering the proposals set out in the memorandum by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House last December. I am convinced that changing the pattern of the summer recess would help to ensure better scrutiny of the Government.

Mr. Burns: Over the past decade or so, the number of hon. Members with children of school or pre-school age has greatly increased. Those Members much appreciate the efforts that have been made to dovetail parliamentary recesses with the school holidays. When the Minister considers implementing the changes proposed for the summer recess next year, will he fully bear in mind the school holidays proposed, both in England and Scotland, before reaching any decision? Easter is a moveable feast each year, so will he also ensure that he does not repeat the problems of last year, when the recess began as the school holidays were about to end?

Mr. Twigg: I am delighted to agree with the hon. Gentleman. One of the purposes of the modernisation and reform programme is to ensure that the House becomes a more family friendly institution, in recognition of the increased number of Members with children of school or pre-school age and of the need to attract more of them from England and Scotland as well as from Wales and Northern Ireland. I am delighted to have the hon. Gentleman's support, and when the proposals are taken forward by the Modernisation Committee I hope that we can ensure that we have a summer recess that coincides much more closely with school summer holidays throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend states one objective, but will he confirm that the main objective of any change to recesses and the way in which the House sits in the parliamentary year is to enable the House to legislate better and Members of Parliament to do their job better in their constituencies, because there are two aspects to the job—at Westminster and in the constituency?

Mr. Twigg: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I see no contradiction between having a more family friendly Parliament and one that also enables greater effective scrutiny of legislation and the accountability of Government. My hon. Friend has served with distinction on the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons. The specific proposal in the memorandum of the Leader of the House would enable us to continue to have the same length of recess over the summer period but would involve the House reconvening

in September. I believe that that would enhance the accountability of Government and the scrutiny of legislation.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Are there any cost implications to the changes?

Mr. Twigg: I see no reason for any significant cost implications, although, clearly, that matter is to be considered by the Modernisation Committee.

Select Committees

40. **Martin Linton** (Battersea): What plans he has to take forward his proposals for reform of Select Committees. [51333]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I intend to bring Standing Order changes before the House in the near future to implement the recommendations of the Modernisation Committee. These will strengthen our system of scrutiny by providing for a more transparent and independent system of nomination to Select Committees and by increasing the resources and specialist staff available to them. In the meantime, I warmly welcome the decision last week by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to appear twice a year before the Liaison Committee, which will be the first time any Prime Minister has appeared before a Select Committee in modern times.

Martin Linton: Does my right hon. Friend hope to submit the new proposals in time for the new Scrutiny Committees, if agreed, to give pre-legislative scrutiny to draft Bills in the next Session? Will he consider including in the objectives of the proposed Scrutiny Committees not only taking evidence from Ministers but scrutinising the agendas of European Council meetings in advance?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend wrote to the Modernisation Committee with the helpful proposal that we might add to the core tasks of the Scrutiny Committees the requirement to make sure that they remain abreast of the scrutiny of European directives and legislation. The point has force and we will consider whether to amend the core tasks accordingly before we debate this in the House.

On draft legislation, it is of course open to Select Committees to carry out their scrutiny under their present powers. I hope that before the House comes to the end of the Session we will have had the opportunity to introduce some draft legislation and that Select Committees will wish to carry out pre-legislative scrutiny. The earlier we can get Parliament in on the act of the preparation of legislation, the better the prospects are for Parliament to shape that legislation.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Does the Leader of the House recognise that members of the Liaison Committee warmly welcome most of the proposals from the Modernisation Committee? On their behalf, I express their delight at the remarkable announcement from the Prime Minister that he will face two full public sessions of questioning before the Liaison Committee each year.

Will the Leader of the House accept that the Chairmen collectively are equally sincere when they say that they are genuinely worried and concerned that the proposed 33 per cent. increase in the size of the Committees could prejudice and damage their effectiveness? Before my right hon. Friend brings his proposals before the House, will he have look at the issue again?

Mr. Cook: First, may I welcome what my right hon. Friend says about the decision of the Prime Minister to appear before his Committee? It is absolutely right that the Prime Minister should appear before the Liaison Committee, which contains the Chairs of all the Select and Scrutiny Committees and can thus carry out scrutiny of any issue within the office of the Prime Minister.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the size of Committees. We considered that carefully in the Modernisation Committee and came to the conclusion that it was not right that Members who want to take part in that scrutiny process should be debarred from doing so because of the present size of the Select Committee. Although I understand the anxieties of some members of the Committee as to the importance of retaining cohesion, I am myself the Chair of a Select Committee—the Modernisation Committee—which has 15 members and succeeded in reaching a unanimous report. It can be done.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider that point? It does not matter how big the Select Committees are—some Members will always want to be on them. Surely, what is crucial is the effectiveness of the Select Committees and maintaining good and regular attendance of their 11, nine, or whatever, members. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore think carefully before putting the current proposal before the House?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman makes with strength a point about which he obviously feels powerfully. I shall have an opportunity to discuss the matter with the Liaison Committee when I visit it next week, and I hope that on that occasion we can understand each other and see whether there is a way forward.

I remind the hon. Gentleman and the House that there are already two Select Committees of 17 members and that they have traditionally been of that size—*[Interruption.]* I think that I am hearing what I am about to say to the House. Those two Committees have traditionally operated through a Sub-Committee system. If Select Committees are to face up to all the matters and core tasks that we set out, more of them will have to set up Sub-Committees and may welcome a larger size in order to do so.

Private Bills

41. **Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): What plans he has to put proposals before the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons for reform of private Bill procedure. [51334]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): Private Bill procedure was reviewed by the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure in 1987-88, and many of the matters previously covered by that procedure are now covered by the

Transport and Works Act 1992. Before the general election last year, the House agreed to Standing Order changes that allow the House to consider the compatibility of the European convention on human rights with private Bills. The Modernisation Committee might discuss that in future.

Andrew Mackinlay: May I encourage the Minister to see that the Modernisation Committee does look at the matter again? Can we interpret the fact that the Leader of the House did not vote on the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill the other week as an indication that he, like me, considered the whole thing a charade and something that the Government should not have had their hands on? Should not the Modernisation Committee and the Government review the procedure to consider whether it should be changed? It was designed, and most used, to deal with the building of Victorian railways. Is it appropriate that, in a modern Parliament, there should be such an archaic procedure—one that the Government pretend not to be involved in, even though in fact they are involved? Surely, we should say what we mean and mean what we say—especially the Government—about all legislation.

Mr. Twigg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The quantity of private legislation has been hugely reduced by various measures—the Transport and Works Act and the Financial Services Act 1986.

The specific Bill to which my hon. Friend referred was debated at great length in the House over more than three and a half years.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): May I urge my hon. Friend to consider reforming the procedure for private Members' Bills? For instance, if we were to adopt a similar pattern for our sitting times on Wednesdays as the one we currently use on Thursdays, might it be possible to bring private Members' Bills into the main body of the Kirk and consider them on Wednesday and Thursday evenings?

Mr. Twigg: That matter certainly merits further debate; it is under review and will be taken forward by the Modernisation Committee.

House of Lords

42. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): What the proposals for reform of the House of Lords are; and if he will make a statement. [51335]

43. **Mr. Martin Salter** (Reading, West): When the Government will announce their proposals on House of Lords reform. [51336]

44. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): When he expects to make an announcement on further progress on House of Lords reform. [51337]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The Government are committed to reform of the House of Lords to create a modern, effective second Chamber. As I have previously informed the House, we received 1,000 responses to the White Paper. As the Select Committee on Public Administration observes in its sixth report, published today,

"the Government wishes to consider them carefully before deciding on the way ahead".

I can confirm, however, that we hope to announce how we intend to proceed before the summer recess.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is the Committee correct to think that the weight of responses to the White Paper is closer to its thinking than to that of the Government? Is he satisfied with the response, which seems to record previously existing points of agreement and disagreement rather than to reflect new thinking? Can we expect new thinking before the summer recess, when the Government have promised their full response?

Mr. Cook: The Select Committee stated in its report this morning that it is understandable that the Government are unable to give a complete and final response, given that it is necessary for us to consider carefully the responses to the White Paper. I have said to the House before, and I am happy to confirm in the context of this Question Time, that the great majority of responses indicate support for a majority elected second Chamber. Clearly, that must be a factor in considering how to take this matter forward. In terms of what we hope to announce before the summer recess, of course we would expect to go further than we have been able to indicate to the Select Committee at present, and I hope that that will point a way forward for us to make sure that we can legislate in the near future for a reformed, effective, representative second Chamber.

Mr. Salter: May I remind my right hon. Friend of his comments following the publication of the ill-fated White Paper on House of Lords reform? He said that the search will go on for a "centre of gravity" on this issue and that we need a "period of reflection." Does he not agree that, five months on, we have reflected more than enough? Given the 304 right hon. and hon. Members who signed the early-day motion in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) calling for a substantially elected second Chamber, there is no longer any doubt whatsoever that this is the road that we should go down.

Mr. Cook: It is very kind of my hon. Friend to remind me of the debate in the House; I assure him that every moment of it is engraved on my memory. I was conscious that the majority of Members taking part in the debate wanted a higher democratic element in the new second Chamber. Of course a period of reflection must come to a conclusion. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman tempts me, but I must invite him to wait a little bit longer before we announce that. That period of reflection is very important to make sure that we take seriously not just what is expressed in the House but what is expressed by the public and the others who responded. I assure my hon. Friend that we are conscious of the need to maintain momentum on this, and we are also conscious of the need

to make sure that the House can legislate at an early opportunity. That is why I hope that we can announce how we intend to proceed before the summer recess.

David Taylor: Before the long-delayed second stage of House of Lords reform creaks into life, do the Government intend to request the House of Lords Appointments Commission to recommend a further tranche of the ludicrously named people's peers? If so, what changes of criteria does the Minister believe are necessary to widen the pool from which these people will be recruited so that we avoid the appointment of the cosy clique variety that we saw last year?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes his point with considerable colour. He will have observed that there have been no recent appointments from the Appointments Commission, and it is important that the House should be able to reach a view on what should be the future composition of the House. It is much more important that we address our mind to how we see the long-term reform of the House. I hope that, in the process of doing that, we can find the centre of gravity. I believe that the Public Administration Committee proved that it was possible for those who want reform to reach agreement.

I strongly agree with my hon. Friend's opening remark about the long time taken to secure reform. For almost a century, since 1911, we have been looking for reform of the second Chamber, and I am determined that we shall not make the same mistake as before, whereby those who were in favour of reform were divided among themselves, and therefore no reform took place. We must not let that happen this time.

Points of Order

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday, my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams), the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) and I met health service workers from Herefordshire outside the gates of Downing street with three separate petitions calling for more beds for Hereford hospital. I then presented my petition of some 26,000 names, along with my hon. Friend's petition of some 3,000 names, to the Prime Minister. The hon. Member for Leominster, however, whose petition was of some 500 names, kept his petition back. Last night, he presented that petition to the House. He stated:

"I presented more than 20,000 signatures to Downing street last week, and it is a great pleasure to present this petition to the House now".—[*Official Report*, 29 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 775.]

Given that Standing Order No. 153 states that a Member presenting a petition

"shall confine himself to a statement of the parties from whom it comes"

and

"the number of signatures attached to it",

will you, Mr. Speaker, explain to the hon. Gentleman how he can correct the record?

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for this opportunity to draw further attention to the strength of feeling in Herefordshire about the lack of hospital beds and to give credit to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) for his part in helping me with this very serious issue. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I thank the hon. Gentlemen for raising this point of order. When Members address the House—whether presenting petitions or in any other way—they must take responsibility for the accuracy of their remarks. There is nothing that the Chair can do to help the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch).

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In the course of a very busy 24 hours for you, have you had time to reflect on the problems between Westminster and the Scottish Parliament on the disposal and dispersal of productions amassed in the Lockerbie trial?

Mr. Speaker: It has been a rather busy day for me. I am still looking into the matter.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I note your guidance to the House about the accuracy of Members' statements to the House. If the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) had been in the Chamber when my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) presented his petition, would it not have been possible for the hon. Gentleman to have put the matter right then?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is trying to draw me into the argument.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, there is considerable concern in the House about the situation in the middle east, particularly as, once again today, the Israeli Cabinet has turned down the request for a United Nations mission to go to Jenin. The Americans hold all the cards in this case and unless they play those cards, they will be considered to be complicit in covering up what happened in Jenin. Have you, Mr. Speaker, received any indication that a Minister will come to the House—either today or later this week—to update us on the latest situation so that we know what Her Majesty's Government are doing to press the case for the UN to be allowed access?

Mr. Speaker: I have no information on that matter.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) and I would have been in the Chamber when the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) presented his petition if he had done what he promised and told us when he was going to present it—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is always welcome in the Chamber, whether the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) is presenting a petition or not.

Waste

3.38 pm

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to grant additional powers to local authorities in England and Wales for the enforcement of controls and for the prosecution of offences relating to the unauthorised or harmful deposit, treatment or disposal of waste and the transporting of controlled waste without registering; to amend the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989 and Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and for connected purposes.

I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the Bill is much simpler than its long title. I introduced what became the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989, and this Bill is a piece of unfinished business. I produced my first Bill because of the appalling situation that I encountered on the perimeter of the Silwood housing estate in my constituency. Some 10,000 tonnes of waste had been illegally dumped—much of it spoil from the docklands redevelopment—creating not just blight and hazards but an environment of dust, dirt and litter.

My Act and the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which followed it, gave a new impetus to apprehending fly-tippers and to cleaning up the results of their criminal activities. Inevitably, as environmental standards rose and public concern increased, waste regulation authorities struggled to keep pace. Regulating waste and tackling environmental crime are high priorities for the Environment Agency, which has done much to deal with both problems over the past decade. However, in respect of fly-tipping, experience now suggests that there would be considerable benefit if local authorities could exercise some of the powers currently available to the Environment Agency; that is the purpose of my Bill.

Fly-tipping is defined as

"the unlawful deposit of waste without a waste management licence or registered exemption".

My Bill applies to individuals or companies with a duty of care to see that people who carry waste commercially are registered and do not dispose of it illegally. Waste production in the United Kingdom is now estimated at 428 million tonnes per annum—up from 400 million tonnes in 1989. Within that overall total, in England and Wales, 30 million tonnes are municipal waste; 25 million tonnes are commercial waste; 50 million tonnes are industrial waste; and 72 million tonnes are demolition and construction waste.

Obviously, the scope for fly-tipping is enormous, but no precise national figures are available for the volume of waste fly-tipped or removed. The Environment Agency estimates that removing fly-tipped waste costs it £500,000 per annum. By contrast, a recent Local Government Association survey of fly-tipping provided evidence that the estimated cost of clean-ups to English and Welsh local authorities was £25 million per annum. It found that 94 per cent. of the 128 responding authorities had recorded incidents of fly-tipping, with 20 per cent. recording more than 1,000 incidents. Furthermore, 84 per cent. believed that local authorities did not have sufficient powers to deal with fly-tipping, and 97 per cent. supported a change in regulations.

The survey informed the deliberations of the National Flytipping Stakeholders Forum and its recommendations on the way in which local authorities could deal more effectively with fly-tipping. Officers from my council—the London borough of Lewisham—are enthusiastic members of the fly-tipping forum, and the work of Kevin Moore, Lewisham's service policy and partnerships manager, in particular, has inspired my ten-minute Bill. Kevin Moore's preoccupation is not with Bob the Builder, but with his criminal counterpart, Frank the Fly-Tipper and his alter-ego John; I stress that those nicknames were chosen by Kevin Moore, not by me. Frank offers builders and householders cheap rates to dispose of bulky waste and rubble. He finds a quiet residential road, industrial site, railway line or roadworks and tips his truck. If caught red-handed, he says that he had to unload to grease his axle or fix the truck. He will claim that the vehicle is not registered in his name; it is owned by John, whose full name and address he does not know. Of course, John does not exist and to ensure that he is not traceable, a false address is given to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. If Frank is stopped by the Environment Agency, of course he will promise to give John the papers to get registered and nothing more will happen.

Kevin Moore wants action. Lewisham has suffered 13,600 fly-tipping incidents in the past year, costing over £500,000 in clean-up operations. That is an enormous burden for a local authority but, more frighteningly, the figure is 50 per cent. up on last year, which was 50 per cent. up on the year before. Whenever a new waste sector is regulated, fly-tipping increases. I dare not mention fridges, but tyres are already a major problem in Waltham Forest, Birmingham and Newcastle. The London boroughs of Lewisham and Newham were the first local authorities to have public service agreements aimed at reducing fly-tipping. They stand ready to pilot the new powers proposed today and are confident that many other local authorities wish to follow them.

My Bill would make explicit provision to give local authorities the power to serve notices requiring waste carriers to produce documents and to extend the offence of failing to comply with such a requirement. It would introduce two further measures—first, to extend the power to carry out roadside checks and, secondly, to provide for the imposition of fixed penalties for the offence of failing to produce authority to transport controlled waste.

The latter is particularly important because in practice, as I mentioned earlier, failure to produce registration documents results in no penalty. The new measure would be a much more effective deterrent to those who take to our streets with their trucks full of illegal waste: they would have to get registered or get fined. The advent of CCTV and the willingness of residents to report fly-tippers mean that local authorities can often identify offending vehicles. They are much better placed than the Environment Agency to stop a fly-tipper in transit or to spot a suspect vehicle on their patch.

Case studies from my borough indicate all too clearly that the stretched resources of the Environment Agency mean that it does not use to the full the powers that the House gave it a decade ago. Fly-tipping remains a major scourge, blighting our landscape and people's lives.

Local authorities are not alone. Increasingly, big landowners such as the National Trust, Railtrack, British Waterways and individual farmers are suffering unsightly and dangerous fly-tipping. Councils are faced with mounting clean-up costs as they seek to meet increasing demand. Last year, Lewisham prosecuted 46 fly-tippers and, using existing powers, served more than 500

[Joan Ruddock]

fixed-penalty fines on businesses found directly responsible for minor fly-tipping, but the council is confident that it could do much more if it had new powers.

Frustration is growing. Local authorities are under increasing pressure from the public and, indeed, from central Government. Waste production continues to rise relentlessly as prosperity and consumerism grow. Neglected and dirty streets lead to community apathy and antisocial behaviour. Waste minimisation and recycling are essential to protect the future environment, but we need to take action today. If we do not want to get buried in our own filth, we will have to give councils the means of tackling the criminals who constantly evade the law and blight the environment of so many law-abiding citizens.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Joan Ruddock, Peter Bottomley, Malcolm Bruce, Mr. Gregory Barker, Sue Doughty, Jim Dowd, Ms Julia Drown, Julie Morgan, Mr. Bill O'Brien, Ms Bridget Prentice, Mr. Simon Thomas and Ms Joan Walley.

WASTE

Joan Ruddock accordingly presented a Bill to grant additional powers to local authorities in England and Wales for the enforcement of controls and for the prosecution of offences relating to the unauthorised or harmful deposit, treatment or disposal of waste and the transporting of controlled waste without registering; to amend the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989 and Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 128].

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

[Relevant document: The Second Report from the Treasury Committee, Session 2001–02, on Budget 2002, HC 780.]

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I should inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.49 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am pleased to do so at a time of economic stability, with improving prospects for economic growth, with the right foundations on which to carry forward our work on enterprise and fairness and with investment and reform in our public services, securing the national health service for the future.

The Chancellor was able to report in his Budget statement that Britain has enjoyed

"the lowest inflation and the lowest interest rates for 40 years; for the first time for half a century, unemployment in Britain is lower than in America, lower than in Japan and lower than in the rest of Europe; and in the year just ended, Britain had the highest growth of any of our major competitors."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2002; Vol. 130, c. 577.]

That record of economic stability has not happened by chance, but is a result of the tough choices that we have made and the new monetary and fiscal frameworks that we have put in place, which are serving the economy well in the global uncertainties that we have seen.

The challenge—indeed, the opportunity—for British industry and investors is to build on that hard-won stability, accelerate productivity improvements and increase output, jobs and prosperity. Although the economy has been stable, it can and must grow stronger. The Bill reflects the Government's clear role in ensuring the conditions necessary for successful businesses through important measures to modernise taxes, promote enterprise and cut red tape.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Will the Chief Secretary reconsider the Bill as it affects the North sea oil and gas industry and explain how those measures will bring stability? The Government have used that sector as an exemplar of how industry and the Government can work together, yet people in the industry are now in a state of shock and despair given that all the Government's understanding of them seems to have been swept away. The costs of operating in the North sea are so much higher than in other fields and the fields are so much smaller and therefore the returns are much more risky, so it seems a strange time to put up tax when other regimes have been lowering their taxes on the North sea.

Mr. Smith: On the North sea oil regime, our aim is, of course, to promote long-term investment in the North sea, while giving a fair return to the British people. So the Bill contains two important measures in relation to the North sea tax regime. First, to raise revenues, clauses 90 to 92

will introduce a supplementary charge at a rate of 10 per cent. on North sea profits; but, secondly, to support new investment, clause 62 will provide 100 per cent. first-year allowances for capital expenditure and investment in the North sea. I am advised that, under the allowance change and even with the supplementary charge, companies that invest in new fields will have higher post-tax rates of return than they would under the current regime. So we are striking the right balance between stimulating investment and getting a fair return to the British people.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Given the words that the right hon. Gentleman has just uttered, will he place in the Library what is effectively the business case, stating in detail how he has come to his conclusions, so that we may also make a balanced and informed judgment of those words?

Mr. Smith: I shall be very happy to write to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) and deposit a copy of the letter in the Library to illustrate my point about the interaction of the 100 per cent. capital allowance and the 10 per cent. charge.

On the platform of stability that we have put in place, the aim of the Budget, enshrined in the Bill, is to build a stronger enterprise culture, with higher productivity and investment. In recent years, British business investment levels have risen significantly from just over 10 per cent. of national income to almost 14 per cent.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): In the context of investment, will the Chief Secretary tell us what the savings ratio is this year, compared with the savings ratio that the Government inherited in 1996–97?

Mr. Smith: As I recall, the ratio is about 5 per cent. and is projected to go up gradually. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the savings ratio reflects consumer confidence in their domestic financial position. One of the reasons why it went down was that consumers had more confidence and their household balance sheets were stronger than they had been in the years of boom and bust under the Conservatives, when they never knew what would happen to their financial circumstances.

We want to sustain and improve business investment and that is why in past Budgets we cut corporation tax from 33p to 30p, the lowest rate in our history. To encourage investment in the technologies of the future, clause 52 and schedule 12 extend an enhanced research and development tax credit to all companies. That means a £400 million boost for innovation and research in Britain.

To help companies restructure without key decisions being constrained by the tax system, clause 43 and schedule 8 set out an exemption for companies disposing of substantial shareholdings. That new relief forms part of the Government's commitment to reform and modernise the corporate tax regime, ensuring that the United Kingdom remains a good place in which to do business.

The Bill also sets out the new regime to provide relief for the cost of intangible assets, including intellectual property and goodwill. The new relief, details of which are set out in clause 83 and schedules 29 and 30, will encourage business to take advantage of opportunities in the knowledge-based economy. This is another important step in our programme of corporate tax reform.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The Minister has made many points about corporate tax reform, particularly with regard to corporation tax, but does he accept that in Scotland 75 per cent. of all small and medium-sized enterprises are either sole traders or partnerships and do not pay corporation tax? What is there in the Bill to help those businesses and truly help enterprise in Scotland?

Mr. Smith: I was coming later in my remarks to the steps that we are taking to raise the VAT threshold and greatly to simplify the administration of VAT, which I hope will come as a great help to the companies to which the hon. Gentleman refers. He is right to stress the importance of small businesses. They account for 55 per cent. of all private sector jobs—more than 10 million jobs in all—and nearly half the economy's output. Recognising their important role as employers and wealth creators is an important theme running through the Bill.

In 1997 we cut the small companies tax rate from 23p to 21p and in 1998 we cut it again to 20p with a starting rate of 10p. This year, clause 31 takes it down again to 19p with immediate effect. To send a strong signal to the small business community, clause 32 reduces the starting rate of corporation tax, also with immediate effect, from 10p to zero. That means that companies with profits of up to £10,000 will pay no corporation tax. The Budget set out the most favourable tax regime for small companies in any of the advanced industrial countries and the Finance Bill puts that into statute.

To fund the growth of innovative young companies, we need to increase the level of business investment. Private equity investment has doubled since 1997 and 38 per cent. of all EU private equity investment is in the UK. To maintain that momentum, the Bill will cut capital gains tax to 20 per cent. for business assets held for one year or more from this month. For business assets held for more than two years, it will cut capital gains tax to 10 per cent. That means that overall, Britain will have a capital gains tax regime more favourable to enterprise than even that of the United States.

We recognise too that the cost of compliance is an important issue and the Budget sets out proposals to reform the administration of VAT, to help smaller firms comply with PAYE and to remove unnecessary regulations. Clauses 23 to 25 set out the steps that we are taking in the Bill to simplify and streamline the VAT regime.

In disadvantaged areas, businesses can be a catalyst for community regeneration, so in 2,000 designated enterprise neighbourhoods, our small business tax cuts will be supported by further measures to encourage social entrepreneurs. First, there are measures on stamp duty on property transactions. In the pre-Budget report, we abolished stamp duty on home and business property transactions worth up to £150,000. For commercial transactions, we are now seeking state aid approval to abolish the limit altogether. Secondly, the community investment tax credit will take effect from this month, providing £25 million to support every £100 million of private sector investment. Clause 56 and schedules 16 and 17 set out the details.

[Mr. Smith]

We also believe that there is no necessary trade-off between economic growth and environmental protection. The challenge for us all is to achieve higher growth while enhancing the environment. It is increasingly recognised that sustainable development is an opportunity for British companies. Investing now in productive energy-saving technologies and techniques is important for competitiveness in this expanding global market.

We are taking further steps in the Bill to exempt from the climate change levy all electricity produced by combined heat and power. We will also exempt from the levy electricity generated by coal mine methane, which combines the social benefit of employment in mining communities and the environmental benefit of efficient energy production. More generally, investment in energy-saving technologies will qualify for capital allowances at an enhanced rate of 100 per cent., strengthening our economy as we move towards our Kyoto targets.

On cleaner fuels, the Bill introduces a fuel duty incentive on sulphur-free fuel. We have already announced fuel duty cuts for the development of hydrogen, biogas and methanol in pilot projects. Last week, my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary invited further proposals for pilots that would help the development of cleaner fuels and which we would be prepared to support with fuel duty cuts and exemptions.

Incentives will also be introduced to encourage people to drive cleaner vehicles, with a licence fee reduction of £30 for the most efficient cars, £55 for the least polluting vans and £35 for the least polluting motor cycles. We have also announced our introduction of the distance-based road user charge for lorries, with offsetting cuts for the UK haulage industry to ensure that foreign lorry operators pay their fair share for using our roads. The details are set out in clause 134.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Some time ago, the Government announced that they would give the fuel duty rebate to community transport. Is there anything in the Bill that advances that commitment? When will we get the proposals that the Government promised they would make on that measure?

Mr. Smith: I understand that no such commitment was made, but as the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter, I will check it carefully and get back to him.

On waste disposal, we want to encourage the sustainable treatment of waste. As was expected, clause 119 increases the standard rate of landfill tax from £12 to £13. The Bill also includes important amendments to the operation of the aggregates levy and provides for the scheme's operation in Northern Ireland. Clauses 126 to 130 set out the details.

The goals of economic growth and environmental protection are intertwined in the policies of this Government. That was true of the Budget, it is true of the Bill and it will be true of the forthcoming spending review.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I was pleased to hear of the planned increase in landfill charges, but does not the Minister recognise that associated with that steady increase in charges is a steady increase in fly-tipping of the type that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) seeks to address in the private Member's Bill on waste that she introduced a moment ago? The problem exists in the constituencies of many hon. Members. Do the Government intend to tackle fly-tipping at the same time as making it more expensive to use our existing landfill sites?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford in introducing her ten-minute Bill. That is partly why we have been reviewing and consulting on reform of the use of the fund that the levy makes possible to ensure that it is properly aligned both with our priorities and with those of the public for better recycling and clearing up mess wherever it is—as well as taking vigorous action against those who are responsible for fly-tipping.

Mr. Jack: When the landfill tax was introduced, there was a corresponding reduction in employers' national insurance contributions. Can the Chief Secretary explain why, for the second time under this Government's responsibility for that tax, no corresponding reduction has been made, although the landfill tax rate has been increased?

Mr. Smith: We have made a judgment on the overall balance between the reduction of 0.3 per cent. in employers' national insurance contributions and the establishment of the fund. As I said, we have been reviewing the fund's operation. In making that overall judgment, the effects must be considered together.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Smith: I should like to make a little more progress, if I may. I have been very generous in giving way.

To ensure fairness for taxpayers and businesses, we must act swiftly to close tax loopholes and be vigilant against tax avoidance. The Chancellor has therefore decided to act with immediate effect on the avoidance of stamp duty on property, to put an end to three artificial schemes for VAT avoidance and to review the complex rules of residence and domicile.

The heart of the Budget, as we debated last week, is to secure the long-term future of the national health service—a key priority for the Government. Tomorrow, we will have the opportunity to discuss the measures in the national insurance resolutions. The Bill freezes personal allowances for the under-65s in 2003–04, contributing to further investment and reform in public services and the NHS, which were starved of resources for 18 years under Conservative Governments, but will be renewed for generations to come by this Government.

We believe in a Britain where fairness and enterprise reinforce one another, where, on the platform of stability and tough fiscal rules that we have put in place, we can invest the resources needed for quality public services and make work pay, so that everyone is enabled to make the most of their potential. A strong and growing economy is crucial for a fairer Britain. The Bill, like the Budget, advances both, and I commend it to the House.

4.8 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Finance Bill because the provisions contained in its two volumes and 488 pages increase the burden of taxation on important sectors of the economy; fail to make adequate commitments about taxation and personal allowances in future years; and will have a negative impact on competitiveness and the attractiveness of the UK as a location for investment.'

I begin by drawing attention to my declaration in the Register of Members' Interests. Specifically, I do occasional work on staff communication skills with employees of J P Morgan and Deutsche Bank.

I can say without exaggeration, and with the assent of my right hon. and hon. Friends, that the Chief Secretary's speech in winding up the Budget debate last Tuesday was widely viewed as the most peculiar parliamentary performance of this Parliament, and probably of the past five years. The right hon. Gentleman was overcome with hysteria and propelled into such flights of uncontrolled fury that many Conservative Members feared that Vesuvius had exploded all over again. I am an observant as well as a compassionate chap and I therefore recognise that it was a terrifying experience for the Chief Secretary to try to cope with the forensic dissection of the Budget that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) unleashed. Nevertheless, let me say with all due courtesy that it is reassuring to observe that this afternoon he has returned to some semblance of normality.

Let me continue as I have begun, in a generous spirit and with some words of welcome for specific measures in the Finance Bill. We welcome the tax credit for research and development by large companies, even though it has been announced for the third time. We welcome the cut in corporation tax for small firms and the modest reform of the basis for the payment by companies of VAT. However, they and other not unwelcome features of the Budget must be viewed in the wider context of other, damaging imposts.

I refer specifically to an impost of which business is painfully aware: the £6 billion a year extra taxation with which it has been encumbered in the past five years and the additional burden of £5 billion a year in regulatory costs. Those burdens impede companies' ability to win orders and create jobs.

The Bill must be viewed in the light of the fact that new regulation that affects business has been introduced and continues to be introduced every 26 minutes of the working day. It must be viewed in the light of the fact that since the Government took office, Britain has plunged from ninth to 19th on the world competitiveness scoreboard. It must also be considered in the light of the fact that productivity growth is below that of the United States of America, under the Labour Government, when it was consistently above it under the previous, Conservative Government.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: In a moment. The hon. Gentleman tempts me; he will have to wait only a few minutes.

The measure must be examined in the light of the fact that this country's share of world exports has fallen since the Chancellor took office. The balance of trade deficit is there for all to see—it has damaged the country every month for the past four years. Indeed, the British Chambers of Commerce estimate that rail failures alone have cost the average company in this country no less than £21,000. The Chancellor is wont to speak in terms of telephone numbers and that figure might therefore be writ small in his thinking. However, as my hon. Friends know, it is significant to the companies that are damaged as a result. That is the crucial point.

Kevin Brennan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: I can no longer resist the hon. Gentleman's soothing bromides.

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman is an expert on peculiar parliamentary performances, but is not it peculiar to cite so many statistics without reminding us of this country's record on growth compared with that of the other G7 nations?

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman tempts me. I shall comment on growth and the recent forecasts later. He might wish to advance his cause by making a speech or indulging in an intervention, but it is extremely foolish of him to assist me in mine. That is precisely what his ill-advised intervention has done.

The Bill is massive and its size continues and exacerbates a trend that we have witnessed in the past five years. The first Finance Bill of Margaret Thatcher's Government, which was commended to the House of Commons by the then Sir Geoffrey Howe, now my noble Friend Lord Howe of Aberavon, ran to 22 pages. For the elucidation of Labour Members, it was published on 18 June 1979. This Bill is the third largest that the Chancellor has introduced and the third largest of all time—it has 488 pages and is published in two volumes. As if that were not a grievous enough affliction, this 488-page, two-volume Bill is accompanied by a further two volumes of explanatory notes, which in total amount to no fewer than 604 extra pages.

David Taylor *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman must contain himself. I shall readily give way in a moment.

I leave it to the House to judge whether it was a tactful calculation or an inadvertent error on the part of the Government that the pages of the explanatory notes were left unnumbered. My indefatigable assistant was obliged to do the counting herself on my behalf.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The hon. Gentleman is right to make a point about the inflating size of Finance Bills under this Government. Would he, however, care to comment on that trend under the Conservative Government? In 1995, the Finance Act ran to 566 pages.

Mr. Bercow: That is a very illuminating fact, and I disclaim all responsibility for it immediately on the ground that I was not here, I did not know, I am not

[Mr. Bercow]

responsible, I cannot be brought to book, and it is a matter of the most stupefying irrelevance to me. Whereas the Liberal Democrats want to focus on the past, my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Conservative Benches are concerned with the present and preoccupied with the future. That is the difference between forward-looking Conservatives and backward-looking, neanderthal, nit-picking Liberal Democrats, who will always remain the minority party.

David Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is taking the House on an illuminating peregrination round the dimensions of the document before us. Is he not, however, living proof that a small size does not necessarily produce concise coherence of the kind with which he suggests Lady Thatcher's early legislation is associated?

Mr. Bercow: There are two answers to that. First, so far as I am concerned, there is hope yet, and I am still growing. Secondly, I say to the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor)—who is always, if nothing else, very fair—that nothing was ever to be heard from my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Howe of Aberavon on the subject of Finance Bills that was not penetrating, persuasive and concise in equal measure.

Mr. Jack *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: I shall give way to my right hon. Friend, who is a distinguished former Financial Secretary.

Mr. Jack: As someone who was responsible for quite a long Finance Bill, I wonder whether my hon. Friend would agree that the pages of the Finance Bills for which the last Conservative Government were responsible were quality pages that laid the foundations for the reform of the British economy and helped to leave it in its current robust state?

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. He was a distinguished Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and the last Conservative Government bequeathed an outstanding economic legacy to this Government. The simple reality is that, as a consequence of successful economic policies pursued over 18 years by the Conservative party, we achieved record prosperity at home, secured respect abroad and helped to rediscover that sense of belief in ourselves that for so long, under Governments of both colours, had deserted us. That is the reality, and my right hon. Friend is sensible to point it out to me.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: Not at the moment. I am always tempted to give way because I like feeding on dog bones, but I will come back to the hon. Gentleman in due course.

The facts about the size of the Bill are all the more remarkable given the fact—to which the Chief Secretary elliptically referred—that it does not even include provision for the increases in national insurance contributions. The sheer, unbridled, crass ineptitude of the Government in moving the Budget resolutions was such—as the wider public should now be aware—that a separate debate on the national insurance rises is required tomorrow. That debate will be dealt with by the shadow Chancellor and by my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington).

Kevin Brennan: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that it is not normal practice to include national insurance matters in a Finance Bill, because national insurance contributions go not into the Consolidated Fund, but into the national insurance fund?

Mr. Bercow: That was an unfortunate intervention, because the reality is that the Government believed that that was the plan, but suddenly discovered that they had erred. They then grovelled to the Opposition in recognition of the fact that an extra parliamentary day would be required for this purpose. I would simply say, in all kindness to the hon. Gentleman, who is an agreeable companion outside the Palace of Westminster, that grovelling sycophancy should not be taken too far. I know that the hon. Gentleman is keen to impress those on the Treasury Bench, but if he is going to make interventions he should be clear that they are in line with the nous and information available to Ministers.

In the context of complexity, from which I know Labour Members are keen to distract attention, I refer to the verdict of John Whiting of PricewaterhouseCoopers, a distinguished and senior accountant on 25 April in the *Financial Times*:

> "The only thing that keeps it bearable is the fact that we have seen a lot of it before. But for that, we'd be utterly floored."

The trend of ever more complex Finance Bills, and lengthier ones at that, is serious. It is compounded by the trend of ever more complex and lengthy tax law, as illustrated by the growing size of tax manuals. Tolley's standard tax manual, the bible of tax accountants, has grown by more than 30 per cent. in the past three years. As the *Financial Times* put it on 24 November last year:

> "Tolley's manuals on VAT, income tax and corporation tax . . . have had to add a total of 855 pages to explain the gospel according to Gordon Brown. The three guides, which together have 3,414 pages, are longer than London's residential and business telephone directories. Tolley's has even had to reduce the print size to cram in more."

That is in no way a tribute to the Government. Rather, it is a searing indictment of their addiction to meddling, stealth and over-regulation. These are now the principal bugbears of individual taxpayers and British commerce alike. Clive Lewis, secretary to the Institute of Chartered Accountants enterprise group, was surely right when he said:

> "Not only does the volume and complexity of regulation eat into the resources of a business, but it also absorbs time that could be spent more valuably on survival and expansion."

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: No. In due course I might, but I want to make some progress. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be successful in catching the eye of Mr. Speaker or of one of his Deputies later.

I come to the effect of the Bill on income tax payers. Under clauses 27 and 28, the freeze in personal allowances for those under 65, combined with the freeze

in the national insurance primary threshold, will raise £700 million in 2003–04 and an anticipated £850 million the year after. Millions of taxpayers will be poorer as a result. The Inland Revenue is now projecting an increase in the number of people paying the top rate—40 per cent.—of tax, from 2,080,000 in the last year of the Administration of John Major to 3,070,000 in 2003–04, when the higher national insurance contributions, which the Government said they would not introduce, kick into the groins of those who have to pay for them.

I would like to say something about the treatment of tax credits, about which the Government, if they have any conscience at all, should be ashamed.

Mr. Andrew Smith: On the tax and national insurance increases, are the Conservatives pledged to reverse them, and would they cut that money from NHS spending?

Mr. Bercow: The right hon. Gentleman is very anxious. I can say beyond peradventure that we will set out our tax and spending plans with total clarity and absolute specificity well in time for the next election. If he seriously expects me, 10 months after we lost the last election on our previous manifesto, to announce the contents of the next manifesto, he is sadly deluding himself.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Chief Secretary has asked a very stupid question, which we are used to from him. It was only just under 10 months ago that the Government said that they had no plans to raise national insurance charges.

Mr. Bercow: Deputy Chief Whips have many merits. One of them is that they remind people of points they should have made but did not. That is exactly what my hon. Friend has done. I am bestirred by what he has just said. On 29 May last year, the right hon. Member for Leicester, West (Ms Hewitt), now Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, said that the Government had no plans to increase national insurance contributions. She went on boldly—but unwisely, as it transpired—to say, "It isn't going to happen." Given that the Government cannot make up their mind and stick to it over a period of 10 months, it is absurd and preposterous of the Chief Secretary to expect me, during today's Second Reading of the Finance Bill, to unveil the contents of the next Conservative manifesto. I shall do so later, but not now.

Until this Budget, the various tax credits for families that the Chancellor had introduced—particularly the working families tax credit—had been treated as negative taxation. As such, the tax burden appeared lower than if the credits had been treated as public expenditure, in accordance with international accounting convention. For years, Ministers have been stubbornly insisting that they are right and all their critics are wrong. A delicious irony is therefore to be found by fiscal anoraks who peruse box C2 of the Red Book, which illuminatingly states:

"The Government . . . has decided"—*[Interruption.]*

No, I shall read it slowly, because I want to maximise the shame and embarrassment of Government Members. They are not going to escape that shame and embarrassment. Box C2 states:

"The Government . . . has decided to adopt the OECD classification rules for the purposes of calculating net taxes and social security contributions, as used in the tax-GDP ratio consistent with international best practice . . . This change adds about 0.5 percentage points to the tax-GDP ratio for 1999–2000".

Belatedly, if not grudgingly, the Government have now admitted that they were wrong. The Red Book's main table on the tax burden not only contains tax burden outturn and estimates that differ from those in the Budget and the pre-Budget report of 2001; it also contains revised figures for those two financial statements.

Yet for all the complexity, minutiae and fog of statistics with which the Chancellor and his colleagues seek to blind us, the basic facts about the tax burden are brutally simple. The total tax take will rise by £6.1 billion by 2003–04, and by approximately £8 billion a year by 2005–06. The Government claim that this unprecedented pickpocketing is for the benefit of public services, but I ask the House to consider who will be worse off as a result of the Bill. Nurses will be worse off; police inspectors will be worse off; teachers will be worse off; average earners will be worse off; through measures to come, the national health service will be worse off as an employer; the police service will be worse off as an employer; and the education service will be worse off as an employer.

What we are getting from this Government is just more talk, more taxes, no change and no difference. Frankly, British people deserve better. In the past five years, taxes have gone up and public services have got worse. This country demands and deserves world-class public services, yet all the Labour Government do is tax more, waste more, fail to deliver improvements and refuse to learn from abroad. The Government demand more of voters' money, but they do not know how to make the NHS and other public services better. Every man, woman and child in this country is paying £1,600 more in taxation than in 1997, yet waiting lists are rising again, and the chances of surviving cancer in Britain are among the worst in Europe. Violent crime and street crime are reaching epidemic proportions, teacher vacancies doubled last year and truancy has risen. Under this Administration and the worst Secretary of State for Transport since his immediate predecessor, the trains have now descended into chaos.

Perhaps most shamefully of all, the Government are failing to meet the plethora of public service agreement targets that they set. For Ministers to fail to meet voters' expectations is bad enough—but for them to fail to meet their own expectations requires a breathtaking incompetence that is fast becoming the hallmark of this over-hyped and underperforming Administration. What a shower they are.

We read recently of what always starts to happen in Governments who have a chasm between the words they utter and the deeds they do. They start to fight like ferrets in a sack. The most recent manifestation of the discordant note that has been injected into Government business appeared in an article in *The Independent* last Friday by the respected political editor, Andrew Grice, under the title, "Brown wins battle with Blunkett on crime cash". The trouble with the Chancellor, who is a ministerial and departmental imperialist par excellence, is that he loves to trample over the terrain of all of his Cabinet colleagues. Is a new low being reached? It looks like it. The article says:

"Relations between Mr Brown and Mr Blunkett, who are the two front-runners to succeed Tony Blair, are said by Cabinet colleagues to be strained. They had a skirmish on the eve of last week's Budget over whether the Home Office would receive a cash top-up this year."

[Mr. Bercow]

It says that the Chancellor

"has also expressed scepticism about the value for money achieved by previous Home Office initiatives and whether the high 'up-front' cost of Mr Blunkett's reforms to police working practices will deliver long-term benefits."

The Chancellor is also said to be irritated by the public campaigning for more money by the Home Secretary. There we have it. Relations are not good. It is looking rough and Ministers are turning on each other. They are failing to deliver, they are confounding the public, they are guilty of hype, they are getting it wrong and they are starting to panic.

Mr. Edward Davey: If I may bring the hon. Gentleman back to the Budget debate and to the documents before us, can he tell us whether he has read the Treasury Committee report published today, and whether he agrees with it?

Mr. Bercow: I am familiar with the report. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's prompting, because I have read it and have a view on it that I shall reveal to the House shortly. I know that the hon. Gentleman numbers patience among his qualities and I will happily offer him my verdict on that important matter in due course. However, even if the Liberal Democrats do not agree, I would have thought that many important features of the Bill remain to be addressed, including North sea oil taxation.

Clause 90 will introduce a 10 per cent. supplementary charge on companies producing oil or gas in the UK on the UK continental shelf. That charge will apply to companies' profits from the extraction of oil or gas in the UK or on the UK continental shelf. The Red Book predicts that the tax will cost the industry £100 million this year, £450 million next year and £600 million the year after that. However, commentators Wood McKenzie put the figures at £127 million, £454 million and £771 million, followed by £1 billion in 2005–06. Already it is predicted that investment will be discouraged, with a serious adverse impact on the Scottish economy. That is the considered judgment of the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association and of the respected head of BP, Lord Brown, who said only last Tuesday:

"I don't think any other country in the world has increased production taxes in this way over the last 10 years—with two exceptions—Venezuela and Argentina."

The risk to jobs in the UK is so obvious, and to those in Scotland so palpable, that everyone is aware of those risks except, apparently, the Government.

Sir Robert Smith: I raise a constituency concern, and the hon. Gentleman is right to say that Scotland's economy is highly dependent on the industry. However, it is important to point out that the whole UK economy benefits from that investment. Businesses far from the North sea will find that their supply chain ends there.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman is right and I agree with every word he said. Industry experts Wood McKenzie are understandably anxious that the changes could make the UK less attractive to investors and may delay or postpone the development of marginal fields. That is their considered verdict. If Ministers disagree, it would be helpful if they could invoke some evidence in their support.

Even before the Budget, we saw signs that activity in the North sea was slowing. What appraisal have the Government made of the latest round of licensing? I am told that one company has withdrawn its bid since the Budget, and many fear that the outcome of this round will be disappointing. In suggesting, as the Chief Secretary did, that the industry warrants further taxation, I put it to him that there is widespread concern that the Government have too little regard to the enormous capital requirements of UK continental shelf projects and the long time scales over which returns on investment are achieved. Measured by the return on capital employed, oil exploration and production has in fact been one of the lowest performing sectors over the past 20 years, underperforming in the overall UK market by more than 40 per cent. Furthermore, the Government's tax take is now up from 40.1 per cent. to 46.5 per cent. as a result of the Budget. That rate is higher than in the gulf of Mexico, Canada and Ireland.

The treatment of controlled foreign companies—a matter of breathtaking insignificance to the economic illiterates who pepper the Labour Benches—is a cause for concern to us and to many outside the House. The controlled foreign companies rules are designed to stop UK companies reducing their UK tax liability by diverting profits to subsidiaries in low tax regimes. Those rules work, broadly, by charging the UK parent companies of CFCs on an amount equal to the profits that would otherwise avoid tax.

The important point in this context is that clause 88 provides for a reserve power to make regulations specifying overseas jurisdictions to which the exemptions from the CFC rules will not apply. That is clearly targeted at the Crown dependencies of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. The proposals concern subsidiaries of groups that have their headquarters in the United Kingdom.

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: Oh, I know that the hon. Lady is very anxious; I will be referring to her in dispatches before long and of course I will then give her an opportunity to intervene.

Dawn Primarolo: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: Very well.

Dawn Primarolo: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way so graciously. Will he remind the House of when the Conservative party introduced a similar reserve power when it was in Government, and why?

Mr. Bercow: No, I will not. I simply say to the hon. Lady that the circumstances in which the oil industry finds itself—the margins on its work, the extent of the investment required and the cost of the capital that is put into the process—are on a radically different scale from those that applied then. The verdict of Lord Brown of BP and the view of the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association show that they see no comparison between the tax behaviour of the Conservative Government, in

different and more propitious circumstances, and that over which the hon. Lady is cogitating now. I will come on to the subject of foreign companies and the hon. Lady's role in relation thereto.

This feature of the Finance Bill has nothing to do with tackling money laundering—rather, it is but the latest instalment in the Government's maniacal war against tax competition. The uncertainty resulting from this reserve power threatens the UK's position as a location for multinational companies' headquarters in the future.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: No, I will not, because I am dealing with the hon. Lady, which is a pleasurable experience from which I do not wish to be diverted.

A report in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 21 April offers a lurid account of telephone calls allegedly made by the Paymaster General to Senator Pierre Horsfall, Jersey's senior politician. He is said to have been given an ultimatum that unless his Government signed the European Union code of conduct by 16 April—the day before the Budget—his island would have to face unpleasant consequences, even though, as Crown dependencies, the Channel Islands are not in the European Union. The Channel Islands and the Isle of Man could scarcely be expected to offer to destroy the sector that provides 70 per cent. of their income. It is reasonable for them to rely on the guarantee given by this country 30 years ago when we joined the European Economic Community that their tax sovereignty was untouchable. For the Government to contemplate wrecking the economies of those dependencies is both financially short-sighted and, if I may say so, the most objectionable form of Executive bullying—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] Well, I wanted to get that off my chest.

On vehicle excise duty, schedule 5 makes changes to the vehicle taxation and registration system to provide that liability to tax the vehicle shall rest with the registered keeper. It creates the offence of failing to re-license a vehicle. It provides that a supplement may be charged where a vehicle keeper fails to re-license a vehicle, and that the amount of such a supplement and the circumstances in which it is payable shall be specified in regulations. The schedule will provide that vehicle excise duty shall be payable on any vehicle on the register, or used or kept on a public road, or on any former mechanically propelled vehicle that remains registered as a vehicle.

The trouble with that is twofold and simply stated. The Government are giving themselves the power to levy vehicle excise duty on vehicles that are neither used nor kept on the public road, and to tax things that used to be, but are no longer, mechanically propelled vehicles. If there is a new Labour logic somewhere in that bizarre and eccentric proposal, the Government will no doubt advise us of it, although the prospect seems improbable. In the circumstances—

Mr. Edward Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: No, I will not. I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman and I do not intend to do so again. I know that he wants to make a contribution and I look forward to it with bated breath and eager anticipation.

Motoring organisations have not been sufficiently consulted. The AA is understandably concerned about the measure and the Opposition will explore it in proper detail in Committee.

The Chancellor has boasted—not an uncommon phenomenon in the present incumbent—that he will cut beer duty by 50 per cent. for about 350 pub, local and micro-breweries that produce fewer than 2,500 pints of beer a day. However, the reaction to that has by no means been universally favourable, as Jim Burrows, the chief executive of Brakspear, has told us. He said:

"This clumsy tinkering with beer duty could eliminate the very British heritage the Chancellor claims to defend. His concession only partially implements the European directive on much needed duty savings, which were designed to help small traditional independent breweries to survive. But capping the concession where he has at 18,330 barrels, rather than at the higher 122,205 barrels European limit, will seriously damage a significant number of historic British regional brewers."

That ought to be a matter of concern to Members on both sides of the House, as there will be such breweries in the constituencies of a number of hon. and right hon. Labour Members and those breweries will be hurt. I wonder whether independent-minded and industrious Labour representatives of those constituents will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to register their protest at the Government's behaviour.

Mr. Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: Oh, very well—the hon. Gentleman is so amiable. I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Davey: I am especially grateful to the hon. Gentleman for indulging me.

The hon. Gentleman makes a strong case. Does he realise that the situation is even worse, as the cut in the price of a pint that the Chancellor announced on Budget day is unlikely to happen? It is extremely likely that the landlords and breweries will not pass on the cut in duty.

Mr. Bercow: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not being too pessimistic, but he might be—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) rather ungenerously observes that the hon. Gentleman's intervention was "All froth". Only time will tell, I know not.

I have, typically, understated my critique of the Government this afternoon, but it would be a disservice to the House not to mention the stop-press news about the Budget. The verdict is highly critical; it states:

"We are concerned that the Chancellor's Budget may already be based on over-optimistic projections."

It continues:

"The imbalances between net trade and domestic demand, and in particular strong consumption growth, may present a challenge to the stability of the UK economy . . . We are not clear that the Budget makes any significant contribution to correcting the imbalances in the economy . . . We remain concerned about UK productivity which has lagged behind that of the United States."

It protests:

"The Treasury should have published the document 'Trend Growth: Recent Developments and Prospects' in advance of the Budget statement so that the House could have scrutinised it."

[Mr. Bercow]

It points out:

"The Chancellor should have published at the time of the Budget the borrowing requirement for 2007–08."

It continues:

"We remain concerned that some Departments seem to be experiencing difficulties in delivering on the Government's agenda of increasing public sector investment."

Furthermore, it states that

"underspending has been significant in some Departments".

It complains:

"In terms of matching money to reform it remains far from clear what sanctions are proposed and how they might be implemented."

It notes in relation to taxation that

"the Government are guilty of sophistry."

It deplores the

"lack of consultation with foreign banks in London."

Furthermore, it demands

"publication of information on the take-up of tax credits".

Dr. Palmer *rose—*

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington) *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: That is the verdict of the report on the Budget published today by the distinguished Labour-dominated Select Committee on the Treasury. It is a savage denunciation of the Government by their own friends. Truly, we live in interesting times. The Committee stage is now an enticing prospect. My hon. Friends and I will approach it with relish.

4.46 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): On the points that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) raised at the end of his speech, I shall credit him with perhaps not realising that what he calls a Labour-dominated Committee was in fact a childish ambush set by Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members to take advantage of a funeral. There is a long tradition that Select Committees operate by consensus. That tradition is normally to the benefit of Opposition Members, as otherwise Government Members on Select Committees would routinely pass motions praising the Government to the skies and approving every detail in every Bill.

Mr. Laws: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Palmer: I shall finish my point, and then I shall give way.

On this occasion, because I was absent for the funeral of the brother of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), and because other hon. Members were absent for other reasons, Opposition Members took the opportunity to force through 25 wrecking amendments to the draft report that had been discussed on the basis of the deliberations of the previous week.

Mr. Laws: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but I regret the intemperate language that he is using. He has completely misrepresented the amendments that were put through, which were not party political point scoring but which in many cases reflected the observations that had been made by expert advisers to the Committee. The hon. Gentleman, for whom I have great respect, should withdraw his accusations.

Dr. Palmer: Let us consider an example. In one of their amendments, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members on the Committee lay great emphasis on the alleged sophistry of having a ceiling on the standard rate of national insurance, because, they say, there is a 1 per cent. extra charge on higher incomes. That is the kind of piffling sophistry—I use the word that Opposition Members used—that so irritates people outside Westminster.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Palmer: I will not give way, because I wish to continue my remarks for a moment.

The whole operation was typical of the kind of thing that annoys people about politicians. People say that we spend more time trying to trip each other up than we do addressing the issues. Not one of the amendments that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats tabled to the draft proposals in Committee addresses the central issues for the population at large. Not one of the amendments deals with the national health service and whether the increase in funding is worth while. Not one of them deals with the child tax credit and the relief that it will provide to low-income families. Not one of them deals with the impact on the environment of the reduction in duties for non-polluting fuels. Instead, there was one piffling, technical amendment after another.

Mr. Laws *rose—*

Mr. Jack *rose—*

Dr. Palmer: I give way to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack).

Mr. Jack: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's observations. If Labour members of the Committee were so concerned by what was happening when they were in a minority as decisions were being taken, will he explain why they did not produce a minority report in which they could have addressed the points that he has made?

Dr. Palmer: I do not believe that there is provision for minority reports—*[Interruption]*—but even if there were, that would not address the essential point. The report makes perfectly clear the votes on each amendment. Again the right hon. Gentleman makes a point about parliamentary procedure and does not deal with the central issues that concern the population at large.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Dr. Palmer: The hon. Gentleman would not give way to me, but I shall give way to him.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman's generosity of spirit is appreciated. This is a case of, "Methinks he doth protest too much." Does he not recall that the hon. Member for

Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), the distinguished Chairman of the Treasury Committee, was present on the occasion in question and that it took place on a full parliamentary day when an important vote on a major piece of legislation was due to take place? It was greatly to the credit—and a proper of reflection of the attention to duty—of my hon. Friends the Members for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) and for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and, in fairness, a reflection of the dedication of the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), that they were present. They were doing their job, earning their salaries and respecting their constituents. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) did not display a similar attitude.

Dr. Palmer: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman, who is normally an amiable fellow, takes the view that the funeral of a leading county councillor in my constituency is not an important matter. I disagree with him.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): My hon. Friend will be aware that, if one wants to produce a minority report in a Select Committee, one has to indicate one's desire to do so at the beginning of the proceedings. I voted 25 times in the Committee yesterday to try to get a slightly more sensible report and, if I had known about the way in which Conservative and Liberal Democrat members of the Committee wished to handle proceedings, I would have signalled my desire to produce such a report. Sadly, I assumed their good will and good sense, so I did not do that.

Dr. Palmer: I sympathise with my hon. Friend. It is sad, because hon. Members on both sides of the House have put a lot of effort into building up a sensible tradition of Select Committees. Unfortunately, the two Opposition parties are so desperate for petty tactical success that they put it first.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Palmer: No, because I want to move on to discuss the Budget itself. Whereas the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), dwelt for about 20 minutes on the number of pages in the Budget and on gossip about how Ministers get on with each other, I would like to address the content of the Budget.

The central feature of the Budget is that, for the first time in many years, adequate provision is foreseen for the health service. Strikingly, that was not addressed at all in the Opposition spokesman's introductory remarks. It was not as if he was in favour of it or against it; it simply was not addressed at all because he was too busy counting the number of pages in the Red Book. In the real world, there is broad consensus that however one organises the health system, funding for health in Britain is inadequate, and has been for many years under different Governments. We all know the reason why; until recent years, the economy has been in such a parlous state that successive Governments have been unable to provide adequate funding.

I am proud that we are now in a position to change that, but I note that the Opposition are unsure of their position. We are promised that at some time in the future they will say whether they support or oppose the commitment, but for the time being they are Delphic on the subject, which is why they concentrate on counting pages instead of looking at content. I have talked to my constituents about the impact of the Budget, but I have yet to meet one who wants to know how many pages are in the Red Book. I have yet to hear a constituent raise any of the issues raised by the Conservative spokesman. Again and again, people tell me, "At last we have a Government who are taking health seriously." Of course they have reservations—we should be open about this—about whether the money is really going to the NHS. After many years of frustration and disappointment, people naturally wonder whether we are really going to put the money in.

There is a political difficulty, which we all know about. There are thousands of hospitals in Britain and hundreds of thousands of people employed in the health service. It will always be possible—whether in three, eight or 100 years' time—to find a hospital somewhere in Britain where a mistake has been made or a problem has arisen, which Opposition spokespeople will use as an opportunity to show that the system is not working and the money has not produced results. They will do so, as the Opposition Health spokesman has said, to try to demolish public confidence in the health service so that they can introduce an alternative, even though they do not know what it is.

In the real world, people do not share that priority; they want our initiative to succeed and recognise that the Opposition do not want it to, which is one reason why the Opposition's response has so far failed to command interest, let alone support.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Imagine a major business suddenly telling the hon. Gentleman, "We are going to spend £40 billion on developing our business. We don't know how we are going to spend it or even if we can spend it. We haven't worked out what we are going to do." Does he think that that business would be a great success for Britain? Is that an effective way of planning investment and spending?

Dr. Palmer: The hon. Gentleman's remarks seem to relate more to the way in which the Conservative party's finances are run than to the NHS. As he will be aware, the NHS plan was agreed by all the major bodies involved and commands widespread support. If he wants to highlight specific elements of the plan and discuss whether we can achieve them, we could obviously have a reasonable dialogue. I was sorry that his hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham attacked the individual objectives set by the Government and the alleged failure to achieve them. Those of us who have worked in management—I suspect that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) has—recognise that if we do not set objectives we will not know if we have succeeded and will not be able to track progress. I welcome the fact that the Government have set themselves tough targets. Sometimes an individual target will not be met. We must have a serious dialogue about that, rather than picking up on the failure as if it were a hostage to be burned at the stake for political advantage.

Mr. Bercow: The position is even worse than I described. Not only have the Government set targets and in many cases failed to meet them, but in important respects where people could legitimately expect targets to be set, they have not set them. Is the hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Bercow]

sanguine about the fact that the Government have no public service agreement target for the reduction of bed blocking, for the reduction of the number of cancelled operations, or for the increase in the number of beds in the care home sector?

Dr. Palmer: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raises the issue, as I have discussed it in some detail with my health authority. I am somewhat inhibited by the fact that we are discussing the Budget, so I am not sure whether you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will allow me to go into detail. Briefly, the health authority in my area says that bed blocking in the sense in which the hon. Member for Buckingham means it—inadequate funds—is not the key issue. The key issue is finding suitable accommodation with which patients are happy. That is not a financial issue, the health authority says. It is a matter of providing intermediate care in the hospitals. The health authority very much welcomes the additional funding that is coming through for that.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Does my hon. Friend agree that although we have been arguing about numbers for the past few minutes, the essential difference between the Government and the Conservative Opposition is that the Conservatives cannot commit themselves to an NHS free at the point of use for everyone?

Dr. Palmer: My hon. Friend is right. It is possible that one day the Conservatives will re-commit themselves to that—

Mr. Harris: But they are not doing so now.

Dr. Palmer: Indeed. Until now the Conservatives have always said through gritted teeth that they were willing to finance a national health service free at the point of use. They have not said that they were willing to finance it well, and we know from their period in government that they are not, but they have been willing to finance it on some basis. It now appears that that is not the case. That is a matter of grave concern to people out in the real world.

Let us return to the Westminster world, where we all feel at home and where we debate our points of order and our points of sophistry at our leisure. Another aspect of the Budget that has received widespread support is the commitment to a reduction in duty for combined heat and power, the reductions on methane and the support for green vehicles. The recent reports from the Cabinet Office on the future of energy expenditure in Britain make it clear that if we want to make significant progress within our lifetime, we must start now. We cannot delay.

I welcome the fact that the Chancellor has opened his doors to representatives of each of the industrial groups developing alternatives to the standard petrol engines, to encourage faster development. I welcome that not just because of the impact that it will have in Britain but because if Britain takes a lead in this area, we are likely to have an export market that will dwarf many of our present markets.

On my next point, I declare an interest: I advise my former company, Novartis, which is a multinational company involved in pharmaceutical research. The proposals to aid research in Britain are welcome, as they reinforce Britain's position as a science base. We cannot underestimate the importance of those proposals because, in the long term, the profile of the British economy will depend on whether we have that significant research base.

It is entirely possible that we could give up Britain's traditional scientific advantage and concentrate on call centres, insurance services and other traditional or not so traditional activities by which we could make a living in the world market. However, if we want balanced, long-term development that will benefit Britain not only under this Government but under any future Government whom we might imagine in our nightmares, that scientific base is essential, so I very much welcome those proposals.

I want to allow other hon. Members to speak, so I wish to make a final point on the Budget. I very much welcome the attempt to cut the illegal use of rebated fuel. Those of us who watched the fuel protests will have been struck by the large number of farmers who drove around on motorways and elsewhere, and many of us wondered whether they conscientiously siphoned out their rebated fuel before setting out. During the Select Committee hearings, Conservative Members attempted to find out which class of people were affected. The answer, of course, is the criminal class. That is the class of people who misuse rebated fuel for the purpose of making a profit.

I have a query for Ministers about whether it makes sense in the long term to have what is in effect a subsidy for farming through rebated fuel and whether it would not be better to have a market rate for that fuel and support farming by other means, possibly those that would attract match funding from the European Union. In the longer term, with our new Labour attachment to market mechanisms, it probably makes sense to move red fuel back towards the market rate, especially as we are trying to reduce the overall impact.

In concluding on that technical note, I should like to welcome the positive and focused nature of the Budget. To those who say that people on the street are horrified and alarmed by the one percentage point increase in national insurance contributions, all I can say is that the feedback that I have had from everyone I have spoken to in my constituency suggests that if that increase delivers the goods—the health service for which people hope—they will be hugely relieved, pleased and looking forward to a better future.

5.8 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) has in large part made a very measured and constructive contribution to the debate, but his earlier remarks on the Select Committee on the Treasury were wide of the mark. I speak as a former member of that Select Committee who was involved in the drafting of several reports, including those on the Budget. I remember from my time serving on that Committee that there was constructive debate when we considered draft reports.

When I look through the minutes at the back of the report and at the amendments tabled by Conservative Members and Liberal Democrat Members, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), I see constructive amendments that relate to evidence provided to them by their expert external advisers. The advice and

evidence were provided not by politicians or party pundits, but by experts in economics and finance. In that vein,

I found the hon. Gentleman's remarks unwelcome and out of place in the House.

Although the hon. Gentleman may have had a valid, understandable reason not to be present, other Labour Members were not present either. If his objections to the report are to be considered, we need to understand why those Members were not there to argue their case. One can only presume from their absence that they were not interested or that they were not prepared to argue their case because they were embarrassed by aspects of the Budget.

Mr. Tom Harris: Whatever the hon. Gentleman's explanation of how the report came to be in its present form, does he believe that the views of the Treasury Committee, as now constituted, are accurately represented in that report?

Mr. Davey: That is a surprising intervention. We have the report before us and it was passed in a proper manner through the due procedures. If it is not representative, that is the fault of the members of the Committee and those who were absent, not the Committee as a whole. That is the process of the House.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): As a member of the Committee, I should say that the overwhelming proportion of the report—almost all of it—was the Chairman's first draft. The huge row that has broken out concerns a relatively small part of a number of proposals in the summary of recommendations.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful for that elucidation.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton) *rose—*

Mr. Davey: In order to be fair to the House, I shall allow the Chairman to respond.

Mr. McFall: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Chairman's drafts come before the Committee. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the back of the report he will see that 25 amendments were put forward. If 25 amendments are put forward, the Chairman's report is changed quite considerably. That is a matter of fact.

Mr. Davey: It is a matter of fact that the report was changed significantly, but the amendments that were passed were based on the evidence provided by the external advisers. That is a key point.

Mr. Laws: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Davey: I want to come to the substance of my speech but before I do so I shall take an intervention from my hon. Friend who also serves on the Committee.

Mr. Laws: Is my hon. Friend aware that some of the amendments that were passed to the Chairman's draft report—for example, recommendation (s), which welcomes measures in the Budget, and recommendation (k), which welcomes the Government's approach to the growth and stability pact—were tabled by Opposition Members to the Chairman's report and side with the Government? Is it not clear therefore that the suggestion of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) of an entirely partisan, political approach is not an accurate summary of the way the Committee conducted itself?

Mr. Davey: My hon. Friend has the concluding remark to this part of the debate. He shows that he and Conservative Members played a constructive role in the debate and I recommend the report to other hon. Members.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I shall not take further interventions on the report because many criticisms can be levied at the Finance Bill and I want to come to those. Tonight and during the next few months, my hon. Friends and I will be making those criticisms because we believe that many parts of the Bill are ill judged and damaging to the British economy. There are the ill-advised choices of taxes that the Government have sought to raise and there is the complexity that is piled on complexity.

Liberal Democrats will be tabling a series of amendments to show their constructive and genuine alternative to the Government's tax policy. While the Chancellor seems intent on tying up British business in tax bureaucracy, Liberal Democrats will be radical in their proposal to cut his Gordian knot.

Despite the Bill's failings, however, on Second Reading the House must be mindful of the core direction of the Budget's strategy—to provide the cash for our public services, and in particular, the health service. It took the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) 20 minutes before he came to the health service, and that shows a complete misunderstanding of the Budget.

Liberal Democrats are unequivocal in welcoming the Government's U-turn from their general election position on that matter. Just under a year ago, Liberal Democrats argued at the general election that taxes had to rise to fund the services that we provide for each other. Our election campaign was focused on health, education, pensioners and police. It was distinguished and differentiated partly by the fact that we were arguing for higher taxes to make that revenue possible, and that extra revenue had to be found from somewhere.

Our opponents were vicious in attacking us. They said that we were wrong in saying that we could not have something for nothing, so we are delighted that Labour has now changed its course and agrees with us.

Mr. Tom Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: Before I do so, let me say that the Liberal Democrats wish that the Government had made that position clear before the election. The process would have been fairer and more honest, frank, open and transparent and the Budget would have had even wider acclaim if they had put the proposals to the British electorate just 11 months ago. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can explain why they were not put before the electorate.

Mr. Harris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but I shall stick to my original intention in

[Mr. Harris]

making this intervention. Was not his party criticised at the time of the election because it said that it would fund every promise under the sun through a 1 per cent. increase in the basic rate of income tax?

Mr. Davey: That was a disappointing intervention. If he had read our manifesto, which was accompanied by detailed costings, he would have seen that it set out a series of spending proposals that were fully costed on the basis of three major tax changes, including not only the penny on income tax, but the 50p charge on incomes of more than £100,000 a year—a proposal that was repeated in our alternative Budget. Indeed, we will be pushing and arguing for our alternative and against the Government's tax measures, which we think are far more damaging.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: No.

Interestingly, Labour's key policy changes after the last election and the 1997 election were based on Liberal Democrat manifesto commitments made in the campaigns. In 1997, in order to move away from the Conservative policies of boom and bust and failed economic management, the Labour Government rightly adopted our policy of establishing an independent central bank. *[Laughter.]* Labour Members laugh, but the proposal was not set out in their manifesto, so they should wipe the smiles off their faces. Perhaps they will be more amused by my next observation. It was interesting to hear Conservative Front Benchers try to take credit in the Budget debate for the independent central bank policy, when they had opposed it in government. It beggars belief that the Conservative Opposition are trying to take credit for that policy.

However, after the 2001 election, Labour has now adopted our policy of raising tax to invest in the public services. If only it had done so before.

Mr. Blizzard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: No.

If only Labour had adopted our specific tax policies, we would have had a much happier outcome, but at least it has shifted. It is the Conservative Front Benchers who are now left high and dry, voting against investment for the NHS. The Conservatives join the Liberal Democrats in criticising specific tax policies, and we welcome their support in opposing the Government on those measures, but they present the country with no alternative, so it can only surmise that in voting against the tax rises, the Conservatives want to vote against the health service. Instead of a coherent alternative health policy, we read in today's edition of the *Financial Times* that their health policy update—that is what they call it—will take at least another year to come into being. The Liberal Democrats wonder why. Perhaps on their Cook's tour of continental capitals, the Conservatives have rediscovered their previous love for Europe. They may have developed a taste for continental travel and for the euros jingling in their pockets, or perhaps their delay in proposing a constructive alternative has occurred simply because they do not know what to do.

Whatever the cause of the Tories' black hole on health, the Liberal Democrats at least know that they object to the NHS investment, and we will point that out, as I am sure Labour Members will.

Mr. Blizzard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: I am happy to do so.

Mr. Blizzard: I am grateful. Now that the Government have raised extra revenue through taxation—I understand that the hon. Gentleman may not agree with their precise method—will he say whether his party now wants to raise still more through taxation?

Mr. Davey: I am grateful for the opportunity to put our response on record. We are waiting with bated breath for the publication of the spending review later this year. We need to ensure that the Government are investing in education, the police, pensioners and other issues. I tell the hon. Gentleman and Ministers that if that spending review does not provide the resources that are necessary for those key public services, we will continue arguing for extra tax revenue to make those essential investments.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I am not in the front rank when it comes to demanding additional cash, but there is one aspect of policy on which a small amount could go along way. Our troops in Afghanistan are serving alongside American troops in an area that the United States Government have defined as a hostile fire zone. The Americans get a complete income tax exemption during the time that they are serving in a hostile fire zone. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should match those terms? It would not cost much in public money, but it would go some way to showing this country's appreciation for our service men, who do so much for us.

Mr. Davey: As usual, my hon. Friend makes a telling point, which deals with an aspect of taxation legislation that has not been raised in the House before. All hon. Members should welcome his remarks, which highlight the fact that our troops facing hostile action are not treated in the same way as American troops. I look forward to my hon. Friend pressing the Government in the Standing Committee to try to ensure that they put that matter right.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: No, I wish to make some progress.

If the Budget was good news for the NHS, the Chancellor's tax strategy is very bad news for UK plc. Certainly, the alternative Budget that we published before the election proposed tax rises, but they would not have clobbered business—they would have shared out the burden of paying for public services fairly among households.

I am delighted that the Treasury Select Committee, which has only one Liberal Democrat member, has today published a report that effectively backs up Liberal Democrat Members' concerns about the Chancellor's choices on taxes. I have never seen a Select Committee report that is so damning of a Chancellor's tax policy,

drawing on the views of independent expert witnesses. I refer hon. Members to paragraph 54, which discusses the national insurance rises. It says:

"We think that the Treasury has, as yet, failed to make the case for choosing a method of revenue raising (higher employer and employee national insurance contributions) which excludes well-off pensioners and people living comfortably off unearned income from making a contribution to higher NHS spending."

Kevin Brennan *rose—*

Mr. Cousins *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I shall not give way at the moment.

The proposals on employees' national insurance contributions exclude very wealthy pensioners and very wealthy people living off unearned income, who are not being asked to contribute to the NHS. Many of those people will not understand that, and some may think it unfair, because they, too, wish to make their contribution, but the Government will not let them. It is bizarre that the Government have chosen this relatively unfair way of raising tax.

Kevin Brennan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is about to defend that unfairness.

Kevin Brennan: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that the Liberal Democrats would have raised taxation purely from households, by exactly how much would they have raised income tax in the unlikely circumstance that they had been able to do so?

Mr. Davey: I am increasingly surprised by the failure of Labour Members to read documents that we publish and place on our website, which set out our detailed policies. We argued for 1p on income tax, which would raise about £3.5 billion, and for a 50p tax rate on income above £100,000, which would raise just over £4 billion, and I refer the hon. Gentleman to one or two other tax measures described in those documents. Together, they would raise slightly more than the Government have raised through their Budget proposals, so he will have little success in pursuing his argument.

I refer hon. Members to paragraph 68 of the Select Committee's report, which deals with employers' national insurance contributions. The key point that the Government are having to wrestle with is their belated realisation that business is extremely concerned about the way that it has been treated in the Budget, because it contradicts what the Government have said in the past. In the 2000 Budget, the Government cut employers' national insurance contributions, linking that to the introduction of the climate change levy. They lauded that proposal and said that it would increase employment. When my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil questioned the Chancellor about it at the Select Committee hearing, the Chancellor failed to acknowledge his point, and simply said that changes had been made in other years that meant that the increase would not be damaging to business. I am afraid that that was sophistry, and my hon. Friend was right to point it out. We all agree that raising money for the national health service is a valuable policy objective. However, placing the burden on employers' national insurance contributions, and thus on the basic cost of employing labour, must be bad news for the country and job creation. The Government will rue the day that they made that decision.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that in 1999, for example, British business lost £10 billion through ill health absences?

Mr. Davey: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right but that does not mean that one should clobber business with extra taxes. It does not follow that doing that will suddenly create better health. The Liberal Democrats agree that there should be more investment in the health service. We have explained how we would achieve that; our method would not hit UK plc.

Mr. Weir: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that by going down the national insurance route and cutting corporation tax, the Chancellor may help companies but do nothing for sole traders and partnerships who bear the additional tax?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, which I hope that those on the Treasury Bench have noted.

Using national insurance contributions to find extra money for the health service might have been appropriate if the Government had combined it with significant reforms. However, they chose not to do that. They could have made the national insurance system far fairer and more efficient but they did not do that.

We set out the alternative in our alternative Budget in the general election campaign. It is raising income tax. Why did the Government not do that? Because they made a grubby political promise at the last election. They cut income tax in the previous Parliament when they did not need to do that, and they were grubbing around for a tax to raise. They chose not to raise income tax because of a manifesto commitment yet they broke such a commitment and contradicted the utterings of Ministers during the election campaign by raising national insurance. By failing to raise income tax, which would have been fairer and more efficient, the Government put grubby politics before the health of the economy. They should apologise.

Mr. Beard *rose—*

Mr. Tom Harris *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I have taken many interventions and I want to make some progress.

The Bill deals with far more than national insurance. It is riddled with errors that, like the national insurance increases, break two key economic tests for tax policy: fairness and efficiency.

Let us consider the policy on income tax allowances. By freezing them, the Government have increased the tax burden on the poorest. That is a bizarre position for the Labour Government to adopt. More low-income workers will be caught by the income tax system than by the national insurance system. Where did that appear in Labour's manifesto? The Rooker-Wise amendment was a great achievement by Labour Back Benchers in the late

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1970s and the proposal to freeze allowances goes in the opposite direction. Labour Members should be ashamed of that.

The only defence that I have heard is that some of those affected will benefit from some tax credits. Let us debate the options. First, some people who are affected will not be eligible for the tax credits. Freezing the allowance will therefore hit some of the low paid, and [illegible]come pensioners. Secondly, some of the tax credits are so complicated that many low-income workers will not claim them. Experience of the working families tax credit shows that. That is not a fair method of raising taxation.

Business efficiency has been hit. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) said, the proposals to change the tax regime for the North sea oil industry are bizarre and a breach of faith. The Government consulted the industry for many months on different changes that would favour investment and help the industry but ensure that the Exchequer got its fair share. Suddenly, out of nowhere, they make the proposal that appeared in the Budget. If the Government cannot understand why business is losing confidence in them, they should consider the way in which they treat business. They consult, then go off in a completely different direction. That is not the way to win over or to support business.

The other inefficiency in the Finance Bill is its horrendous complexity. The hon. Member for Buckingham, who is no longer in his place, referred to that at length in terms of the number of pages in the Bill; I want to talk about it in relation to one or two of its proposals. Nine pages are devoted to a minor beer duty change, which we and the breweries believe will not even achieve the Chancellor's target of reducing the price of a pint of beer in time for the World cup. Thus nine pages are taken up by a tiny measure that will not even achieve its goal.

Fourteen pages and two schedules are devoted to a minor tax relief on vaccine research, which will probably also miss its target. We shall be looking at that research. It is a worthy aim, but whether the measure will achieve it is highly questionable, because the Government are using the tax system for inappropriate measures.

Mr. Beard: Why?

Mr. Davey: The proposal is unlikely to achieve its aim because there are dead-weight costs, and because one cannot be sure that what is given tax relief is what we want to give tax relief to. For example, a pharmaceutical company with a whole range of drugs that it cannot sell in western markets could dump them on developing countries. Giving tax relief in those circumstances would be totally contrary to the Government's intentions.

Five clauses and one schedule are devoted to the aggregates tax, although we were told in the debate on last year's Finance Bill that the Government had sorted all that out, that there were no problems and that they could go ahead with the measure. The Liberal Democrats—and, to be fair, the Conservatives—said that the aggregates levy should not go ahead at that time because the problems had not been sorted out. The fact that the Government have presented the House with five clauses and a schedule on the matter tonight shows that we were right and they were wrong. They should delay the implementation of that tax until they have sorted it out properly.

All this complexity is the reason for the Liberal Democrats launching their campaign for simpler tax. Details of it can be found at www.simplertax.org.uk and I recommend it to hon. Members. We shall consult over a period of time with business, tax professionals and all other interested parties on a whole range of proposals for simplifying the tax system. We want to engage constructively with business and the tax professionals—the experts—to ensure that when we are in government and come before the House with tax proposals, they will be proposals to reform the tax system, to reduce the compliance costs for business and to introduce major micro-economic reforms to help UK plc.

Rob Marris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: No, I want to make some progress.

I commend to the House one particular proposal on simpler tax in our first e-newsletter on the website, because it relates to the Finance Bill. We believe that film tax relief should be abolished. It is clear from the Bill that the Government realise that this little tax relief, which they put in place a few years ago, has become a complete rip-off. A whole series of companies are now exploiting it in a way that goes totally against the Government's original intention. Soap operas—the Coronation Streets and Emmerdales of this world—now claim that every episode is a film in its own right, to get the tax relief. How is that stimulating entrepreneurialism and innovation? Those reliefs only serve to create extra tax complexity.

Mr. Beard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: No, I will not give way.

We are now having to debate many pages in the Bill relating to anti-avoidance mechanisms for a relief that we should abolish. We should be taking those pages off the statute book.

To be fair to the Government, there are a number of measures in the Bill that we welcome. The fact that the bribes that companies used to give to win business overseas are no longer to be tax deductible is welcome; that is something that we have campaigned for. The extra support for amateur sports clubs is also welcome, as is the fact that some of the measures in the Bill have been widely consulted on. The increase in the inheritance tax rate band is welcome, as are certain other modest measures.

When we add up all those welcome measures, however, and stand back and ask, "Does this Bill improve the British tax system?", I am afraid that the answer is no. If it did not underlie a Budget strategy that we genuinely support, including investment in the health service, we would not feel able to vote for its Second Reading.

On Second Reading, it is customary to discuss the Treasury Select Committee report and the macro-economic policy that lie behind the Budget. I shall do so briefly. The Chancellor and, indeed, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury had, and have, a relatively good story to tell about the economy. Employment is high and

unemployment is low, interest rates—both long-term and short-term—are low, and inflation is low. All that is welcome news, and represents a genuine achievement on the part of the Labour Government. The Budget, however, fails to address many failings. First and, in many ways, most significant is the fact that the British economy is incredibly unbalanced.

For some six or seven years, the growth of the economy has been fuelled by the consumer sector alone. It has not been fuelled by investment in business or in manufacturing. Labour Members know that, and they should worry about the fact that the Budget makes the situation worse by piling taxes on to the corporate sector and not restraining the consumption of the household sector through a balanced tax policy. The Government are leaving the job of dealing with consumer demand to the Monetary Policy Committee, which in due course will mean higher interest rates that will stifle investment. By failing to achieve a balanced tax policy—a policy that would help to balance the macro-economy—the Government are storing up serious problems.

Dr. Palmer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: I will give way once more.

Dr. Palmer: I thank the hon. Gentleman. Is he saying that not only would he have preferred an income tax increase to a national insurance increase, but he would have preferred a larger increase?

Mr. Davey: We have spelled out our proposals. We would have liked quite a large increase for those earning more than £100,000 a year and a modest increase for the remaining sector, which would have hit those who will not be clobbered by the national insurance contributions. We accept that that would have had a much bigger effect on private sector consumption, but it would have produced a much more balanced economic policy.

Concerns have been expressed about the Government's short-term growth forecasts. Just the other day we learned that in the first quarter of the year the economy has grown by only 0.1 per cent. If the Chancellor is to meet the growth targets that he announced a few days ago, that figure will have to be revised, or the economy will have to grow very fast during the remaining three quarters of the year. The Item Club, to whose pronouncements we should pay particular attention because it uses the Treasury's own forecasting model, has said independently that it does not believe the growth forecast will be met.

My main worry about the forecast, however, relates to the longer term. Both in 1999 and now in 2002, the Chancellor has increased his forecasts of the economy's underlying growth potential: the forecast in the Budget is 2.75 per cent. per annum. I do not quibble over whether that figure is achievable. It may well be achievable: indeed, owing to the excessive caution exercised by the Treasury up to now, it probably is, especially as public spending forecasts are currently based on a 2.5 per cent. forecast. What concerns me is the argument that the Government have produced to back up the change. If we really want to hold the Government to account, we must understand the thinking behind their policies, and analyse those policies rigorously to establish whether they meet the tests of arguments.

How do the Government say they can now revise upwards the underlying rate of growth? They have used a new report from the Government Actuary's department relating to an increase in the size of the labour force, and in particular the prediction that net migration will be slightly higher over the next few years. That may strike Members as very reasonable, but when we look at the detail and, specifically, at the Budget publication "Trend Growth: Recent Developments and Prospects", we find that the Government have not used the Actuary's principal forecast. They have gone away from the principal projection by the Government Actuary. They say that it is excessively cautious and believe that it should be higher. In using a new report to justify uplifting the growth forecast, the Government have gone against the forecast of the Government Actuary. It takes some explaining.

Mr. Beard: The hon. Gentleman is laying all the emphasis on the increase in the size of the working population. Reports also show that, year on year, there has been growth in productivity. That alone justifies the change in the trend rate that the Government propose.

Mr. Davey: I am sorry but the hon. Gentleman clearly has not read the Government's own report. The Government assume in their forecast of underlying growth that productivity will stay the same. He cannot argue that underlying growth has increased due to productivity; his own Ministers are not arguing that. It is largely down to the change in net migration.

Mr. Beard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will show that he has read the report.

Mr. Beard: Given that the hon. Gentleman is apparently reading from a paper, he might read it accurately. The Government are not projecting any increase in future growth; they are not saying that they have not allowed for growth over the past five years. They have made a cautious prediction, taking today's productivity growth and not allowing it to increase according to the measures introduced in the Budget. That is what the Budget is saying.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is completely wrong. The reason why this situation is particularly bizarre is that, at the same time as the Budget was published, the Wanless report was published. It tried to work out what the health needs of the nation would be in 20 years. When Wanless looked at population trends, he took the principal forecasts of the Government Actuary, not the higher one that has been assumed by the Government. The Government's core strategy was for health spending, but in their Budget strategy they use a different forecast of population growth from the Wanless report's.

I hope that the Minister will explain that in his summing-up speech. I also hope that the Government will do rather better than the document on trend growth, which provides no intellectual backing for the change. There is no model of the causes of emigration or immigration, and no analysis of whether they are to do with the relative economic performances of different countries, asylum policy or international political situations. All the independent expert advisers to the Select Committee on

[Mr. Davey]

the Treasury said that it was an area of great uncertainty, yet the Government are not taking the principal projection of the Government Actuary. It is bizarre.

I had the privilege the other day of discussing such matters with senior people at the Bank of England. They informed me—I was not aware of it—that the statistics on immigration and emigration are among the weakest there are. Unlike other countries, which require people to register with the local police, for example, when they enter the country, we do not. I support that policy, but it limits our ability to understand net migration. We do not have the figures, yet the Government base their increase in growth forecast on that. They may be right; perhaps we will achieve that underlying growth, but they need a slightly better analysis in order to convince us. We hope that they are right.

It will be a long summer in the Finance Bill Standing Committee. We will have some long debates—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) tempts me, I can speak for a lot longer. In fact, I think I will make some remarks; the hon. Gentleman has really tempted me.

I have a concern about the whole process that we are engaged in: the Finance Bill process. People who have to use the tax system say that it results in very poor scrutiny. The processes, the time and the whole ethos around the Standing Committee do not enable us to engage in constructive scrutiny.

Like the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), I had the privilege of sitting on the Institute for Fiscal Studies tax law reform committee, which looked at the institutional processes behind a move towards tax simplification. That committee, which was staffed by experts, had a vigorous debate. It believed that the Finance Bill process is of second order and is failing this country, and that we need radical reform. As that is a process point, the Second Reading debate is the right place to make it.

The Chancellor wanted to create consensus on NHS investment, which was a bold and courageous ambition. Unfortunately, the Conservative party has prevented that consensus from being established. The Chancellor cannot take any blame for that, but he can take the blame for the fact that he has alienated a number of taxpayers, particularly in the corporate sector, because he has developed a tax policy that is unfair, inefficient and over-complex. Had he chosen a different route, he would have had even greater support, and we would be far surer than we can be today that we will get the quality NHS that our country deserves as a result of all the extra money.

5.46 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on Second Reading. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) has gone on a lot. I could sum up his speech with the slogan, "More and simpler tax." Given the promises that the Liberal Democrats have made, they will end up as the party with the simplest tax system in the country: they will be taking 100 per cent. of everyone's wages. They have to do an awful lot to convince people that their policies are credible.

It is the same with the official Opposition. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) made an indelicate rant. I look forward to the day when he improves and makes a delicate rant. Their whole argument is this. The shadow Chancellor, his boss, was on the radio and television today. In answer to a question, he said:

"it is clear that the NHS needs more money—it needs reform",

but when the questioner asked him what the next stage was, he said:

"we will need to look . . . at how other countries do it".

How can a party have any credibility in opposing the Second Reading of a Finance Bill when it cannot come up with its own proposals? That question will plague Conservatives throughout the land until they answer it.

There was much ado about the Treasury Select Committee report. As the Chairman of the Committee, I wanted the opportunity to put the report into context. I feared that some people had their own gloss on it when I received a telephone call from a television station at 8 o'clock this morning, three hours before the report was published. However, let that be.

It is my responsibility as Chairman to ensure that the principles of the Committee are adhered to. Those are simple: as a Back-Bench Committee comprising hon. Members on both sides of the House, we have a responsibility to undergo an intellectual inquiry into the Budget. Everything we have said in the report, particularly the draft report, centres on that intellectual inquiry. I will go through the report on that basis.

The Select Committee report was preliminary. It was for the benefit of the House—to help it with the Second Reading. Paragraph 1 is clear:

"We may wish to consider some of the Budget's measures and proposals in greater detail at some appropriate time in the future, when we have had time to fully assess their implications."

In other words, we have not had time fully to assess their implications and we will come back to it. I tell the House and those on the Front Bench that we will come back to that particular issue. The statement is therefore provisional.

The report does not criticise the Government's budgetary aims; in fact, it welcomes the Budget's redistribution from high to low earners.

Mr. Laws: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that the Select Committee's report welcomes certain Budget measures, but does he acknowledge that some of the amendments welcoming Government policy were tabled by Opposition Members, and enjoyed the support of the entire Committee?

Mr. McFall: Yes, but as I said, there were 25 amendments, and not all of them fell into that category. None the less, the hon. Gentleman is right and if he bears with me I shall mention some of the relevant issues.

As I said, the Committee welcomed the redistributive effect. It also welcomed the sound economy that the Government have built over the years. Britain has the fastest growth of any G7 country, and we are very pleased that, since 1997, over 1.5 million more jobs have been created. We are also pleased that inflation is at its lowest level for 20 or 30 years, and above all that the Government have made finances transparent over the long term.

Some of the experts to whom reference has been made spoke of a synchronised global slowdown, and said that the Government have forecast growth of about 2 per cent.

to 2.5 per cent for 2002, and of 2.75 per cent. to 3.25 per cent. for 2003. We think that that is wise, because as the Chancellor said in his pre-Budget statement,

"No one country can insulate its economy"

and stand on its own. He continued by saying that he is

"cautiously optimistic about the prospects for the British economy."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 829-30.]

I shall return to the Committee's comments on that issue.

On the economic outlook, we agree with the OECD that the United States is leading the global upturn. Gross domestic product growth of 1.5 per cent. for 2002 has therefore been revised to 3 per cent. to 3.5 per cent. for 2003. Historically, the Government's growth projections have been on the low side, but that has changed. We took evidence from the Chancellor, Gus O'Donnell and other Treasury officials. Mr. O'Donnell's explanation of the growth prospects for 2002–03 seemed particularly realistic.

As the report makes clear, according to commentators such as Goldman Sachs, the Government are being optimistic. The report states:

"Whether the Treasury's growth forecasts are achievable remains to be seen, and we note the view that they are perhaps optimistic given the considerable uncertainties facing the global economy at the present time."

That approach is a reasonable one for any Committee that is charged with taking evidence from a wide range of people, and with engaging constructively with the Government, and the Chancellor in particular. We put such points to the Chancellor because it is incumbent on us to probe these issues, and to satisfy our own minds that matters are in order.

We are concerned about the imbalances to which the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton referred. We are mindful of the comments of Mervyn King, the deputy governor of the Bank of England, who said that the weakness of net trade

"cannot continue for many more years without leading to a trade deficit that would be painful to correct."

The report asserts:

"The imbalances between net trade and domestic demand, and in particular strong consumption growth, may present a challenge to the stability of the UK economy, and we encourage policymakers to remain alert to those risks."

That is a valid comment for any Treasury Committee to make, particularly in respect of imbalances. Goldman Sachs told the Committee that the Budget has not done enough to dampen consumer demand, and that the Monetary Policy Committee should take that factor into consideration. We questioned the Chancellor about that, and he made clear his views, and those of the Government.

The Government said that a trend growth of 2.75 per cent. had been established, but that was before they based their public finance forecast on the more cautious assessment of 2.5 per cent. When we considered those assumptions, the question of demographic changes and immigration arose. We should welcome the opportunity to debate immigration, but we should not tie it exclusively to the Second Reading of the Finance Bill. Countries such as the United States enjoy labour mobility, increased productivity and economic dynamism and interchange because they opened their doors and allowed people in. In that regard, immigration was seen as a valuable component. No Government should be afraid to take on such issues, and we need a wider debate. The issue of demographic change should be debated upfront, rather than being buried in our deliberations on Second Reading and in Committee. If we do that, we will be looking ahead and can perhaps put our economy on a more sound footing.

Mr. Flight: The hon. Gentleman used the analogy of the United States. In respect of the skills that it needs, it has rightly taken the economically sensible decision to make immigration open and simple. Is that the essence of the hon. Gentleman's point about UK policy?

Mr. McFall: Exactly. Several universities in the north-east and north-west have recently been advertising for students from abroad. We give such students the skills, only for them to go back home. Why can we not have a green card system, so that such people can use their skills to the benefit of our economy if they so choose? We need to consider these issues in a much more mature way, and that is the worthwhile contribution that the Committee is making to this debate.

The Committee also commented on productivity. The Chancellor has made jobs growth and productivity two of the hallmarks of his chancellorship, and he and the Department of Trade and Industry have produced a joint report on productivity. I applaud such efforts, but I have some concerns about the achievement of productivity targets. America cites the "new economy" as a major factor in its productivity, but whereas much of America's growth occurred in the mid-1990s, it has taken time to bed in in this country. In the next year, the Committee will try to discover what can be learned from different parts of the country by examining the twin objectives of jobs growth and productivity in the context of regional economies. We do not want to be dominated by Westminster or London; we want to know what is happening in the rest of the country.

As paragraph 21 of the report makes clear, examples of best practice could prove valuable to the general debate and to the Government's polices. It states:

"We remain concerned about UK productivity which has lagged behind that of the United States. We agree with the Budget's aim to increase the rate of growth of productivity and recommend that the effectiveness of the various measures included in the Budget for this purpose should be closely monitored and reported on in future pre-Budget Reports and Budget Statements."

We also considered the issue of fiscal policy and the Government's rules. They have two self-imposed targets, including the golden rule, but it is comforting to know that one of our experts, Carl Emmerson, from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, noted that even if the Treasury had not increased the assumed trend growth rate

"the Treasury forecasts would still suggest that the fiscal rules were going to be met"—

although less comfortably than currently forecast. That is important for long-term trends and for the EU growth and stability pact.

Another aspect that we mentioned was underspending by Departments. That has a long history in Whitehall. The civil service mentality for years has been to take no risks. If individuals in Departments take no risks, they will never be accused of overspending. That is a cultural problem, and the Government must teach Departments

[Mr. McFall]

how to spend. Last year, out of £200 billion some £7 billion was not spent. If we want to repair our public services, that underspending must be attended to.

Dr. Palmer: Does my hon. Friend agree that the move to multi-year funding is a step forward because it can result in an underspend in one financial year being spent in the next? That is more sensible.

Mr. McFall: It was a good move by the Chancellor to introduce the comprehensive spending review with a three-year spending programme. As I mentioned earlier, that is in its infancy still, but if the ambitious targets in the Budget—which I applaud—are to be met, we have to tackle the underspending. The Committee stated, in paragraph 38:

"However, we remain concerned that some departments seem to be experiencing difficulties in delivering on the Government's agenda of increasing public sector investment, and that under-spending has been significant in some departments. We believe that the comparison of departmental spending with planned intentions should be reviewed quarterly in the process outlined to us by the Chancellor. We also welcome the Treasury's acceptance that the relevant quarterly figures will be made available to the Treasury Committee."

It was one of the members of the Committee—my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard)—who asked for those figures to be provided quarterly, so that we can monitor the position and determine whether the total intended spending is achieved.

In terms of the Budget's impact on monetary policy, the Committee made no real comments, although we noted the symmetrical 2.5 per cent. target. While the point is not explicitly made in the report, I suggest that many members of the Committee laud that target, for which the MPC has responsibility. I certainly believe that when we engage with our European partners in the stability and growth pact, we should ensure that the best elements of what we have in our policy should be adopted.

The Committee commented on health spending. It is hard not to agree that the Government's health spending will be enormous, and that has to be welcomed. The NHS is one of the most treasured services in the country and its establishment was a cause of celebration for all the parties after 1948. If we can repair the NHS and ensure that the money supplied to it is spent wisely—that is a big issue, and the Committee hope that the Government will achieve that—everyone will applaud that. From the Wanless report and others, I have not learned of any provision elsewhere that matches the service we have, under which anyone who is sick receives comprehensive treatment locally, free at the point of use. I certainly enjoy that provision.

I direct the Minister's attention to paragraph 46, in which the Committee states:

"While the Chancellor told the House that the planned increase in NHS spending to 2007-08 represented a 43 per cent. increase, after inflation, the King's Fund"—

a research body that examines health spending closely—

"have estimated that the increase would be 62 per cent. in cash terms, but only 35 per cent. in volume terms, taking into account NHS-specific inflation. This means, they estimate, that 'just over half . . . of the cash it . . . receives will be available for expanding services'."

In the light of those comments, the Committee looks for further information from the Government on which to base our assumptions and conclusions. That said, we welcome the extra spending for the NHS and we want to see it used wisely and properly, not thrown into a black hole. I have made that point to the Chancellor and others.

As a Scottish MP, and one who represents a constituency that has whisky interests—it is not awash with whisky, but we have some whisky plants—I have lobbied the Chancellor, along with my colleagues, not to adopt the strip stamp for whisky. I do not see any of my colleagues in their places—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, there is a Scottish colleague in front of me and one behind, so I am well guarded. After massive lobbying, I am delighted that that measure was not in the Budget and I offer the Chancellor my congratulations on that.

Sir Robert Smith: My constituency also contains distilleries, and one in particular was very worried by the possibility of the introduction of the strip stamp, given its cash flow projections and the extra investment that would have been required. Its absence from the Budget was most welcome, but I warn the industry that I have also in the past welcomed the Government's treatment of the oil industry as very positive and that has not continued in the long term. I hope that the present policy on whisky continues and that the Government stick to their guns.

Mr. McFall: I received a letter from the Scotch Whisky Association that congratulated me, and others, on lobbying the Government on that issue. The Government have come up trumps and should be congratulated.

Mention has been made of tax credits. The Committee considered the poverty trap and the marginal rates. In the Red Book, the Government have given figures for marginal rates of taxation varying from 70 per cent. down to 50 per cent. There are no more 100 per cent. marginal tax rates, which should be welcomed, but issues of concern still arise that we wish to bring to the Government's attention. In some cases, we cannot avoid marginal tax rates and we certainly welcome the fact that measures have been implemented to make work pay.

In our report, we quote the comments that we have received from the Confederation of British Industry which indicated that workplace absences cost £10 billion in 1999. It is logical to conclude that if we improve the health service, we will benefit employees and employers. In that way, employers will also gain the benefit and that should be lauded.

Employers are also benefiting from the R and D tax credit. The Government introduced it originally for small companies, but the move to include large companies has prompted favourable comments. For example, the CBI has said that it is pleased with the consultation and with the measures that the Government have introduced.

Dawn Primarolo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I have listened very carefully to his speech—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am also trying to listen very carefully to what the Paymaster General is saying.

Dawn Primarolo: I must have read your mind, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Just before you spoke, I realised that I should swivel around to face you. I apologise, and I shall start again.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, as I want to emphasise that the CBI has welcomed the research and development tax credit. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) complained about complexity in the tax system, but does my hon. Friend consider that the CBI would rather do without the R and D tax credit, and that it would prefer that the relevant legislation did not appear on the statute book?

Mr. McFall: Your power, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is clearly greater than mine, as my hon. Friend the Paymaster General turned her back on me as soon as you spoke. However, I heard her question nevertheless.

The CBI has welcomed the R and D tax credit. It certainly wants the measure to be implemented. That is a plus for the consultation that has taken place between Government and industry.

I turn now to the stability and growth pact, and I draw the House's attention to paragraph 33 of the Treasury Committee's report. It states:

"We share the Government's view that the Stability and Growth Pact should be reformed to take account of issues such as the economic cycle, debt sustainability and the accounting for investment expenditure. We urge the Government to work with other Member States to find agreement on the definition and interpretation of the Stability and Growth Pact as soon as possible."

The Committee is making a wide-ranging inquiry into Europe, and I hope in the next few months that we will be able to visit the European Central Bank and speak to Wim Duisenberg and others. However, we will go charged with the belief that the Government's actions with regard to the Monetary Policy Committee and independence for the Bank of England have been good. The Committee urges the Government to begin a dialogue with other countries to find the best solution to such matters.

In conclusion, I am aware that the Government have tried, with this Budget, to build a consensus with regard to the welfare state. It is already clear that families will benefit from some useful measures. I used to be a schoolteacher, and I worked in a number of deprived areas, as they were termed. It warms me to know that child benefit, which in 1997 was worth £11 for the first child, has been raised to £16. Moreover, 5 million out 7 million families will now receive £27.50 for the first child, and poorer families will receive £54.50. That is of immeasurable benefit for families that have been at the margins of society.

I am very pleased, too, about the Government's proposals for pensioners. We must be alive to the fact that we must be generous to pensioners who have got by on small pensions but who have been penalised by the system. The fact that the pensioner credit will be available to between 5 million and 6 million pensioners is a cause for celebration. The average pensioner will be £8 a week better off from October, so many elderly people will be able to stay in their homes longer and look after themselves in a better fashion.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that we should use the tax and benefits system to build a consensus with regard to the welfare state. However, we must remember that nothing can be delivered if sound economic policies and a sound economic platform are not in place. The Government have established those policies and that platform, and I urge that they be maintained.

I am also at one with the Government in their ambition to enhance and promote public services. For too long—for decades—those services have been in disrepair. I want the Government to communicate to the electorate the fact that we have a viable strategy, but they must also make people understand that its implementation will take time. However, if we do not repair the public services, we could lose them all. This Budget hinges on that question. I urge the Government to stand by their fairness agenda for families and pensioners.

It is very important that Britain look outwards, to the EU and the third-world countries, so that we keep abreast of what is happening on the international stage. I shall be back, in another capacity, to urge the Government to do more about global poverty. I welcome my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's admission that we survive in the global economy but that half the people in the world are not engaged in it. We must be outward looking, and ensure that the fairness agenda applies globally, and is not confined by borders.

6.16 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I am grateful to be called to speak. At the outset, may I remind the House of the declaration of my business interests in the Register of Members' Interests, and in particular my role as a non-executive director of a retail tile company?

I listened to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) with interest. He spoke with the authority that goes with being Chairman of one of the most important Select Committees in the House, and he reminded us of some of the important economic parameters underpinning the Budget and this Finance Bill. The hon. Gentleman made clear the importance that he attaches—as do many others—to having good-quality public services in this country. I think that hon. Members of all parties share that view in connection with the health service. We are divided by a difference of opinion as to how we should achieve that, but that is probably healthy in its own way. Labour Members should not criticise the Opposition simply for the fact that we are still debating the matter and have not yet reached a decision.

I should like also to recognise the work of officials in the Treasury and the Inland Revenue, who are not present in the Chamber and who cannot speak about the Finance Bill and the Budget. I used to be involved in putting together Finance Bills, and I recognise the singular contribution those officials make. Regardless of the contents of the Bill, a huge amount of work goes into producing it. I, for one, am grateful that the task has been performed with skill once again this year.

Some of the measures in the Bill are very debatable, but there are others that I welcome. The simplification of VAT will certainly be welcomed by many small and medium-sized enterprises, and I know that hon. Members of all parties are united in their welcome for the important proposals to help sports clubs with financing.

In addition, I was very pleased with the sections of the Bill dealing with combined heat and power, and with the proposal to modify the climate change levy, which will no longer be charged on the electricity sold by CHP systems into the national grid. When the climate change levy was introduced, I stood at this very location in the Chamber and made that same proposal, and I was supported by hon. Members from all parties. I am glad that the Government—the sinners on that occasion—have repented, but it is a case of, "I told you so."

[Mr. Michael Jack]

If the Government are in repenting mood on the climate change levy, I hope that they will look again the position of the horticulture industry which, as the Paymaster General knows, is carbon neutral. I have entertained hon. Members before with detailed expositions as to why that industry should be given relief from the levy. Now that the light is dawning on the Government, it is possible that it will dawn again on the horticulture industry.

I am especially pleased with clause 37, which introduces some important minor changes to the operation of schedule E. I am aware that the changes are a response to representations, if I can put it thus, from those involved in the tax law rewrite exercise. That has not happened before. Much had been said already about the complexities of our tax system, and I shall have more to say about that in a moment.

I am pleased that the Finance Bill is being used as a way to aid the process—at least within the strictures of the rewrite exercise—of making our existing law understandable. It raises an interesting point. We praise that exercise for its clarity, but to pick up the point of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), there are in many cases more pages of clearer tax exposition. The real challenge for those of us who debate the length, weight and size of a Finance Bill is to decide what we want from our tax system in a complex world.

I listened carefully to the analysis of some of the many pages that have been required on aggregates tax and changes in matters connected with petroleum, and probably they are too long. However, we have no mechanism to debate the efficient operation of our tax system. I think that the time is right for the Government to consider having a standing commission on the operation of the tax system. We have a Law Commission, and from time to time it makes important recommendations about how the law of the land could be changed and improved. I think that a similar mechanism is now required for the tax system so that we can examine in detail how to make it operate properly.

I acknowledge that the legitimately elected Government of the day have the right to raise the money that they think fit, and we have the right to object to that if we disagree. However, there are ways, as the tax law rewrite exercise shows, in which the operation of the tax system can be made more efficient. A commission made up of experts with, if necessary, a political input, might be a way of creating neutral territory on which recommendations about the operation of our tax system can be made on a continuing basis.

In welcoming parts of the Bill, may I also welcome the extension of the age allowance to many pensioners? That is right for someone who has worked hard, particularly when returns from pensions are under pressure—largely as a result of falling stock market returns. However, the Government are complicit because of the ending of the payable tax credit. Vicars, for example, are especially badly off as the Church of England is £12 million down in its pension scheme. That is the reality, and anything that can be done to ensure that there is tax relief for pensioners who may be living on more modest means is welcome.

To date, the debate has centred on the reaction of business to the Finance Bill. I was struck by this headline in the *Financial Times:*

"CBI chief warns Brown of fading business support".

The gin and tonic and prawn cocktail circuit surrounding the 1997 election may have left business with a warm and friendly feeling, but now, particularly with the national insurance changes, that is wearing thin.

I come to some items that are not in the Bill. However, I would like them to be debated in Committee and I hope that the Government will consider them. I said in 2000 that in life assurance products, the way in which the I-E formula dealt with capital gains tax had not been amended to reflect changes in the capital gains tax regime as it applied to the individual. The Government did change, within that formulaic approach, the way in which personal taxation affected individuals.

I mention that because such products are the basis of many people's saving expectations for the future. That area has not been attended to, but it would be simple to do so and the cost would be relatively modest. In a letter sent to me in 2000, the former Financial Secretary to the Treasury told me that it would cost £30 million. That would enable there to be a modest improvement in the return to those policies if the internal capital gains tax regime was brought into line with wider capital gains tax changes. The hon. Gentleman did me the courtesy, in writing his letter, to say that the matter had been considered carefully by the Treasury, but that it was not minded to make the change just yet. I have been very patient, and now suggest to the Paymaster General that the time is right to look at that. It is a relatively inexpensive way of ensuring that life assurance policies returns can be improved and that their internal tax regimes are in line with wider tax activity.

In his concluding comments, the hon. Member for Dumbarton referred to the fact that large parts of the world are totally disconnected from the wealth and economic growth mentioned in the earlier part of his speech. I propose that the Government should give serious consideration to developing a tax credit to encourage investment by British companies in some of the least developed parts of the world. It would, by definition, be riskier, but what I have read about the workings of overseas aid leads me to believe that the private sector can make a positive contribution. British companies need some encouragement, and a credit such as I have described might be one way of addressing that issue.

Dawn Primarolo: If the right hon. Gentleman casts his mind back to when he was Financial Secretary to the Treasury, he will recall that some of our double taxation treaties tried to address that point. Unfortunately, they were systematically misused, resulting in the loss of huge amounts of revenue to the Treasury and no gain to the developing nation concerned. The point made by both the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) is to be carefully considered, but I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will remember that, unfortunately, once something is in the tax system it can be used in ways that were never intended. That has certainly been our experience.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the kind way in which she has responded to my point and for her

agreement that it should at least be considered. I accept that we must be concerned about the abuse of the tax system, which I shall talk about in the context of tax relief for films. However, the time has come to see what encouragement we can give to genuine investment efforts. The Government have talked about addressing the issue of the devil making work for idle hands; in areas that are potential hotbeds of world terrorism, this objective is worth re-examining.

I am delighted to learn that companies such as Grosvenor Estates are in discussion with the Treasury and the Inland Revenue about section 13 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 and the way in which private companies can trade legitimately in terms of their capital gains without being unfairly affected, as they would judge it, by the current mechanism. Companies such as Grosvenor Estates, which are entirely legitimate and do not use mechanisms afforded to private companies for illegitimate activities, deserve a fair hearing, and I am delighted to learn that those discussions are continuing.

I come now to the items in the Bill, and wish to focus on films, oil, capital gains tax, the oil strategy and associated matters. It is noteworthy that the Government's desire to restrict the tax relief on expenditure on the production of British qualifying films is buried in an Inland Revenue press release. I find it difficult to find an individual press release on the subject.

In the Chancellor's Budget speech in 1997, he talked about wanting to help the talents of British film-makers. He said that they should be employed, wherever possible, to the benefit of the British economy. He was mournful of the fact that the British film industry had not, in his judgment, received the encouragement that it deserved.

The Chancellor said that, after consideration, he would provide a three-year measure costing £30 million to encourage the British film industry. It has been interesting to see how, perhaps with typically cinematic imagination, the film industry has freeloaded on the Chancellor's tax generosity. As someone who gamely fought against giving relief to the film industry, because I could see no justification for helping that particular group of luvvies, I ask the Paymaster General to explain how assistance of £30 million to the film industry has led to the Treasury's estimate that next year, 2003–04, it will raise and recover £225 million, and £295 million in the following year. Perhaps the hon. Lady can enlighten us, either tonight or in the Standing Committee, as to what went wrong with the drafting of that relief; how the film industry freeloaded on the Government; how the Government were conned into the proposal in the first place; and why they have only now woken up to the fact that they have been taken—in common parlance—for "a right tater" by the film industry.

On the question of the oil industry, here again the Government are seeking to raise revenue through the measure. Some heroic work is going on in the Treasury with the addition of the 10 per cent. supplementary charge on the corporation tax of continental fields. In the current financial year, we start off at £100 million; then we go to £450 million; and then, in a massive leap, to £600 million. That is why I asked the Chief Secretary if he would be kind enough to put the business case. I, for one, want to know what lies behind those heroic revenue increases. What analysis has been carried out with the oil industry to examine its investment opportunities?

The United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association reminded me that in this financial year, 2001–02, the Government have already raised £5.2 billion in tax from the oil industry—an increase of 25 per cent. over the previous year. In information furnished to me and, I am sure, to other Members, the UKOOA states that the measure, which came very much out of the blue, has shaken industry confidence. The association points out:

"The 10 per cent. supplementary charge on North Sea profits will raise the UK marginal rate to 73.75 per cent."

More tellingly, the UKOOA calculates that, in the period until 2010, the charge will remove £5 billion of capital resources from the industry. That is why we deserve to see some business modelling. What will be the effect on offshore development in the UK of taking £5 billion out of the industry?

The experts at Wood Mackenzie have already been quoted. They point out that if the oil price falls to below $20 a barrel, the mathematics of the formula currently proposed by the Treasury mean that 10 per cent. is the wrong figure if the Government want to raise the £100 million cited in the Red Book for 2002–03. For example, Wood Mackenzie calculates that an oil price of $19.50 would raise £127 million. That gives rise to the question of how sensitive that levy is to changes in the oil price.

Furthermore, the fact that the financing costs for debt cannot be set against the supplementary charge is a drawback to development. The UKOOA advises us:

"Debt finance is vital to be able to develop projects and could represent up to 70 per cent. of a project's development funding."

We shall have to go into some important questions in Committee if the Government are to justify that punitive measure.

Mr. Flight: Has my right hon. Friend focused his mind on whether that 10 per cent. supplementary tax will or will not qualify in relation to double taxation treaties where a number of the North sea explorers are subsidiaries of overseas multinationals?

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting that question, although it leads me into an area which now is not the time to go into—the whole question of the international competitiveness of investing in offshore activity in the United Kingdom.

My third point relates to capital gains tax. When the Government came in, they changed the capital gains tax regime with their complex taper measures, making the express argument that the longer one held an asset the better it was and the more virtuous it was. Now, they are touting it around that two years is the chosen period during which one can achieve a very low rate of capital gains tax. That is quite remarkable. If the Government are the sinner that repenteth, where is the analysis that suddenly states that to get a 10 per cent. effective rate in two years is a good thing, whereas when they first introduced the tapered tax the period was significantly longer? Why not go the whole hog and get rid of that complex, unnecessary part of capital gains tax? If people could move their capital quickly on to more profitable activity, I cannot but believe that that would be an engine for growth.

That is another example of where, instead of undertaking cost compliance modelling of their tax proposals, the Government should produce a well argued

[Mr. Jack]

business case. Too many of the Government's proposals on tax are based on ideas that have no justification in fact. It is clear that the long-term, up-to-10-year taper had no economic justification, just as the two-year period is not justified—so why not zero?

The Red Book contains some further heroic work on oil fraud strategy. I welcome the proper working of the tax system and the proper collection of revenue, but how on earth are the figures in the Red Book to be achieved? The oil fraud strategy starts off at £100 million in 2002–03. In 2003–04, we suddenly find ourselves nearly three times better off and then there is a gargantuan leap to £550 million—half a billion. In 2004–05, we shall be five and a half times better at getting that money in than we were in 2002–03.

How is that trick to be pulled? What is the extent of the oil fraud that is going on? The House needs more convincing details, especially from a Government who are confronting a National Audit Office report that states, in paragraph 5.8 of its summary, that we face a VAT fraud bill of between £6.4 billion and £7.3 billion. Where is the analysis of what the Government have been doing to try to ensure that that missing money was collected? That sum is the equivalent of at least one year's increase in the national insurance charge. That is a major leakage. I want to be convinced that the Government are not merely publishing heroic figures and that the Red Book contains justification for the claim that such a huge sum of money can apparently be raised through the oil fraud exercise, even though there is no mechanism for doing that.

I am sure that we shall have many interesting and detailed discussions in the Finance Bill Committee. I hope that it might be possible for me to make a modest contribution to them. I also hope that when we debate the individual measures, the Government will, for once, give us much greater insight into what is going on and into the justification for the measures that they propose. I hope that the Government will not merely use their Committee majority to bludgeon through tax measures without giving us a thorough and proper explanation of what those measures are, what they do and how they will work. The Government must convince us that—unlike the film industry tax measures—they will actually work.

6.39 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I cannot pretend to have the same breadth of knowledge and experience of Treasury matters as the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), but I hope that I have some understanding of the issues involved in one part of the Bill. However, before I come to that, I want to say that, overall, the Budget was a good one, and therefore this is a good Bill.

I strongly support its three main thrusts. The first of those is investment in the national health service. The second is support for those who work, especially those on lower incomes and those with children, although not only those with children. I welcome the redistributive—I had almost forgotten how to say the word—nature of the measure. In a society of high or full employment, work is the best form of social justice. I am also pleased by its third thrust: further measures to encourage enterprise, especially among small businesses, which employ most of the people in the country and in my constituency.

All our plans for investment in public services and social justice for poorer people, children and the elderly require a strong economy; the Chancellor's judgments over the last five years have given us that strong economy. I do not doubt his judgment that our economy is in good enough shape and the labour market strong enough to withstand the 1 per cent. increase in employers' national insurance contributions. With such a powerful record, one hesitates to call into question any aspect of the Chancellor's judgment, but I think that he has got it wrong with one measure in the Bill. In fact, it is so wrong that, in the medium and long term, I believe that it will have a negative effect on a key sector of the economy through lost investment and employment. Over time, the measure will produce less tax revenue, not more, and will add to our problems on energy policy. That policy is already the subject of the performance and innovation unit report, which offers the Government some difficult decisions to make.

I refer to the proposed changes to the fiscal regime for North sea oil and gas. At first sight, taking £600 million and upwards from oil companies' profits might seem easy pickings—it does not look like a vote loser among the general public. I question this judgment, however, as I fear that it will have a profound effect on one of the country's most important industries—an industry that has accounted for 18 per cent. of total UK industrial investment over the last decade. I look at it in terms of what is in it for UK plc, not for the oil companies themselves and I do not like what I see. I will not argue that oil companies are unable to pay more tax when the oil price is high; it is currently $26 a barrel according to this morning's paper. The price stood at more than $30 a barrel 18 months ago, but it is not always high—it was $10 a barrel four years ago. The only certainty about the oil price is its total unpredictability.

The real point is that the companies about which we are talking can make money by investing in activity anywhere in the world, because there is a world price for oil. As I represent a constituency in which the oil and gas industry is a major part of the local economy—that is why I chair the offshore oil and gas industry all-party group—I want that investment to be made in the UK continental shelf for as many years as it is technically possible to exploit the reserves. We need to remember that innovation is expanding the technical capacity all the time, and much of that innovation is British. The investment that we get means jobs, a safe and secure energy supply, and, with natural gas, environmental benefits. It also means continued tax revenues. We have so far had, for our benefit, £175 billion of tax revenues since oil and gas were first discovered in the North sea. I fear that the new extra 10 per cent. tax will drive away some of that investment.

We must understand the nature of this industry. It is truly global in its investment pattern, and each multinational company operates in that way. There are lots of places in the world where oil and gas can be exploited, and capital investment patterns and plans can easily be redirected, albeit with a long lead-in time. It does not have to stay rooted in one area because that is where its skilled work force are; as we know, the work force are highly mobile. The product itself can be moved readily around the world, although nearness to market is of some advantage in relation to gas. The investment can

therefore easily be made anywhere in the world where oil and gas are found, and more reserves are still being found year by year.

We must face up to the real truth—on a world scale, the North sea is not particularly attractive in terms of competing for further investment. It is what we call a mature province, with only small and technically difficult fields left to exploit. Those fields are called marginal fields—the costs of producing from them are comparatively high in world terms.

When the Treasury carried out the review of North sea oil and gas taxation in 1997–98, it produced figures from consultants showing that, by international comparison, we had a low-tax regime in the United Kingdom. Those same consultants also showed at the same time that the North sea had the highest costs internationally. The Treasury eventually accepted that, and it called off the review. The threatened tax rise has now returned—not in a review but in a Bill.

It is still true today that the UK continental shelf is a costly place from which to produce. A recent study by consultants Wood Mackenzie—to which reference has already been made—shows that the weighted average unit cost from post-1999 developments ranked the UK continental shelf 58th out of 59 energy provinces around the world.

When oil and gas were first discovered here in the 1960s, it was thought that we had enough reserves for 25 years. Today, new fields are being worked on only because costs have been reduced and innovation put to use, but production reached a record level last year. We can go on for another 30 years, with all the benefits that we derive as a result, if we set the right conditions. My concern is that this measure does not help to set those conditions.

We do have some advantages internationally in competing for investment. There is a good market for gas all around the North sea, but our key advantage is stability—not just political stability, but financial stability. We should have fiscal stability, too.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman is making an extremely important set of points. Does he agree that, if the Government remain firmly in support of the proposal, it is very important that they make a detailed case for why they think that the UK offshore industry can bear more tax? In addition, they should provide some comparative data to address many of the international points that the hon. Gentleman is making.

Mr. Blizzard: I look forward to seeing that information when it is deposited in the Library, which, earlier today, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary agreed to do.

The stability about which I am talking breeds confidence. That is the crucial factor in making high-magnitude, extremely long-term investments, which are the particular feature of the oil and gas industry. Because no one can predict the oil price, as much stability and confidence as possible is required in the political system, Government policy and the fiscal regime. This country has enjoyed that advantage; indeed, it is our best advantage. Of course, only one thing undermines that advantage more than making a big change—doing so in a surprising way. Last week's announcement took me and the industry by surprise because it was so inconsistent with previous policy and other current Government policies.

One must question the Government's judgment because the policy is inconsistent with that of the previous five years and with the lessons that we appeared to learn from that previous policy. When Labour took office, a review of the North sea fiscal regime was announced. That in itself created uncertainty, and we saw levels of investment in new projects fall markedly. Then—this is not especially connected—the oil price fell and stayed at $10 a barrel for some time. Consequently, when the review was abandoned, people wondered whether it was because of the low oil price or because there was a recognition of the issues relating to maturity of the province—field size—about which I have spoken tonight. It took some time for the industry to be convinced that it was the latter reason. The Government's decision to set up the oil and gas industry taskforce, and, subsequently, Pilot helped the industry to be convinced.

Through that initiative the Government and the industry worked together—Treasury officials were included on the Pilot committee, which was an unprecedented and very welcome move—and my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy acted as chairman. Through Pilot, a future was mapped out with targets for the industry to achieve. That worked. Last year, 21 new field developments were approved and £4 billion was invested, which was above the target that Pilot had set. Together with the £4 billion of operating expenditure, that investment supports 265,000 jobs in this country, many of them in communities such as my own.

It helps to get a grip on such figures if we consider that, when £50 million or sometimes £30 million is invested to set up a new factory to make semiconductors, that makes national news. It is great and fantastic news, but the sums in the oil and gas industry dwarf those figures.

Confidence was also restored because of the statements that were made. For example, in the pre-Budget report for 2000, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor resisted calls for a windfall tax when we were in the eye of the storm over fuel protests. He said:

> "It has been put to me that North sea oil companies earning higher profits from higher oil prices should be subject to special taxes, but I can tell the House that I am determined not to make short-term decisions based on short-term factors. The key issue is the level of long-term investment in the North sea. This will be the approach that will guide Budget decisions in future."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 2000; Vol. 356, c. 317.]

That statement quite rightly recognises the greater prize of long-term investment.

Many of us on the Back Benches told the industry, "If you want to avoid a windfall tax, invest." It did that but, arguably, the measure in the Bill may be worse than a windfall tax. The industry will be able to pay if the price of oil is $26 or $30, but what will happen if the price falls to $10? I am concerned that the proposal will affect medium and long-term plans for investment. At the moment, the industry always runs a project through to see if it will work by assuming a price of $16 or $18, but it will now have to add 10 per cent. to that figure. I therefore worry that fewer projects will compare favourably with those in other parts of the world. I am surprised by the proposal, because it is inconsistent with one of the key principles for which I admire my right hon. Friend, namely stability.

[Mr. Blizzard]

Less investment in the North sea will have an effect on jobs. Many of those jobs are concentrated in coastal communities, especially those on the east coast such as mine. Those jobs are not easily replaced, because few industries choose coastal or more remote locations. It is difficult to attract businesses to such areas. I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury to consider the league table for unemployment in travel-to-work areas. Most of the top 20 communities in that table are coastal communities. Many towns—especially those with fabrication yards—have already had to deal with job losses in smaller-scale oil and gas activities that have resulted from cost reduction and replacement by innovation.

Let us get it straight. The measure does not mean that the industry will pack up now. We expect committed projects to be seen through and there may still be future projects. However, I fear that there will less exploration and less development of new projects. There will be less frontier and leading-edge work in finding innovative and cost-effective solutions. That has another downside. The expertise that the industry has developed in harsh conditions is recognised throughout the world and is very exportable. One of Pilot's targets is to increase such exports. However, the measure will damage the prospect of that, and it seems inconsistent with the proposal to extend research and development credits with which most Members agree.

Pilot faces a very difficult time. Many of those who have invested a lot of time in it have strong feelings about a surprise tax that seems to run counter to what the industry and the Government have been working towards together. I am concerned that the measure will only hasten the demise of the North sea oil and gas industry and not extend its life, which is what Pilot is all about.

How does the measure join up with energy policy? My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy recently said that our policy is to

"squeeze every last drop of oil and gas out of the North Sea."

That was the mission of Pilot, and it is the right policy. It is good husbandry of natural resources to get everything possible out while we have the infrastructure in place. The policy is also important in terms of having a safe and secure energy supply. Let us also remember that natural gas has helped more than anything else to achieve our Kyoto environmental targets.

The energy review shows that there is an upcoming gap in energy supply that will result from the forthcoming closure of nuclear power stations and from the natural decline in gas production from the mature fields that I have described. We are starting from a long way back with renewables and the coal industry, sadly, seems to be on its last legs. We surely do not want the gas gap—if I can call it that—to be bigger than it need be. I fear that gas that could be recovered will not be recovered if the investment needed to exploit it is directed to more attractive parts of the world as a result of this measure.

I ask the Government to reconsider. We must all contribute to funding the national health service but another 10 per cent. on top—a 33 per cent. increase—is quite a lot. As the right hon. Member for Fylde pointed out, the debt needed to finance projects will no longer be deductible against the new tax, and that will further raise the cost of financing North sea projects. Could not the tax be reduced or the finance charges be made deductible? Recent investment should certainly be exempted from the supplementary tax; otherwise the investment that has arisen as a direct result of Pilot and Government policy will be penalised. That does not seem right.

There is a good proposal in the Budget to abolish the oil royalty, but that only slightly offsets the new tax. It will not overcome the fears that I have expressed today, but I hope that we will not spend a year consulting about it. I hope that the Bill will repeal the royalty as I am sure that the technical details can be sorted out quickly. Capital allowances of 100 per cent. are good, but they will kick in only if the industry has the confidence to go ahead with new projects and if it feels that it will receive a return in the long term and that there are no more surprises around the corner.

Our Government's greatest strength is that they have looked to the long term. I ask right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury to look to the long term when they consider North sea taxation. If we can extend the life of the province, the Treasury and the taxpayer will gain too. I wonder whether I can appeal to the Treasury's most basic instinct to amass the revenue that it needs to bring about our mission to improve public services and to bring about social justice. My argument is that, in the long term, we shall receive more tax revenue through doing something else—or perhaps leaving things as they are—than we will from the measure in the Bill.

6.57 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) made an eloquent and powerful speech. I know that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury heard most of it, but he did not hear the first part. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will read the speech, because the hon. Gentleman made important points on behalf of the North sea oil industry.

I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests and, in particular, to the fact that I am a director of the investment bank, Lazard.

I shall have several disobliging comments to make about the Bill, but I wish to start by making it clear that, during my enforced sabbatical from the House, I watched the Chancellor's first five Budgets from the City. It has to be said that the right hon. Gentleman is highly respected in the City for those Budgets. His prudent phase was highly respected on three grounds in particular.

The first is that he gave independence to the Bank of England. I can say with honesty—it is recorded in *Hansard*—that I was in favour of such a measure 10 or 12 years ago when the Conservative party was against it. Giving the Bank its independence was a brilliant move. The economy is still benefiting from the wisdom of that decision. I have always been opposed to allowing itchy-fingered interventionist politicians to get their hands on the levers of interest rate policy. It is much better to leave them to the structure that the Chancellor has put in place. I thoroughly support that.

Secondly, the Chancellor is respected in the City because he read the crisis that took place in the Asian economies in 1997–98 correctly. Commentators, bankers and economists all said that the crisis presaged a systemic failure in the world economy that would ripple across Russia, creating defaults there and would intensify great

difficulties in Japan and problems in America. We were all wrong. The Chancellor was correct, and he earned enormous praise.

Thirdly, the Chancellor has won great respect in the City for his work on third-world debt relief. He built on progress made under the last Conservative Government and has taken a major step forward.

The Chancellor's first five Budgets—the Budgets of prudence, which I missed—were extremely good. The present Budget and Finance Bill were introduced against an encouraging international background. The United States is coming out of recession with an incredibly robust economy, and the United Kingdom will clearly be bolstered by that. Rates here will inevitably have to rise in future, but probably not before the end of the year. The Budget and the Bill have therefore been introduced against a comparatively benign and certainly improved economic background.

Turning to the Bill, I agree that the Government are right to take another look at arrangements for domicile. It is offensive that a hard-working doctor in Sutton Coldfield earning £60,000 or £70,000 a year should pay 40 per cent. tax and national insurance, but a senior City professional living in London earning 10 times as much or even more should pay no national insurance and very little tax. Nevertheless, we operate in a tax-competitive market; many of the finest people who operate in such a regime can operate anywhere. When the Government look at that regime and the issues involved, they will have to bear in mind the fact that the City of London, with its enormous strengths, gains additional strength from its tax-competitive position.

The Government operate within a global economy, as the Chairman of the Treasury Committee and my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) made clear. It is difficult for Governments to work within that framework. The economy of London has more in common perhaps with New York than with Sunderland. Much of the top end of the London property market is driven by non-UK concerns and the global economy, presenting a serious challenge to Governments wishing to tax it effectively and treat it aright. Nevertheless, it is right that the Government should take another look at that. I also welcome their measure on VAT simplification.

I shall now turn to the reasoned amendment and make some critical comments about the Bill. The 500 pages of new legislation published seven days ago for the House to examine underline the fact that, despite his many virtues, the Chancellor is a compulsive meddler, changing things that he has already changed. The Liberal Democrat spokesman mentioned the Budd committee, a sub-committee of the tax law review committee created by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, upon which he, the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) and I served. During my time on that committee, I heard a number of practitioners talk about the way in which we scrutinise Finance Bills and about the effectiveness of Finance Bill Committees, and was struck by the inadequacies of the way in which legislation progresses as Parliament becomes virtually a rubber stamp.

I served on five Finance Bill Committees—several with the Financial Secretary to the Treasury back in the late 1980s and early 1990s—and I believe that we must be self-critical in appraising the usefulness of the work done in Committee. If Parliament is to have a serious influence on the development of Finance Bills, it should certainly look at the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde about establishing a Standing Committee on taxation. If it is to be involved in consultation, it should be involved at an early stage. I put it to the Chief Secretary that there is merit in having much more extensive debate after the pre-Budget report in November, perhaps even sacrificing a day or two from the spring part of the annual cycle, so that the Treasury and Treasury Ministers can listen to Members on both sides of the House during their consultation, rather than Parliament's putting in time and effort now.

If Parliament is to be effective, it must be able to call expert witnesses. The Budd committee looked at whether there could be a Committee of both Houses. If the Government are unwise enough to proceed with their proposals for an elected second Chamber, perhaps that would remove some of the objections to a Joint Committee. The Budd committee questioned the extent to which Members of Parliament are willing to influence, or interested in influencing, the development of the tax regime. A challenge for everyone in the House is whether we can make any difference to Finance Bills when they reach this stage in their progress. I hope that the Government will seriously consider having a much more detailed debate on their proposals in November. They have been pretty generous and good about putting tax changes out to consultation; in this round, there were three specific areas on which there was extensive consultation with practitioners and professional bodies, which I welcome. The more that can be done, the better, if we are to have more effective consultation and introduce better tax legislation as a result.

The amendment also deals with the burden of taxation. The House does not reflect strongly enough on its deep responsibility to justify every penny of taxation taken off the hard-working taxpayer. The burden of taxation since 1997 has increased enormously. There were approximately £270 billion of tax receipts in 1997, and we are now heading towards the staggering figure of £400 billion, which is a massive increase. Many people question the extent to which they are getting value for money. I do not wish to rehash points made in the Budget debates about spending on health care, transport, and law and order and tackling crime, but many people wonder whether they get value for money from the enormous amount of taxation that is raised. Looking at the Chancellor's assumptions about growth in the Budget and reading what the Item—independent Treasury economic model—club said, I wonder whether, after five prudent and sensible Budgets, this Budget is the other side of the coin and in due course will be seen as reckless.

The Chief Secretary is the taxpayer's guardian. The enormous amount of taxation—every penny of it—must be justified to people who pay it. The House should be a great deal more careful to honour its duty to justify taking large amounts of money from hard-working people.

Mr. Tom Harris: Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that headline tax figures alone do not reveal the whole story? Is he aware that even with projected increases over the next three or four years, the total

[Mr. Tom Harris]

percentage of tax as a percentage of gross domestic product will be lower in 2005–06 than it was at any point under the Conservatives?

Mr. Mitchell: One can do anything with the figures, as the hon. Gentleman eloquently made clear. My point is unanswerable: huge amounts of taxation are taken off hard-working people, and have to be justified. It behoves the House to honour that duty more often than is usually the case in our debates. Looking at the enormous amount of money recently loaded on to tax on income, we can only reflect on the fact that on the "Today" programme, on television in interviews with Mr. Dimbleby, and on page 10 of the last Labour manifesto, the Government made it clear that they had no intention of raising taxes on income, which is precisely what they have done. We can debate that, and the electorate will cast their judgment in due course. I merely point out that the Government have passed draconian and largely commendable legislation on the financial services industry, and that if they had issued a prospectus on tax on income, they would now be in serious trouble with the Financial Services Authority and would have got into hot water for producing such a misleading document.

A great deal of extra money is to be spent on health care. The Government are guilty of a massive dereliction of duty in their failure to put the reforms in place before they put in the extra money. It is astonishing that the money should be provided as it has been. The leverage for getting the reforms that are desperately needed in the health service has been thrown away because of the way in which the matter has been handled.

The Government will live to regret the fact that they have missed out on the key economic lesson of the past 50 or 60 years: that it is competitive, decentralised markets, not monopolistic, tax-financed institutions, which deliver for consumers. The NHS is not about a set of buildings or a set of staff. It is about a set of values. It is about being free at the point of need—*[Interruption]*—but the debate about whether or not the provision of health care should be private is a ridiculous debate.

Those on the Labour Benches continually go on about the fact that the Conservatives have yet to produce their plan on health. They will have to wait for that. We are serving the public and the taxpayer well by ensuring that we look around the world at all the other ways of delivering health care, and that we come back and give our plans to the House when we are good and ready, not as part of the ebb and flow of debate with the Chief Secretary.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. If I were a member of his Front-Bench team, I would be very worried about him. He congratulated the Chancellor on his first five Budgets, supported health care free at the point of delivery, and suggested that taxation on City investors should be higher than that on doctors—a radical suggestion. The hon. Gentleman is welcome to join us. Does he agree that extra money is needed for the health service, or is he saying that the health service that he wants, as we do, free at the point of delivery, is possible with the current amount of money available—yes or no?

Mr. Mitchell: On the first point, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I would rather have my toenails pulled out without anaesthetic than cross the Floor to join him.

On the second point, I am making a serious point. Given the enormous increase in taxpayers' money that is to be spent on the health service, and my lengthy comments about showing respect for the taxpayer, it is right to examine delivery mechanisms, and the Government have made a terrible—indeed, a catastrophic—mistake in the way in which they have gone about providing the extra money, without having first put the reforms in place. I reiterate that it must be right for a responsible Opposition to study carefully all the other mechanisms around the world before deciding which is the right one to put before the British people at the next election.

Mr. Laws: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. He has honestly acknowledged that his party does not yet have proposals for funding the NHS. Is he seriously suggesting, as was suggested from his Front Bench, that no additional money should go into the NHS while we wait for the Conservative party to go round the world and find a better funding solution?

Mr. Mitchell: Those on my party's Front Bench have made it clear that additional money and resources will be needed for the health service. There is no question about that. The hon. Gentleman and his party will have to wait for the proposals to come before the British people and the House of Commons, but I can assure him that when they come, they will be well worth examining.

Before I leave the subject of health, I shall make two other points. First, if one examines the highly respected research conducted by the company Dr. Foster, one can see that there are such enormous differences in the quality of health in different parts of the country—sometimes as much as a 76 per cent. variation in the likelihood of results between one hospital and another—that one cannot ignore the argument that systemic change is required in the health service.

Earlier in the debate we heard about cancer survival rates in this country, which are below those of Turkey. That is why I particularly resent the accusations from Labour Members that the Conservative Opposition are wrong to examine in great detail and depth the lessons to be learned from overseas so that we can give all our citizens a better health service in the future.

The third part of the reasoned amendment deals with the effects of the Finance Bill and the Budget on business and competitiveness. We were told throughout the Budget speech that this was a Budget for enterprise. The word "enterprise" was used so often by the Chancellor that by the time he sat down we all knew that that was certainly not true. The Budget is a tax on jobs. No doubt that will be discussed in detail tomorrow, but the CBI and many others have learned a valuable lesson about the Government. The effect of the changes will be to remove incentives to employ. The CBI said recently that of all our major trading partners, only France has a higher burden of business costs imposed upon it.

The reasoned amendment mentions the "negative impact on competitiveness." You can say that again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The UK has fallen from ninth in 1997 to 19th in the world competitiveness league. Before 1997, when the Conservative party was in government, UK productivity growth was faster than in the United States. Under the present Government it is slower. Our share of world exports has fallen by more than 10 per cent. since 1997, according

to the International Monetary Fund. Last year business in Britain faced more than 4,000 new regulations. A business-friendly Budget this certainly is not.

Mr. Tom Harris: I thank the hon. Gentleman once again. I am enjoying his list of non-achievements on the part of the Government. Perhaps he would like to add, or perhaps he is not aware, that last year the British economy grew faster than any economy in the G7.

Mr. Mitchell: That adds nothing to my list. If the hon. Gentleman is disputing any of the five facts that I gave him, which demonstrate that under the present Government the performance of business in the UK and the difficulties faced by business in the UK are much worse under the Government whom he supports than under the Government of whom I was a part, perhaps he would like to challenge those figures. He cannot do so, which is why he remains seated.

The Finance Bill adds 500 pages to tax law. It is complex, meddlesome and burdensome to the taxpayer without giving value for money. It is hostile to business, bad for enterprise and destructive of competitiveness. It marks a sea change in the way in which the Chancellor will be perceived in the future, as compared with the way in which he was perceived in the past. I look forward to voting for the reasoned amendment tonight.

7.17 pm

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell)—I often follow him on the Select Committee. I salute his contribution. It is hard for Opposition Members, particularly Conservative Members, to say very much about the current economic situation and the Budget because the economic indicators are so strong. We have high growth, low inflation, low interest rates and high employment.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who is no longer in his place, mentioned the complexity of the Budget. He referred to the 1979 Budget—the first one presented by the incoming Conservative Government. The 1979 Budget was part of a process that led to 3 million unemployed, so short Budgets are not necessarily a good thing, as the hon. Gentleman suggested. I knew that I had many differences with him, and I have found another. He stood up in the House and said he hoped that he was still growing; I hope that I am not.

A measure of the difficulty in which the official Opposition find themselves is the wording of the amendment, which suggests that the Budget

"will have a negative impact on competitiveness and the attractiveness of the UK as a location for investment."

Implicit in that phraseology is a recognition by the official Opposition, and rightly so, that we are a competitive economy and an attractive place in which to do business. We on the Labour Benches want to further that process.

I shall focus on productivity. When my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury opened the debate, he mentioned that capital investment—business investment—had gone up from 10 per cent. of national income to 14 per cent. of national income. That is to be applauded because productivity rests, like a three-legged table—a three-legged table should not wobble, nor should productivity—on capital investment, on research and development and innovation and on labour force investment.

It is interesting to consider some of the statistics on productivity—I will not bore the House with many—to show that we have some way to go, but that we have also made considerable progress under this Government. The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield mentioned the high burden of business taxation in France. According to the productivity figures for 2000, if the United Kingdom is taken as 100 on an index, France is at about 118, the United States is at about 139, Germany at about 105 and, interestingly, Japan is at about 98. Japan and the US are low-tax economies. France is a relatively high-tax economy, as is Germany. We are a low to middling-tax economy, so there is no direct link between taxation and productivity.

On our productivity gains, one of the publications issued with the Budget—"Trend Growth: Recent Developments and Prospects"—shows the trend in the United Kingdom's underlying productivity growth measured as output per hour. From quarter 2 of 1986 to 1997, the figure was 1.84. From 1997 to mid-1999, it was 1.55, so there was a fall when the Labour Government stuck to the out-going Conservative Government's spending limits. From mid-1999 to quarter 3 of 2001, the figure was 2.4, so there has been an increase in productivity under a Labour Government. That is extremely important, and we should make further progress, as the Budget will do.

I urge the Government to consider one difficulty with productivity with which we have not yet grappled. In the submission of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research to the Select Committee on the Treasury, the report of which was mentioned a great deal earlier, Mary O'Mahony refers to the difficulties of measuring public sector productivity. It is obviously particularly important to grapple with that difficulty, given that a huge amount of extra resources will go into the national health service. Although those resources are very welcome, we ought to be able to measure any growth in productivity in the public sector, particularly in the health service, so that we know whether we are getting the right bang for the buck from the increased moneys.

I welcome the reduction in the Budget in some of the red tape faced by small business. One of the major headaches for small business is, of course, VAT returns, and the Budget addresses that issue. That will help productivity in the small business sector. It is very difficult to tell whether the increase in employers' and employees' national insurance contributions to fund the change that we need in the health service will have a positive or a negative effect on productivity, but mention has been made of what the effect on employment may be. Of course, if labour is made more expensive in a capitalist economy, capital tends to be substituted for labour, which tends to increase productivity in that economy.

I particularly welcome the changes on research and development in clause 52 and schedule 12. We need more research and development to push forward this country's productivity. We have historically underperformed in that respect. The Finance Act 2000 included tax breaks for small and medium-sized enterprises. Those tax breaks are now coming on stream for larger enterprises. We should be clear how beneficial those changes could be. As I understand that clause and schedule, a large company, like

[Rob Marris]

a small or medium-sized enterprise, that invests in research and development will in effect get 125 per cent. of the money back. It will get the 100 per cent. write-off, plus a 25 per cent. premium, against its profits to encourage that activity.

I welcome the fact that that proposal will cover qualifying bodies, such as Wolverhampton university in my constituency. Those bodies will be able to carry out research for larger enterprises, which will be able to claim that tax break. That will encourage large enterprises not only to carry out research and development in-house, but to farm it out to appropriate qualifying bodies, whether they be universities, charities or whatever.

I hope that some of those productivity gains and the advances in research and development will encourage business in this country to invest in two areas where we have been missing the boat. I have told the House about them before, and I think that I did so when I spoke on Budget day. The first area is the design and build of medical equipment, and the second is the design and build of pollution control equipment. We in the west midlands could well do with playing our part in those markets, which are growing in this country and abroad.

I have a minor request to make of the Minister. I am not an accountant but a non-practising solicitor, as my entry in the Register of Members' Interests shows, so I should like to know more about what happens when a company spends money on research and development and claims for staffing costs and consumable stores. I traced that provision back from the Bill to the Finance Act 2000, which introduced that research and development tax break for small and medium-sized enterprises. One of the schedules to that Act simply states:

"For the purposes of this Schedule expenditure on consumable stores means expenditure that would be treated as expenditure on consumable stores in accordance with normal accounting practice."

I was stumped by that and did no further research, so I hope that the Minister can enlighten me at some point about what that means. That request is not frivolous; it is intended to shed light on what can be claimed against that tax break. I do not know whether a claim could be made for a spectrometer. Would a spectrometer count as a consumable store, or as capital goods?

I should also like to make some remarks about another issue that is central to productivity: the skills of our work force. We need the skills to carry out the research and development to which I refer. We need skills to boost productivity—I read out some figures earlier. As hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree, we need to move to a high-wage, high-skill economy.

We need to develop skills to address the skills shortages that have developed for two reasons. First, the Conservative Government neglected to invest sufficiently in skills training. Secondly, although unemployment has dropped to a relatively low level under the Labour Government in the past five years, there are pockets of skills shortages throughout the country, especially in the south-east.

I am pleased that the Budget and the ancillary documents refer to pilot schemes under which, initially in six areas of the country, small employers will be paid to send their workers on training courses. Paragraph 3.34 of "Developing Workforce Skills: Piloting a New Approach"—one of the documents released with the Budget statement—states:

"Pilots will provide small firms with financial support of up to 150 per cent. of the average wage costs of low-skilled staff for the required period of time off."

That time off will be used for training.

I wholeheartedly support that push to encourage skills training; it is a part of the Budget that has been under-remarked upon. Lower-skilled workers tend not only to earn less but to be less productive. Paragraph 1.10 of that document states:

"Research at the worker level finds that holding a tertiary qualification (e.g. a degree) in the UK increases productivity by between 30 and 100 per cent. when compared to a worker with no qualifications."

That would be a massive productivity gain for our economy. We hope to push forward on that with the Government target of getting 50 per cent. of that age cohort into university by 2010. That should have huge gains for future productivity, directly and indirectly.

I welcome the sector skills councils that are being set up throughout the country to increase skills training and productivity. Box 2.1 of the document from which I have just quoted says that they

"will be strategic bodies with the sole purpose of identifying the skills and productivity needs of their sectors and galvanising action to tackle priority issues."

Ancillary to that, I welcome the Employment Bill now going through the House and on whose Standing Committee I served, under which trade union learning representatives will be given time off, paid for by their employers. That is a step towards encouraging a learning culture, which, in due course, will have increasingly beneficial effects on productivity in our economy as well as enriching the lives of the people who undergo that education and training.

I should like the Government to consider the sort of tax break for training that they have given for research and development—the 25 per cent. premium in addition to writing off 100 per cent. of training costs against taxation. Effectively, there would be the same 125 per cent. regime for training in certain circumstances that this Budget introduces for research and development in large companies and which there has been for the past two years for small and medium-sized enterprises.

I finish with a quote from the Treasury Committee's report, which has already been used by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). When the Government are criticised about targets, it is salutary to remember that we need real measures and to keep on top of them. The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield mentioned that indirectly in terms of the health service. Paragraph 21 states:

"We remain concerned about UK productivity which has lagged behind that of the United States. We agree with the Budget's aim to increase the rate of growth of productivity and recommend that the effectiveness of the various measures included in the Budget for this purpose should be closely monitored and reported on in future Pre-Budget Reports and Budget Statements."

If, like me, one has a great desire to increase productivity in order to catch up with the United States, to continue pulling ahead of some of our EU competitors and to catch up with France, and so on, we need to be able to tell which measures are working and which are not.

7.33 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): It is a great honour to represent the City of London and to be speaking today for the first time on a Finance Bill. Times have changed from a bygone era, even on this day when many of us have dressed in our best suits for the event in Westminster Hall earlier today. Back in the post-second world war era, it was apparently de rigueur during Budgets and Finance Bill debates for Members of Parliament—in those days there were two representing the City of London—to wear large black top hats. My association deputy chairman, Jacob Rees-Mogg, the son of Lord Rees-Mogg, offered to borrow such apparel, but I decided that discretion was the better part of valour, at least on this occasion.

The more disparate nature of financial services in this era, certainly since the big bang in 1986, means that the City can no longer be said to speak with a single voice. In any event, my duty is to the residential population—the 6,000 residents within the square mile of the City of London. None the less, it is a great honour to be able to say a few words tonight on the Finance Bill as it affects the financial services and the business community.

My own record is as a small business man and I probably express the view of many who have a background in business in lamenting the detachment between the business and political classes—something that has been mentioned many times in recent years. I wish to speak briefly on two main aspects—enterprise and globalisation. It has been a much-vaunted if somewhat overspun goal of this Government to promote enterprise. Those words were used by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and by the Chief Secretary earlier this afternoon.

I serve on the Standing Committee considering the Enterprise Bill, which is why I could not be here throughout today's debate, for which I apologise. That legislation is flawed in its rather overbearing regulation on merger controls and cartels, as well as in its somewhat simplistic analysis of the reform of insolvency law.

The Chancellor's instincts, as manifested in the sheer size of the Finance Bill, are all too often to complicate and meddle in taxation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) made clear, the Bill is 488 pages long with 140 clauses and 39 schedules. It is a Budget for the most enterprising among the accountancy profession, but perhaps not for many more.

It would be unfair and churlish not to recognise that the Budget contained a number of positive changes, which manifest themselves in the Finance Bill. I support the cut in capital gains tax, from which I have benefited, having sold a business within a few months of entering the House. I also support many of the venture capital trust changes, which allow a merger and wind-up without losing the tax benefits. My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) has become something of an expert on that issue, and I am sure he will refer to it in his comments later. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) rightly identified the credits that will be available for research and development, which are also to be supported.

Equally, there has been a downside for British business. All in all, we have had a tax-raising Budget and those taxes have been on jobs, making people more expensive to employ, with an attack on the oil industry and on foreign companies. I appreciate that the debate on national insurance contributions will take place at greater length tomorrow, but surely it would have been far better to have scrapped employers' national insurance and to have increased corporation tax rates. That would have simplified matters for companies, cut the compliance bill and encouraged employers to employ people.

Mr. Tom Harris: We have heard many warnings from Conservative Members about measures contained in this and previous Budgets impacting on the number of jobs. The hon. Gentleman may recall that the Conservative party claimed that the national minimum wage would destroy a million jobs, but in fact a million jobs have been created. Is not that a worthy point to take on board?

Mr. Field: To claim that a million jobs have been created by the minimum wage is a rather large step to take. Other jobs may well have been lost. The minimum wage was set at a sufficiently competitive level, so a number of our concerns did not come to pass. Like many people in the mid-1990s, I ran a small business, albeit one in central London that paid even the lowest paid employees considerably more than any projected minimum wage. However, it is clear that jobs have not been lost. It is also well established that the Conservative party has changed its position on that.

With effect from 17 April, a new supplementary charge has been introduced on 10 per cent. of the profits of oil companies for the production of oil and gas in the UK and the UK continental shelf. Given the seat that he represents, the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) probably has deeper day-to-day concerns, but the City of London and the great number of international oil businesses based there will also be heavily affected by the provisions. It is a tax in addition to the standard 30 per cent. rate of corporation tax; it has rules similar to corporation tax, save that the financing costs will not be deductible. I suspect that the Financial Secretary will point out later that, as a sweetener, the Government have increased oil capital allowances from 25 to 100 per cent. and intend the matter to be subject to some consultation. However, the abolition of royalty payments does not appear to be taken into account in the Red Book, and the payments themselves are pretty small and affect only the older oilfields.

The United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association, which represents some 30 of the largest 70 licence holders that are active in the North sea, said that the new surcharge

"could undermine investor confidence in the long-term viability of the North Sea."

The policy comes at an especially crucial time, given the difficulties in the middle east. It will be interesting to see how oil supplies are affected by those difficulties in future years.

Shell Expro, the second biggest company in the North sea, which combines the operations of Shell and Esso there, said only a couple of weeks ago that although it welcomed the increased capital allowance and the possible phasing out of royalties—as I said, the latter affects only the older oilfields—they were

"not expected to come close to offsetting the supplementary charge"

that would be put in place. A number of people have also been very concerned that the higher tax rate will result in fewer discoveries being commercially viable in the years ahead.

[Mr. Field]

I should like to say a few words about globalisation, as financial and business services remain the powerhouse of the City's economy. They account for some 6.6 per cent. of the UK's gross domestic product and 600,000 new jobs are likely to be created in London in the next 15 years—if the Mayor of London is to be believed. On this matter at least, I have no reason to disbelieve him. More than 500 foreign banks will be active in the City and we would obviously wish those circumstances to be maintained.

The City relies on technology and massive labour mobility. The great worry is the flip side in a high-tax economy. We can attract the best workers world wide and, indeed, the crème de la crème of our graduates, but we must accept that work done in London can be done elsewhere increasingly easily, and will be relocated if the City ceases to be such an attractive place in which to do business.

Many hon. Members have spoken on a number of occasions about the severe infrastructure issues that central London faces. I spoke only a fortnight ago in an Adjournment debate on the future of Bart's hospital, which is obviously close to my heart. Likewise, there are transport issues relating to crossrail, the tube and the proposed congestion charge. There is a great worry that too many foreign banks that employ a highly skilled work force are fast reaching the end of their tether. The Bill contains measures that may tip some of them over the edge.

We have discussed controlled foreign companies—companies that are not resident in the UK, but are controlled by individuals who are resident here. Clause 88 provides for a reserve power to make regulations specifying overseas jurisdictions to which the exemptions from CFC rules would not apply. As a result, all CFCs located in those jurisdictions could be taxed under the controlled foreign companies rules. As many hon. Members know, Conservative Members voted against Budget resolution 41, which relates to that new measure. We are concerned that the measure will increase substantially the powers of the Inland Revenue. It is directed especially at the Crown territories of the Channel Islands, including Jersey and Guernsey, and at the Isle of Man, and concerns subsidiaries of groups whose headquarters are situated in the UK.

I believe that that matter has nothing to do with money laundering—a red herring that various Ministers and others have referred to—and relates solely to tax competition. The uncertainty that will result from the legislation will put at risk the UK's position as a future location for the headquarters of multinational companies.

There is also an issue in relation to UK branches of multinationals. I had wanted to deal in some detail with foreign companies that operate in the UK through a branch, as the matter obviously has a strong effect on the City of London. Such companies have long been able to debt fund their branches and thus obtain tax deductions for payments of interest to their foreign head offices. However, those rules are set to change. For accounting periods beginning on or after 1 January next year, the rules will be changed, as UK branches will be dealt with on the basis of the equity capital that they would need if the branch were an independent free-standing company.

That could have a major effect. I know that Ministers will be aware of the concerns that have been expressed and will have received a great number of representations in that regard, but as well as hitting the banking sector, which is clearly a big issue for the City, the measure will also add complexity to the tax affairs of a great number of multinational groups that have UK branches. Indeed, I understand that the Association of British Insurers said:

"There is a concern that the measure could also disincentivise foreign firms from being established in London, given the sums involved."

Given the precarious nature of the insurance market and of Lloyd's in particular, that would be a great problem.

A number of hon. Members mentioned growth, on which the Government's proposals seem unduly optimistic. In a sense, time will tell, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham pointed out, figures released only last Friday suggested that first quarter growth this year was only 0.1 per cent., which is much lower than the expected 0.4 per cent. and the projected growth of more than 2 per cent. this year and 3.5 per cent. next year, on which many of the Bill's spending plans were predicated.

I shall draw my remarks to a close, as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. On the generality of the financial position in which the country finds itself, I accept as a relatively new Conservative Member of Parliament that it would be graceless not to recognise that the Chancellor often commands the Exchequer with great stature. I suspect that he may well be judged in the long term to have been in the upper ranks of holders of that office. Indeed, not to acknowledge that would be as graceless as many of the Front-Bench Treasury team have been in not acknowledging that they were bequeathed a golden economic legacy by the outgoing Government in 1997. They have built on that legacy. Many of us had great concerns in 1997—they were genuine, given the track record of many former Labour Governments—that things would fall apart very quickly. It is only right that a certain amount of credit should be given to the Government for having been able to marshal the economy as well as they have done in the past five years.

One must also accept, however, that the inheritance that the Government received in 1997 was the product of 15 years of often thankless domestic economic performance. Similarly, the work of the current Chancellor and the results of some of his much-vaunted changes to public finances in the past three Budgets—as well as the ones proposed in the Bill—will not become fully apparent until the first half of the next decade. While I am quietly confident that, by then, it will be my party that is sitting on the Government Benches, I am less sure that we shall not have to untangle an unholy mess in our country's finances by that time.

7.47 pm

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): There are two clear themes in this year's Budget: fairness and enterprise. To the Labour side of the House, the fairness of the Budget is self-evident. We have unprecedented investment in the national health service, confirming its principles but at the same time ensuring that modernisation takes place. We have two new tax credits that will help the less well-off: the child tax credit and the working tax credit. Assistance is being provided to the long-term unemployed and single parents to help them secure long-term employment, and there is much else besides.

It is important that, taken as a whole, the Budget is progressive in character. Numerous references have been made to the Treasury Committee's report. It is important to note that the draft report states that the Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that, when all the measures are examined in total,

"the effect is a redistribution from the top half to the bottom half of the income distribution."

I think that that makes the Budget an historic one. It is an excellent Budget for that reason and many others.

It is significant that when we refer to the national health service, the Opposition fail to offer any alternative proposals. We have heard about their grand tour of Europe and their various experiences in different European Union member states. We can only hope that that infatuation will lead them to a more genuine appreciation of some of the benefits that the European Union can bring to this country.

If we have had a Budget for fairness, is it a Budget for enterprise? It is true that several employers' organisations have expressed reservations—for example, the CBI is worried that national insurance increases will be unfair on employers and impede job creation. In all fairness, however, we should bear in mind several factors. There is a moral argument in favour of increasing national insurance contributions. As everyone benefits from an improved national health service, it is only right that everyone contributes.

We must recognise the need, in economic parlance, for a healthy labour supply. Many employee absences in British industry are due solely to illness. In 1999 alone, £10 billion was lost as a result of the large number of people away from work because of illness.

We should not forget that in recent times the national insurance system has been reformed, nor that projections show that this country's gross domestic product growth will probably increase from 3 per cent. to 3.5 per cent. in 2002–03. That will lead to greater prosperity and, in turn, more jobs.

The Bill also contains a whole panoply of provisions that will encourage enterprise, including greater support for research and development, simplification of the VAT regime and reduction of red tape. Other measures will help those parts of the United Kingdom that are less prosperous than the south-east of England. It is therefore a shame that no Plaid Cymru Members are taking part in the debate.

Mr. Weir: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru are a joint group in this Parliament, and I shall speak on behalf of both parties.

Mr. David: That is a pretty lame excuse for Plaid Cymru's absence from the debate. I am talking not only about the present moment, but about the whole afternoon from 3.30 pm onwards, during which not one single member of the Welsh National party has set foot in this Chamber. That is a complete and utter disgrace, because parts of the Budget will help areas like Wales—for example, the community investment tax credit, which will help disadvantaged communities, and the positive changes to stamp duty, which will help small and medium-sized enterprises, including those in Wales.

The Budget as a whole is as much an enterprise Budget as a Budget for fairness. The two concepts go hand in hand. Over the past few years, an enterprise culture has been created throughout the United Kingdom—a culture that the Government are helping to nurture and to sustain at every opportunity. It has become part of the psyche of the nation, and long may that continue. The Budget takes a positive step further in that direction.

The Treasury Committee report refers to the European stability and growth pact. On the Budget deficit, Treasury forecasts show that public finances will be within the confines of the stability and growth pact in 2002–03, but there is a question mark over whether that will continue into 2005–06 and 2006–07. The operation of the growth and stability pact has already demonstrated greater flexibility as regards the attitude taken towards the position of Portugal and Germany. It would be useful if that flexibility were to be enshrined more permanently to create a more prudent and sensible approach. The growth and stability pact needs to be reformed to take account of the economic cycle, debt sustainability and investment expenditure. I am grateful that the Government have acknowledged that point, and that it is being addressed by the European Union through the Economic and Financial Affairs Council—ECOFIN. I hope that that debate will reach a successful conclusion.

Today in this country, 28.4 million people are in work and the lowest number of people are claiming unemployment benefit for 25 years. That is a record. The Labour party's goal is to achieve sustainable full employment. That goal can be achieved in the near future, and the Budget takes us closer towards it. In essence, the aim of the Budget is to create a country that is prosperous and compassionate. In other words, it is about fairness and enterprise.

7.56 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru Members welcome the central tenet of the Budget, namely that there should be more investment in the national health service and that it should come from general taxation. It is heartening to note that the Chancellor has finally accepted the position of the SNP, which has called for that for some considerable time. It is worth recording that in 1999, the SNP sought to reject the Chancellor's 1p cut in income tax and said that priority should be given to investment in public services. We were roundly condemned by new Labour at the time, but we seem to have come full circle. Indeed, I am told that some Labour Members are describing the measure as 1p for Scotland—vindication indeed.

Mr. Tom Harris: Can the hon. Gentleman confirm whether the 1p for Scotland policy will remain part of the SNP's manifesto at next year's Scottish Parliament elections?

Mr. Weir: As the hon. Gentleman knows, our manifesto for the Scottish Parliament elections will depend on matters within the Scottish Parliament, not on the Bill.

The Bill makes no change to income tax—it provides instead for a rise in national insurance contributions—but that is merely to spare the Prime Minister's blushes. All hon. Members know, as does everyone outside the House, that what has happened is a rise in taxation. The mental gyrations performed by Labour Members to justify that method of raising revenue have been a wonder to behold.

[Mr. Weir]

In effect, it does not matter to the average employee whether the increase is in direct taxation or national insurance contributions—it is still an increase in the amount of tax that they pay.

That method of raising revenue has a serious impact. Clauses 30 to 32 impose changes in corporation tax, especially in relation to small companies. Although that is generally welcome to small companies, it does not address the needs of the vast majority of small businesses in Scotland, as more than 75 per cent. are not incorporated and therefore do not pay corporation tax.

Kevin Brennan: While the hon. Gentleman is talking about the effect of the changes on small businesses, and as he is speaking on behalf of Plaid Cymru as well, will he give his reaction to the response to the Budget by the CBI in Wales and the Trades Union Congress in Wales?

Mr. Weir: The changes to corporation tax will be beneficial to companies in many ways. When I asked the Chief Secretary about the difference between companies and unincorporated bodies, he gave a great deal of detail about the effect of the changes on companies. They will benefit, but the point is that unincorporated bodies will not. Far from being a Budget for business, it is a Budget for big business, as the Bill reveals.

Last week, in its Budget coverage, *The Financial Times* gave the example of Safeway in relation to national insurance contributions. It pointed out that because a large number—40 per cent., I think—of Safeway's employees were part time, they did not cross the national insurance threshold. A further 25 per cent. crossed it by so little that it made a marginal difference to the company. It makes a big difference to those enterprises with a small number of well-paid employees. That is often the case with innovative small businesses in Scotland, not least because of the difficulties that they experience when they seek bank finance.

Kevin Brennan: And Wales?

Mr. Weir: No doubt that also applies to Wales. The two Labour Members from Wales may feel free to keep interrupting.

Unincorporated business receives no benefit from the reduction in corporation tax. Most small businesses will pay increased national insurance contributions personally and for their employees but will not receive the benefit of reduced taxation. They are therefore doubly penalised. That is patently unfair. By raising national insurance contributions, the Chancellor is not taxing profit, but increasing the cost to business, which must be met even if there is no profit. It is worth noting that the average self-employed business owner in Scotland makes approximately £14,000 per annum, compared with a UK average of £22,000.

Unincorporated business will not benefit from the change in the research and development grant.

Mr. David: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Weir: No, I want to continue with the point. I suspect that the same problem affects small businesses in other parts of the UK, certainly in Wales. There will be increased costs but little benefit for small, unincorporated businesses. John Downie of the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland said:

"The Chancellor has given a little but taken a lot."

The fiendishly complex system of tax credits may ameliorate the increase to some extent for the lower paid, but it is worth noting that since October 1999, the Chancellor has introduced five new tax credits for families, scrapped four of them and devised two new ones to take effect from April 2003. That was before the Budget changes. That is an average of a new tax credit for families every six months. Business complains that the complexity of the tax system increases its costs. That was one of the four matters that most disturbed businesses according to the survey by the Federation of Small Businesses. There is approximately £3 billion in unclaimed benefits largely due to the complexity of the system. As I said, that complexity means costs for businesses.

By going down the national insurance route, the Chancellor has also effectively reduced the amount that will be invested in the NHS and other public services. It should be remembered that the NHS is a major employer. A large proportion of its costs is wages and salaries. All will be subject to the changes to employers' national insurance contributions and some £26 million every year will be taken out of the NHS in Scotland and given back to the Treasury. Local authorities will pay more than £35 million. Overall, we calculate that the cost to the public sector will be £1.2 billion.

Mr. David: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Weir: No, I shall not give way on this occasion.

I want to refer to some specific clauses. Clause 90 changes North sea oil taxation. I am not sure about its effect in Wales, but it will make a great impact in Scotland. The changes in royalties are largely red herrings because they affect only pre-1982 fields. The new 10p tax is more important and could have a detrimental effect on employment in the North sea, especially on the utilisation of marginal fields. Earlier, the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) made the good point that many fields in the North sea are marginal. Indeed, the UK Offshore Operators Association said that the changes

"could undermine investor confidence in the long term viability of the North Sea."

In constituencies such as Angus, there is substantial employment in the offshore oil industry and there are worries about the possible knock-on effects of the changes on employment. Has the Financial Secretary considered the new regime's effects on North sea oil jobs? The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) is no longer in the Chamber. He asked for the business case for the changes to be placed in the Library. It would be interesting to read it.

The Government are ushering in a substantial change in a vital industry, apparently without undertaking any public-economic assessment of its effect on the 264,800 jobs that depend on the industry. The changes will reduce industry net cash flow, and that will have a negative effect on exploration, which is already low. Exploration and appraisal have decreased by approximately 55 per cent. since 1996. We tabled an amendment in the debate on the Budget; alas, it was unsuccessful, but we may return to it.

The Chancellor must know about the huge damage caused to the rural and remote parts of Scotland by the high cost of fuel. The Budget did not increase fuel duty, but froze it. That is cold comfort to those who experience steadily rising prices. The most cynical among us—that must include most of us—wonder how much of the new 10p North sea oil tax will be passed on to consumers at the pumps. Fuel duty may be frozen, but taxation of fuel may effectively rise. Will the Financial Secretary take any action to ensure that it is not passed on to customers in rural petrol stations?

Perhaps the Financial Secretary will not be surprised to learn that we also have severe difficulties with clauses 126 to 130, which cover the aggregates levy. It is likely to have a disproportionate effect on Scotland's economy. In Scotland, many small quarries will experience dramatic increases in costs through the levy. It is a flat rate levy; that means that the increase will be proportionately greater in Scotland where aggregates are cheaper than in England.

However, the greatest impact of the aggregates levy will be on local authorities and projects such as coastal improvements. In my constituency, Angus council is dualling the notorious A92 road. The levy will add £2 million to the cost of the work. The council tax payer will ultimately bear that cost. That will happen throughout Scotland and Wales because 40 per cent. of all aggregates are used by the public sector.

The aggregates levy will have an impact much further down the line on those who manufacture added-value aggregates products such as pre-cast concrete. I recently visited Montrose Concrete Products, a manufacturer in my constituency. I was told that its products were already undercut by those from Northern Ireland. It appears bizarre, but I am told that the majority of some pre-cast products that are used in construction in Aberdeen come from Northern Ireland.

The Bill provides for transitional relief for Northern Ireland but not for Scotland. That is patently unfair. I do not begrudge Northern Ireland its relief, but Scotland and Wales should receive similar consideration. I appeal to the Government to reconsider the matter. Again, we tabled an amendment in the Budget debate. We received some support from the Ulster parties and some from Liberal Democrats, but not from the main Opposition.

The Chancellor painted a rosy picture of Britain under new Labour, as did the Chief Secretary when he opened the debate.

Mr. Tom Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Weir: No, I shall take no more interventions.

There are wide variations in growth. In the United Kingdom, Scotland is held in a state of managed decline. Although United Kingdom growth has been 2.5 per cent. over the past 10 years, Scottish GDP has grown by 2.1 per cent. resulting in an opportunity cost of £3 billion. Growth in the UK may be set at 2.2 per cent. now, but as the Secretary of State for Scotland recently admitted, growth in Scotland is only 1.2 per cent.

The Bill shows yet again that the priority for Scotland is winning fiscal independence for the Scottish Parliament. Scotland is a wealthy country that can and should stand on its own fiscal feet, legislating to combat its unique challenges and to take advantage of its unique opportunities.

8.8 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I emphasise at the outset that I have never met the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) outside the House, despite his remarks. He described the Chief Secretary as Vesuvius, but it was the hon. Gentleman who brought a volcanic metaphor to mind. He resembled a miniature Stromboli, huffing and puffing and showering the Chamber with rhetorical sparks, but ultimately destructive and negative, leaving a lingering whiff of bad eggs. At least he did not speak for as long as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), who rumbled on and on without threatening to erupt into life. I should congratulate the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), who spoke on behalf of Plaid Cymru as well as the Scottish National party.

Rob Marris: At least his speech was short.

Kevin Brennan: It was, at least, short, as my hon. Friend says. I congratulate the hon. Member for Angus on the detailed knowledge of Welsh affairs that he extemporised during his speech. At least we were spared a speech from the moody mullah of misery, the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price), who normally speaks for Plaid Cymru on Treasury matters.

Mr. Tom Harris: Unfortunately, I was not able to intervene on the hon. Member for Angus. Does my hon. Friend agree that now would be a good opportunity for the Scottish National party to volunteer to serve on the Standing Committee for the Finance Bill, as it has missed previous opportunities to do so and bitterly regretted that afterwards?

Kevin Brennan: As always, my hon. Friend finds an ingenious way to make his point, and he has done so very well in that intervention.

The Bill provides us with the legislative means by which most of the changes announced in the Budget can be put into effect. I disagree with the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton who—if I heard him correctly—said that the Bill was about more than national insurance. It is not about national insurance at all; those provisions are not in it.

There is no doubt in my mind that this Budget is the best in recent history because this represents the moment at which the Government took the steps required literally to insure the health of the nation. It is possible to introduce the measures in the Bill—and the associated changes in the Budget, including the changes to national insurance contributions—because of the favourable macro-economic position over which the Government have presided. There was a time, not long ago, when any economic textbook would have said that it was impossible simultaneously to have low inflation—a record low, as my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) pointed out earlier—low unemployment and high growth, relatively speaking, all at the same time. I remind Opposition Members that our economic growth is very strong at a difficult period for the G7 countries, yet unemployment is at its lowest for more than a generation.

Mr. Weir: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Kevin Brennan: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, as he was kind enough to give way to me earlier.

Mr. Weir: Would the hon. Gentleman like to comment on the differential growth between areas of the UK? As I pointed out, the growth in Scotland is less than half that of the UK as a whole.

Kevin Brennan: The growth in different parts of the country is a matter of concern, and we need to ensure that we have regional policies to deal with that. I have no doubt, however, that the Government's overall macro-economic strategy is correct, or that the nationalists' policies would bankrupt Scotland and Wales. Indeed, the policies of Plaid Cymru, of which the hon. Gentleman has a detailed knowledge, are all to do with public subsidy and devaluation, and provide no answers as to how they would be paid for by the taxpayers of Wales.

As I was saying, unemployment is at its lowest for more than a generation—in Wales, as well as in the rest of the United Kingdom. In some parts of the country, the only unemployment that is left is frictional unemployment. There is hard-core, long-term unemployment in some parts of the country—let us be honest about that—and I am glad that the Chancellor referred to it in his statement, and that the Government are introducing measures, such as the step-up programme that is being piloted in my constituency, to deal with some of the hard-core, micro-level, supply-side problems of unemployment.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): My hon. Friend mentioned regional unemployment. Is he aware that in most Scottish constituencies, as in England, we have the lowest level of long-term unemployment and youth unemployment, and the highest level of employment, of the last 20 years?

Kevin Brennan: I was aware of that, and I can confirm that that is also true of Wales. To listen to Opposition Members sometimes, anyone would think that we were presiding over an economic wasteland. That is a false impression; they do not make their case well when they exaggerate those issues.

We should remember that all this has been achieved by growth in labour market participation. Inflation, too, has been pegged back and subdued, threatened only, perhaps, by the possibility of cost-push inflation from overseas, which could result from the instabilities in the middle east. Nevertheless, we have a remarkable record. Growth, as I mentioned earlier, is strong compared with that of the other G7 countries. Last year, the UK topped the league, and we have every reason to suppose that that will continue in the next year as the world economic position recovers.

It is against the background of a strong economy that we can debate the Finance Bill, which will help to build the strong public services that we need in the years to come, and help to rebuild the national health service. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has often said—and might say again if he were here now—"You can't do nowt without brass." The Government's record on that is very effective. Against this backcloth, the Government have rightly understood the key factors that will ensure that this sound long-term economic base is sustained.

In the first instance, the Government understand that enterprise—the creation of wealth, and the continuing quest for growth in productivity—is the foundation stone of prosperity. Secondly, they understand the need for strong public services, first-class education, help for those who cannot help themselves, and a modern, efficient national health service that preserves the principle of health care free at the point of use according to need—a principle that the Conservative party will not pledge to preserve.

The difference between this Government and their Conservative predecessor is the clear understanding that those two goals are complementary rather than in conflict with each other, as my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly pointed out so eloquently in his speech. Prosperity and social justice go hand in hand. You can't do nowt without brass, but you can't earn the brass without a well-educated, healthy work force. The Tory way was to squeeze public services in the belief that every penny taken out of the public sector would be better used in the private sector. They got the balance completely wrong, however, and our schools crumbled, our health service declined, our people failed to reach their potential and our economy became unstable during that period of boom and bust. The Bill, and the associated measures allied to it, are part of the continuing process of redressing that balance, to allow public services to be rebuilt.

Current United Kingdom public spending stands at 39.5 per cent. of gross domestic product, compared with 43.2 per cent. in Germany and 49.3 per cent. in France. Even when the measures outlined in the Bill and the Budget take effect, UK public spending will still be more than 3 per cent. lower than the European Union average. It is, therefore, false to portray these measures as profligate or as ones that will endanger UK economic growth.

I shall turn to some specific measures in the Bill. The Chancellor will have thought long and hard about the best way to raise the revenue that we need to invest in the NHS, and to find the £40 billion increase needed by 2007–08—the 43 per cent. uplift in real terms that is to come for our health service. He could have raised it by increasing income tax. Indeed, some revenue will be raised from that source through the freezing of thresholds. But there is little scope for that at a time of low inflation, and there are problems with that approach when inflation is higher, because revenues are raised. Raising income tax rates would also have affected many pensioners.

The Chancellor could also have raised VAT. In fact, clause 23 simplifies VAT for small businesses. Raising VAT was a favourite approach of the Conservatives when they were in office. When they first came to power, they almost doubled it from 8 per cent. to 15 per cent. I do not remember that being in their manifesto. They then used it to pay for the total debacle that was the poll tax, by raising it from 15 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. They brought in the council tax at that point. They then famously tried to put up VAT on fuel.

But the Chancellor did not put up VAT because he knew what the Tories knew, which was that, although it is an ad valorem tax, it is a regressive tax that impacts most on those on low incomes, such as pensioners. It is

paid even by children when they spend their pocket money, which is in stark contrast to the thinking behind the child tax credit introduced by the Government. In short, VAT was an ideal tax for the Tories to increase, but not for us.

The Chancellor could have increased excise duties in many different ways, but those, too, are regressive taxes that impact most on the less well-off. Despite Lord Liverpool's 19th century warning not to interfere with the people's pleasures, that was a favourite option for modern Tory Chancellors. It is true that the Bill puts up the tax on cigarettes, but it does so in a way that is predicted to be revenue neutral, suggesting that there will be a fall in demand in equal proportion to the price rise. That will promote better health, as the Budget should, and as it is intended to do in the long term by targeting smoking, while raising revenue.

Yes, the tax on alcopops has been raised to remove the anomaly of treating them like wine, but the tax on beer produced by small breweries has been cut, and excise duties on spirits have been frozen for the fifth year in a row. Moreover, the tax on bingo has been abolished.

This Budget, however, is about more than beer, bingo and Bacardi Breezers. The decision to fund the necessary investment with national insurance contributions was surely appropriate. As the House knows, because the hon. Member for Buckingham tried in a rather silly way to make a debating point about it—I am sorry that he is still not present—national insurance does not feature in the Bill, because national insurance contributions are paid into the national insurance fund rather than the consolidated fund. National insurance changes do, however, exercise a powerful gravitational influence on the Bill, and it is therefore appropriate to say something about them now.

Funding the investment with national insurance rather than tax contributions is right, because it emphasises that the NHS provides the best possible insurance scheme. Furthermore, as my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly said, it is right for both worker and employer to pay. Good health care is as fundamental to the business as it is to the individual, but the market alone will not allocate health care in the interests of the economy and the nation as a whole—as the Conservatives will doubtless discover when they are announce their proposals in due course.

These measures have been built on the economic prosperity created by the Government. They encourage enterprise, and contribute to public services the investment that the nation needs. In marrying economic prosperity with social justice, the Government are pursuing the agenda that we all need. Their priorities are the NHS, education and jobs—the things that will make the nation healthy, wealthy and wise.

8.21 pm

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): The Bill clearly has many aspects. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) seemed to think that he could talk about national insurance while others could not. We should bear in mind the fact that the vast bulk of NHS funds still come from general taxation; it is the additional funding that the Government propose to take from national insurance. Besides, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), our alternative Budget would not have required the national insurance changes.

Rob Marris: Will the hon. Gentleman cast his mind back to 1948, when we embarked on the creation of the NHS? Admittedly, he may well not have been born then.

The national insurance system, surely, was intended to cover unemployment benefit, the basic state pension and the health service. Is that not provided for in the National Assistance Act 1948, and is it not entirely appropriate for a Chancellor who wishes to increase NHS funds to do so through national insurance?

Sir Robert Smith: The hon. Gentleman should wonder why, having included such proposals in the Budget, the Chancellor suddenly discovered that he did not understand the procedures of the House and the workings of national insurance, and therefore had to make emergency changes to the business of the House to make his plans feasible. That is typical of the tortuous circles that the Government are having to negotiate—the hoops through which they are having to jump—to avoid the fact that they made certain promises with which they hoped to buy the last general election. They tried to keep the back door open in order to do what we told them they would have to do—find extra money for the health service. If they had not tried to close the front door, we would not be having these rather farcical discussions about their having to use national insurance.

Others wish to speak, and although we could go on for ever I think the aim is to finish at a sensible hour. I apologise to the Government for the fact that, in the interests of time, I may concentrate more on concerns my constituents will have than on all the good news in the Budget and the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton and the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) spoke of efforts to bring about a simpler tax system and a more effective way of dealing with big policy changes that Governments want to make. They said that fundamental shifts in taxation should be separate from day-to-day tidying up of tax legislation. Any progress in that regard would be welcome. In the last Parliament we tended to sit until much later and we often had debates in the early hours. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and others used to make rather good speeches at that time of night about the need to simplify and improve the tax system.

I enjoy Finance Bill debates in which we move away from the political aspects and where there is some good cross-party recognition of ways in which we could improve tax and finance arrangements to the general benefit of the country and the political system. We still have not got there, and I urge all with greater minds than mine who have applied themselves to the task to keep up the good work. That would be much appreciated by those who must currently fill in some of the most complex tax returns, and interpret some of the most complex signals sent by the Budget.

Others have touched on issues that will affect my constituency. A measure of the complexity of all this is the fact that, in the Bill, we are still trying to sort out the aggregate tax that the Government claimed to have sorted out last year. It would be nice if they admitted that they could perhaps restrain themselves, step back and look again at the impact of that tax.

[Sir Robert Smith]

The assessment of the environmental impact focused very much on the local impact of quarrying, in terms of environmental costs attributed to it. However, tax is being collected to the centre and being distributed throughout the country. Those from whom the tax is collected do not necessarily see the benefit of undoing any potential environmental damage.

This Budget poses an additional problem. Because of difficulties involved in the introduction of the tax, it will now affect large boulders from quarries. That will hit coastal defences. Given increasing flood threats and the growing need for such defences, it seems perverse to impose a major tax on the cost of building them. Even if the Treasury cannot look at the global nature of the tax, perhaps it could look at the margins. It has made other exemptions. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) mentioned the extra costs affecting the breakwater at Peterhead. The rock used will be transported only three miles from the quarry. Adding to the cost of the breakwater strikes me as an unfortunate side-effect of the tax.

As has been said, fuel duty is being kept down this year. That is bound to be welcomed in the north of Scotland—indeed, in the whole of Scotland. As it is so far from any markets, any move to reduce costs and avoid extra burdens is welcome. I hope the Treasury will resist pressure from the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) to extend fuel duty to parts of the economy such as agriculture, fishing and, indeed, heating.

I am pleased about the proposal to charge foreign hauliers for road use, and to level the playing field between them and our hauliers. Some find it frustrating that it may not be implemented for several years. It is indeed frustrating that the announcement has been made so often, but implementation is still only on the horizon.

Haulage is important to my constituents and to the north and north-east of Scotland because, as I have said, we are further from the markets. Another important industry in my constituency is agriculture. A wider debate on finance and the general state of the economy still concerns the high pound versus the euro. Nothing in the Bill explains how the Government will square the circle, and help to remove some of the pressure.

There is still the possibility of access to agrimonetary compensation. If the Treasury could allow the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs access to the money this year, it would redress some of the hangovers of the foot and mouth outbreak. I suppose it would help if DEFRA asked the Treasury, but I hope the Treasury will tell it that it can use the money this year, although it may not be able to in future. The Government should try anything that is available to them to repair the damage of last year's major foot and mouth outbreak.

One of the frustrations for the farming sector is that we are in the European Union, with free trade in agricultural products and a common system of agricultural support, yet the Government deny UK farmers access to the support that is available to competition abroad. UK taxpayers are in effect paying for foreign farmers to take jobs away from agriculture in this country. It would be a great gesture if the agrimonetary compensation were accessed in the last year in which it could be accessed.

We have already touched on national insurance versus tax. It goes back to one of the sad things about the way in which the Government approached the last general election. There is common cause between Liberal Democrat and Labour Members about the need to invest in the health service. Some of us are disappointed that the Government are looking to launch the first year of major investment in the health service when we had hoped to be in the fifth year of it, but at least there is common agreement about that investment.

The Government are in danger, however, of undermining the message that we tried to get across to the public at the election—that investment must be paid for through fair taxation. By not making that point at the election and by trying to use back-door methods to find the funding, the Government could undermine the credibility of the core message that we need to get across. The Government have a last chance to ensure that there is effective delivery of health care. For the sake of future generations, they have a major responsibility not to destroy the fundamental belief in an NHS free to users and paid for out of public funds. This is the last chance to get it right. Having made a mess of how to raise the money, I hope that they do not make a mess of how to spend it.

As the Paymaster General knows, I have major concerns about the Government's proposals for North sea taxation. In many ways, they were most effectively put by the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard). I hope that the Treasury will look at his speech extremely carefully and I hope that the tenor of his arguments have convinced those on the Treasury Bench that he is expressing a genuine concern; it is not a matter of political point scoring. Many in the industry had thought that there was much greater understanding in the Treasury of the complexities of the financial arrangements that apply in the North sea than appears from its presentation of the Budget.

I welcome the promise of the Chief Secretary to put in the Library detailed workings of the Government's assumptions and calculations. I hope that those detailed workings will go some way to explaining the figures that the Paymaster General gave in her reply to the Budget debate last Monday.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): My hon. Friend will know that, as his neighbour, I share his concerns about the implications of the proposed tax changes. He will know that, on the day before the Budget, members of the all-party group on the UK offshore oil and gas indu[illegible] met the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association, which clearly had not the slightest indication that the Government had such proposals in mind. Those of us who have contacted members of that organisation since then know how shocked they are that the Government, having apparently developed a constructive relationship over five years, blew it out of the window without any notice. That has inflicted incalculable damage on confidence and investment in the North sea, and may be extremely damaging to the British economy.

Sir Robert Smith: I welcome that intervention. My hon. Friend has long experience of the importance of the industry. He has seen at first hand its impact on the north-east economy for longer than I have, and understands the industry's early stages of development,

its progression, the way it integrates into the economy and the way it is affected. He is right about the all-party group. A sad message has gone out to people that they should ask for more than they want rather than enter into a genuine dialogue and reach a common understanding.

Those in the industry are genuinely shocked. Some people have put a lot of time and effort into trying to make the taskforce and Pilot work and to develop something from which we would all benefit. That is the important thing—the aim was to gain something from which we would all benefit. Obviously, the industry has its own interests, shareholders and finances to worry about. If the industry's financial interests differed from those of my constituents and the economy, I would have to part company from it but there was a commonality of purpose. The Treasury stood to benefit in the long run because, if we get more oil and gas out, we get more revenue. Jobs would benefit from long-term investment, and security of supply would benefit from the fact that we were taking our gas out of the North sea, rather than importing it. All those things seem self-evident.

On various platforms and in various debates, including in Grand Committee, I have often praised the Government for the way in which they handled Pilot. I praised Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry for the way in which they took that initiative forward. Sadly, the Government have now done a lot of damage. We looked at other sectors, including fishing, and we said that Pilot was a model for the way forward for business and growth, a way of achieving financial understanding and dialogue between those affected by Government decisions and Government. That relationship has been broken, which is extremely damaging, and I hope that the Government will try to repair it.

I hope that it is possible to place the relevant information and figures in the Library before the Committee stage. If the Finance Bill receives its Second Reading and the motion goes through as on the Order Paper, the clauses will be debated next week. It would help if the Government were to provide the background and analysis to inform that debate. I suppose that to expect a change of heart by next week would be to expect a miracle. However, if, in the light of the debate, the Treasury concludes that it has got some of its assumptions and analysis wrong, it would be helpful if the Paymaster General offered the hope that the proposals might be revisited on Report, so that the damage can be undone.

Having listened to the Treasury make its case, I think that it has misunderstood where the North sea is at in terms of drilling, exploration and production. Current oil fields are tiny, and the cost of finding and developing them must therefore be met out of a much smaller return. Even though a huge field off Angola, say, would involve the payment of a higher tax return, it would still make much more money than a field in the North sea, on which less tax is paid.

The Treasury has lost the ability to strike a balance and ensure that the North sea's investment potential is maximised. It has not recognised the differential in costs and returns, and that we are dealing with much smaller fields. It has not dealt with the long life cycle of oil investment, and it has failed to recognise that profits aid investment in the next stage of exploration. Nor has it acknowledged that companies have to consider the long-term cycle of low and high oil prices, and the total return over the life of the risk. It has not considered the fact that every hole that a company drills that fails to yield oil has to be paid for through the successful fields.

One of the most fundamental and depressing facts for my constituents—many of whom have recently lost their jobs to make the industry competitive, and many more of whom may do so—is that the tax hits investment in the United Kingdom alone. If a company chooses to invest abroad, the Government do not impose that tax burden. Other Members have pleaded with the Government to consider measures such as interest costs and royalty relief. That would be a welcome development, but when the Government place the figures in the Library, they should recognise that, as we have shown, they have got them wrong. Doing so would offer some hope to my constituents, and for the long-term future of this country's prospects. The Government should be good enough to tell the House that the figures and the assumptions are wrong, and that they will happily revisit the tax regime on Report and do more to invest in this country's future.

The oil and gas so far extracted from the North sea are equivalent to the remaining reserves; in other words, we are perhaps only half way through its development cycle. However, if the Government kill off the investment and the larger platforms that provide the hubs for small fields, such fields will never be developed. Our future generations will not get the tax revenues from those fields, they will not get the jobs and we will lose the export industry that we have built through expertise. I urge the Government to think again about this extremely damaging and ill-thought out manoeuvre. Such a manoeuvre may be politically easy to achieve, but sometimes in government—and especially in the Treasury—it is a matter of more than easy political hits. Careful, structured decisions need to be taken that do not do long-term damage but long-term good. The rewards are for future generations, but the decision as to whether those generations will get them is in the Treasury's hands.

8.38 pm

Jon Cruddas (Dagenham): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris), I want to concentrate on the debate on productivity, which the Chancellor developed in his pre-Budget report and in the Budget itself.

Historically, our economy's productivity performance has been weak. In the post-war period, there was a trend shortfall between the UK and many of our competitor industrial economies. I am pleased that the Government have acknowledged that productivity improvements are the key to long-term growth and sustained increases in living standards, and I wish briefly to consider some of the elements that account for this deficit with our competitors. For example, why are our productivity rates so weak that, despite comparatively low labour costs, relative unit labour costs are uncompetitive? Before considering such issues, I wish briefly to consider the Government's general economic strategy since 1997.

There are four core pillars of Government strategy, the first of which is economic stability. Long-term interest rates are at their lowest for 35 years. Inflation is at its lowest for 30 years, and is expected to remain close to our 2.5 per cent. target. We have the lowest mortgage rates since the early 1960s, and debt estimates stand at a healthy 31 per cent. through to 2004. That is partly

[Jon Cruddas]

because Labour's first term witnessed a fiscal transfer to the Exchequer through the effects of growth, and because tax receipts were hoarded as we retained inherited expenditure plans. At the same time, last year Britain was the fastest growing economy in the G7. This year, growth is forecast at a range between 2 per cent. and 2.5 per cent.

The second pillar is reinvestment in public services. Owing to the mixture of caution and growth, we are now in the middle of a spending cycle characterised by sustained investment in public services. Through this spending cycle, spending on health will rise in real terms by an average of more than 6 per cent. a year; on education, by 5.6 per cent; on transport, by 14 per cent; and on police in England and Wales, by 3.9 per cent. In that period, expenditure on health will rise in cash terms by some £17.2 billion; on education, by £12.2 billion; on transport, by £5.1 billion; and on the police, by £1.6 billion. In total, that is £36.1 billion extra annual cash expenditure on the public services by 2003–04. Moreover, the Budget also announced a further £33.5 billion investment in health between 2003–04 and 2007–8.

The third pillar is attacking poverty here and abroad. That will mean £5 billion of extra help for pensioners, especially poorer pensioners through the minimum income guarantee. As we saw in the Budget, the new pension credit builds on that by rewarding thrift. We have introduced the national minimum wage and more help for families through record rises in child benefit and a new tax credit regime. The new working tax credit and the child tax credit will develop that strategy further. Internationally, we have increased Britain's aid budget by some 45 per cent.

The fourth pillar is full employment. Countless economists have had to alter their assumptions about the trade-off between unemployment and inflation—the so-called non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment. We have seen more than 1 million extra jobs and the new deal has confronted long-term unemployment among young people. Unemployment is at its lowest since 1975 and full employment is once again a core aspect of public policy.

In terms of general economic management and growth, public service reinvestment, confronting poverty and tackling unemployment, the Government have established a robust platform. It is against that general background that the issue of productivity should be considered. I welcome initiatives announced in the Budget such as changes in corporation tax, including the reduction in the starting rate and the small firms rate cut; the new research and development tax credit; stamp duty exemptions to promote enterprise and investment in disadvantaged areas; and direct cash help to small firms that file tax returns on line. All are welcome stimulants to improve productivity, given the link between it and entrepreneurship.

I wish to focus on another element of our weak comparative productivity—the human capital side of the equation. According to OECD comparative statistics, Britain had become a centre for relatively cheap labour as early as the 1960s. For total hourly labour costs, which are the sum of total hourly earnings and social charges, we are well down the international league tables. After the second world war, Britain remained a relatively high-wage economy, but by 1970, of our leading competitors, only Japan had lower labour costs. Since then the gap has narrowed between Britain and the US, but not with France, Japan and Germany.

The cost of labour is one part of the equation: the other is the efficiency of its utilisation, or labour productivity as gross domestic product per man hour. The evidence reveals a substantial and enduring shortfall in productivity levels in Britain compared with the US, Japan and other leading western market economies. The differential with the US opened up earlier in the century. The gap with workers in Europe developed during the 1950s and 1960s, following post-war reconstruction. By the 1970s, the pattern had become entrenched.

A decade of poor, often negative, annual rates of productivity growth through the 1970s was followed by more rapid advances during the 1980s. That is often taken as evidence by the Conservative party that the supply-side reforms of the 1980s amounted to some form of economic transformation. The cornerstone of the strategy was the attack on individual and collective rights of people at work and, more specifically, an assault on the institutions held responsible for delivering those rights—the trade union movement. Alongside that, we saw the removal of sector-based training provision and the institutions that sought to put a floor under wages—the wages councils. Compared with the 1970s there was an improvement, but the argument that that produced an economic turnround in our fortunes is unconvincing.

The actual improvements in our productivity record averaged some 2.3 per cent. between 1979 and 1988, which was broadly in line with our leading competitors. The result is that in terms of our general economic performance we remain disadvantaged.

Rob Marris: Does my hon. Friend agree that the statistical productivity gains in the 1980s were bought at the expense of 3 million unemployed? While productivity per person hour may have increased, for the economy as a whole—taking into account the 3 million, if not 4 million, unemployed—productivity did not really increase between 1979 and 1988.

Jon Cruddas: I concede that productivity increased, but only because shedding 2 million in hoarded jobs and creating an army of nearly 3 million unemployed people will show up as productivity gains when one divides aggregate output by man hours, across the whole economy. However, the 1980s entrenched certain long-term patterns of low wages and low skills in the country's industrial organisation. Instead of turning our economic fortunes around, the 1980s tended to compound rather than resolve our long-term structural problems.

The result is that, in terms of general economic performance, we remain disadvantaged. Unit labour costs—total labour costs divided by the productivity of labour—remain relatively high, despite the low cost of labour in this country. In short, since the post-war period we have witnessed a general and sustained era of low comparative productivity, based on a history of low wages and weak systems of skill formation.

Some commentators in the 1990s argued that we were embarking on the so-called new economy—a new period of productive prosperity, driven by expanding production of knowledge and new technology and the erosion of traditional work in manufacturing and industry. Indeed,

paragraph 20 of the Treasury Committee report refers to the new economy, and my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) spoke earlier about the respective productivity gains to be engineered through the so-called new economy revolution. If those gains are real, we should expect improvements in the structure of the labour market and in our productivity record. However, none seems to be being registered in the statistics.

The UK has a record of continuous employment growth since 1992. That provides a good test for the argument that paid employment is moving decisively away from low-value production and service activities to new knowledge-intensive sectors, and leading to a schism with our low-wage, low-productivity past.

The labour force survey data collected by Professor Peter Nolan, the director of the Economic and Social Research Council's "Future of Work" programme, permits an analysis of whether a more productive industrial research structure is developing. As I did on Third Reading of the Tax Credits Bill, I shall refer briefly to some of Professor Nolan's findings, as they are germane to both debates.

The ESRC data show that, between 1992 and 1999, the category "White Collar Professionals" accounted for 1.5 million of the 2.3 million increase in employment. Yet the "Traditional Services" category—covering clerical and secretarial, personal and protective, sales, postal and cleaning jobs—and the category "Manual, Manufacturing and Construction Workers" still account for nearly two out of three jobs in the British economy.

When we inspect this analysis closely, we find that the fastest-growing occupations have been four long-established services—sales assistants, data input clerks, storekeepers and receptionists. The second-fastest growing group comprised people in the state-dominated education and health service sectors, and the third fastest group was the caring occupations—care assistants, welfare and community workers, and nursery nurses. In the 1990s, the fastest-growing occupation was hairdressing.

Those occupations could scarcely be said to be at the cutting edge of the new economy. The fastest-growing manual occupation since 1992 is housekeeping, which has grown by 368 per cent.

In short, key areas of growth through the 1990s, in terms of the demand for labour, have been in traditional low-paid, unskilled and routine employment, much of it carried out by women. At the same time, there has been no overall improvement in our comparative productivity shortfall.

We might conclude that a key long-term structural problem of the British economy is our weak productivity record, and an over-reliance on relatively low-skill, low value-added products and services. That pattern appears to have been consolidated through the deregulatory 1980s, and it is reflected in the contemporary structure of the labour market and a large part of its growth sectors. The Government's strategy of putting issues to do with productivity at the centre of our future economic strategy is therefore absolutely correct.

Boosting education and skills provision is critical in overcoming those entrenched structural problems. The key measures in the Budget in this area must therefore be welcomed—the pilot schemes allowing time off for training, and the £30 million set aside for the Investors in People scheme.

The skills agenda is key to boosting the productive capacity of the economy. It will work alongside the other recent reforms to the vocational system, which include innovations such as the learning and skills councils, the sector skills councils and modern apprenticeships.

Mr. Flight: On the other side of the coin, does the hon. Gentleman believe that growing job subsidies and the resulting payment of a wage that bears no relation to the skills and the market value for the job are an important disincentive to upping skills and productivity improvement?

Jon Cruddas: Does the hon. Gentleman mean through the tax credit regime?

Mr. Flight: Yes.

Jon Cruddas: I would say that that is a correct and focused strategy to reactivate the supply of labour which has been proving effective in terms of the pattern of unemployment reduction and job generation over the past four or five years, of which the tax credit regime is a part. I agree that there could be disincentives to increased productivity where job subsidies disincentivise capital investment. That is orthodox economic theory. However, I emphasise the other pillar of the Government's economic strategy—namely, the move towards full employment and towards reactivating the stock of labour through an active labour market policy which carries with it the non-accelerated inflation rate of higher unemployment. There is a trade-off between inflation and unemployment. Such a policy would be deemed successful under its own terms of reference.

The search for greater economic regional balance and regeneration is central to sustaining productive growth. As Member of Parliament for Dagenham, I represent an area central to the industrial regeneration of east London and the broader Thames gateway. The emphasis on skills formation will be critical in our strategy of rebuilding the centre of manufacturing for London in Dagenham—the lowest wage economy in greater London, with low basic skills provision and staying-on rates.

The new centre for manufacturing excellence that is being built and the new Ford engine plant on the Dagenham estate will be key elements in this strategy. That is working hand in hand with the London development agency and the education and skills providers in the locality across the public and private sector. Already we are beginning to see results.

This sub-regional strategy complements the strategy developed in the Budget. The objective is to build a virtuous cycle of high-wage, high-skilled production alongside much-needed infrastructure development. That is beginning to happen in Dagenham, in collaboration with the devolved agencies and the Government. At the same time, the strategy is to retain macro-economic stability, rebuild our public services and confront poverty.

Overall, I welcome the fact that issues around productivity are moving centre stage in our economic debates. I congratulate the Government on the coherence of their strategy, and strongly support the Bill.

8.52 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I begin by building on the comments of the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), who is not in his place. He raised a very important point for a large number of small business people—the treatment of unincorporated businesses and the impact that this Budget and preceding Budgets introduced by the Government have had on the balance between incorporation or remaining an unincorporated small business.

An article in *Taxation* magazine in March 2002 highlighted through the use of numbers the dilemma that many businesses face. I am not one for wading through huge volumes of numbers—I am rebelling against my previous occupation as a chartered accountant by not doing so—but I want to put on record the impact, prior to the Budget, of changes in the tax rates.

In the tax year 1996–97, comparing the tax on a net income of a taxpayer earning £42,000 as an unincorporated sole trader and the tax paid by an incorporated business, the benefits of being an incorporated business were relatively marginal, at about £1,300. By the financial year 2000–01, that benefit had increased to £3,500, showing that the unincorporated businesses were suffering as a consequence. Whereas in the last financial year, a trading income of £20,000 would yield a difference of about £2,000 in favour of an incorporated business, as a consequence of the Budget, with the extension of the starting rate for corporation tax of zero to £10,000, an incorporated business is some £3,300 better off than one that is unincorporated.

As a result, many small unincorporated businesses, such as plumbers, small builders or shopkeepers, think that they should incorporate because the tax position has become so advantageous for them. In doing so, however, they will of course incur additional costs, such as setting up the company, filing returns and the preparation of accounts which, although not audited, need to be filed with Companies House. That is a major concern. At a time when businesses are suffering from an increase in regulation, there seems to be a general drift towards incorporation in Government policy.

Previously, one of the barriers to incorporation for sole traders was the amount of pension contributions that they could make, because tax-free pension contributions were limited to salary. That pushed people to remain unincorporated: they paid themselves high salaries and received tax benefit on their pension contributions. However, with the introduction of stakeholder pensions by the Government, an incorporated sole trader need only pay himself a decent salary in one year and then for the remaining four years he can use that year-one salary as a reference point for his pension contributions. There is no longer a barrier to incorporation owing to differential treatment of pension contributions.

The Federation of Small Businesses asked whether that was a deliberate policy of the Government. The Inland Revenue assured the federation that the policy was deliberate and was intended to encourage enterprise. However, I am at a loss to understand how incorporation in itself is an encouragement to enterprise. I should have thought that we should be encouraging small businesses to be set up according to whichever format suited them rather than directing them—as the goal of Government policy—towards incorporation.

That affects not only sole traders, but partnerships. Today, I spoke to someone who runs his business as a partnership but is taking the route of incorporating it, as it is more tax-efficient to do so as a consequence of the tax changes made by the Government.

The situation will worsen in the financial year 2003–04. Personal allowances may be frozen, but the thresholds for corporation tax may rise in line with inflation and national insurance contributions will be higher. That will be an impetus to force more and more small businesses down the route of incorporation.

Small business men throughout the country would welcome an explanation from the Government as to why their conscious policy is to head down the route of forcing—or encouraging—small businesses to be incorporated. Perhaps the Paymaster General will take the opportunity of this debate to provide that explanation. It certainly has not yet reached small business men; they are angry about that drive to incorporation and feel that, as a consequence of this and previous Budgets, the Government are not interested in enterprise or indeed fairness as regards their businesses.

Several Opposition Members have drawn attention to the length of the Finance Bill; it is the third longest in history. The measure is complex. All the commentators on it are consistent in their remarks. On 25 April, Edward Troup of Simmonds and Simmonds said:

"Companies which in the past have not had to worry about any special rules are now getting rules that they do have to worry about."

On the same day, John Battersby, a tax partner at KPMG, said:

"We really need a slowdown in this torrent of legislation to provide businesses with the opportunity to assess where they are and concentrate on their business."

Certainly the message that I am receiving from businesses and accounting practices in my constituency is that the rate of change in the tax system is becoming unmanageable for many businesses. Business men spend more time dealing with regulation than running their businesses.

Dawn Primarolo: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the tax system should try to keep up with the massive and rapid changes that are occurring in business to ensure that those decisions that businesses take are on the basis not of distortions in the tax system but on the basis of what is best for their business? Therefore, if business changes, the tax system—if it is to provide the best environment for business—must also change.

Mr. Hoban: The Paymaster General makes a valid point. There is a distinction, however, between those changes that are driven by the way in which businesses change—to which the tax system must therefore respond—and the changes that the Government have introduced over the last five years in the tax credits scheme. As I said in Committee earlier this year, a series of different tax credit schemes exist. Those are changes in the tax system that the Government have imposed, with which employers and their advisers need to keep up. Keeping up with legislation is therefore a problem. I accept the Paymaster General's comment that there is a need for tax legislation to reflect change in business, but the Government must also recognise their responsibility for change in the tax system.

Clive Lewis, the secretary of the Institute of Chartered Accountants enterprise group, has summarised the problem with the burden of red tape and tax administration:

"Not only does the volume and complexity of regulation eat into the resources of business but it absorbs time that could be spent more valuably on survival and expansion."

That point is reiterated time and again by businesses across my constituency and by business men whom I meet here and elsewhere. The Bill adds to that complexity, and not merely through its length.

In his opening remarks, the Chief Secretary referred to the community investment tax credit, which will cost the Exchequer £5 million in the next fiscal year. The Bill includes 27 pages of regulation to administer a scheme that the Government estimate will raise only £100 million in investment in deprived areas. I am not clear what behavioural impact this tax change will have. I expect that a lot of money that would have already gone into deprived areas will simply be rebadged under the scheme so that people benefit from the generous tax credits over the life of the scheme. I question whether we need 27 pages of regulation to administer what appears to be a relatively small and inexpensive relief on offer to businesses that would invest in deprived areas.

The other area that causes me concern in the Budget is the tax relief for community amateur social clubs and sports clubs. The Government have been relatively generous in allowing merely six pages of regulation to cover that. When I look at the detail of those pages, however, it concerns me that many treasurers, who are not accounting or tax experts, may find categorisation of expenditure and the way in which non-qualifying expenditure can be clawed back from relief in previous years to be not worth the candle and too complicated to try to find ways of recovering some of the tax benefits offered by the Government. If we are to offer community groups the opportunity for tax relief, we should try to make sure that the schemes that we offer them are relatively simple and straightforward. By offering complex schemes, the take-up rate, as is seen so often with changes introduced by the Government, will be surprisingly low.

In a debate in Westminster Hall earlier this year, I commented on the way in which reliefs and changes to the tax system give rise to the risk of tax avoidance. I want to conclude by quoting from the Treasury Committee's report on the Budget. It referred to the film tax relief, which will be abolished in the Bill—

Mr. Edward Davey: It will not.

Mr. Hoban: I am sorry. It will be amended in the Bill. Interestingly, when the relief was initially suggested in 1997, the estimated cost was some £20 million over two years. Remarkably, the saving to the taxpayer from the restriction of the relief is £500 million over two years. That shows how reliefs can be manipulated.

Mr. Edward Davey: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me that the relief should be abolished?

Mr. Hoban: I am not here to make tax policy on behalf of those on the Opposition Front Bench. However, I generally take the view that the fewer reliefs there are, the lower the general tax rate is and the harder it is to avoid tax. I therefore conclude with a quote from the Treasury Committee report. Paragraph 73 says:

"We are concerned that the recent proliferation of tax reliefs, allowances, and credits will increase the scope for tax avoidance, and we urge the Treasury to consider carefully such issues before bringing forward additional tax reliefs of this kind."

A simpler tax system is in the interests not just of taxpayers, but of their advisers and the Exchequer generally.

9.5 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): Although my contribution comes late in the night, I am sure that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will appreciate that it will be a quality contribution with more light than heat.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) is no longer in his place, but I agree with his estimation of the stature of the current Chancellor of the Exchequer. The hon. Gentleman made the point that my right hon. Friend was one of the best Chancellors that we have had. The quality of the Budget that we are discussing provides clear evidence of that.

The outcome of this Budget process is to raise money to ensure that finance is available to meet the objectives of the Government's spending plans that have been set to satisfy the needs of the people. It is therefore right that the major point of these proposals is the need to provide funds to put Britain's public services, especially health, on a sound footing.

It is clearly evident from the public's reaction to the Budget and to the national insurance contribution increases to be introduced next year that the Bill faces up squarely to the top priorities of the British electorate. Last week's opinion polls clearly indicated widespread support for the proposals, with 74 per cent. of those sampled giving support for the increase in national graduated contributions that aims to brings this country's health expenditure up to the levels enjoyed in Europe and to satisfy consumer and customer expectations.

Public support for the Government's proposals to protect and enhance public services was clearly underlined by someone who is one of the Government's severest critics and one of the strongest supporters of public service provision. John Edmonds, who is not often kind to the Government, pointed out last week that we had witnessed:

"A rare event in British politics, an honest and courageous Budget, putting need before greed."

Within that catchy slogan lies the fundamental difference between those on the Government Benches and the Opposition.

This Government cater and care for the many; Opposition Members care only for those who can care for themselves. The Conservative party—which in the past created such a hue and cry about Labour's so-called stealth taxes—now cries wolf again at the people's health tax, a tax increase brought forward as part of a balanced and carefully constructed series of initiatives to maintain the UK's impressive economic performance and to safeguard continued growth in the economy and the UK's long-term prosperity.

Angus Robertson (Moray): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the importance of growth to the economy.

[Angus Robertson]

Will he perhaps tell the House the growth figures for the Scottish economy and whether he is happy with them? Can he name another of our close neighbours that has a growth figure lower than that in Scotland? Does he agree with his colleague, the Member of the Scottish Parliament for Dundee, East, John McAllion, who said recently:

"I do not think the financial system in the Scotland Act is working very well. We should take time to do this, certainly before the next Scottish elections"?

In order words, we should give Scotland financial independence.

Mr. Luke: My colleague, the MSP for Dundee, East, is entitled to his views. We are an open and democratic party.

At the recent meeting we held with the members of the Scottish chambers of commerce, the Scottish growth rate, which is significantly lower than the growth rate for the United Kingdom, and manufacturing gave rise to concern. However, their representatives told us that consumer spending in Scotland was on the up, house prices were increasing and there was an improved uptake of tourism. Although the Scottish economy is perhaps not performing as well as the UK economy, they are clear indicators that there are significant grounds for optimism. Those aspects of the Budget which I welcomed last week will certainly increase the efforts of Scottish manufacturing and assist Scottish growth, but I am sure that we will return to that later.

At the end of the day, there has been a lot of criticism of the Budget proposals. Industry's response has been a cranking-up of the campaign in which it claims that despite tax benefits to improve productivity and encourage investment, the increases in national insurance will undermine confidence, destroy jobs and damage future growth prospects. I understand its concerns, but its Cassandra-like prophecies of doom are vaguely familiar. Were those arguments not used in opposition to the minimum wage? Were we not told by the Opposition that British business could not afford the minimum wage, which would destroy jobs, ruin the economy and stifle growth? However, in fact, growth has continued to increase and jobs have continued to be created.

It was heartening to read the speech that Mr. Mervyn King, the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, delivered to the British chambers of commerce last week. He argued that the increase in national insurance would help to moderate consumer spending and house price inflation. If that step dampens down consumption and has a deflationary impact on housing prices, it may deal with the problem of the Nationwide figures in today's papers which show house prices at record highs, even in Scotland, so we may not have to face up to an early rise in interest rates, a point reinforced by *The Daily Telegraph* in a headline to a report of Mr. King's speech—"Tax Rises Good for Growth, Bank Argues".

While business has signalled its opposition to the Budget proposals in the round, and is clearly upset at having to pay its share for a better health service—a social cost—surely it must see their economic logic if they help to avoid dearer money and keep interest rates at the historically low levels achieved by successive interest rate cuts last year. In building his Budget, the Chancellor has taken steps to ensure that the macro-economic factors that determine consistent, balanced economic performance are in equilibrium. It may be a tax-and-spend Budget, but it is certainly not a boom-and-bust Budget; it is a just Budget and has been well received by the public.

I should like briefly to address two areas of the Budget relevant to my constituency which have been mentioned by other Members this evening: the new levy on North sea oil introduced by the Chancellor and the new research and development tax credit for larger companies. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on his contribution, in which he expressed concerns about the oil levy. I am a member of the all-party offshore oil and gas industry group and represent a coastal community which was mentioned by my hon. Friend and which missed out on the biggest boom in the oil industry as it is at the margins of the business, primarily innovation and supply.

The current oil price of $26 has been sustained over the past few years, as was said in a debate last week with the chief executive of BP. Given the current production costs of $8 a barrel, the levy is acceptable in the short term. However, to ensure the long-term viability of British operations, I join Members who have urged the Treasury to engage with industry to ensure a long-term productive future.

I warmly welcome the research and development tax credit for larger companies. The future of British and Scottish industry, as well as manufacturing jobs, can be secured only through investment. I speak as a Member representing a constituency whose economic history is littered with industries that have suffered and disappeared through lack of investment. I can also cite glowing examples of companies in my area that have to their credit invested heavily in research and development, as evidenced by their continued profitable existence.

NCR recently opened a large R and D facility in Dundee to help plan and promote the automated cash machines that will be used globally in years to come. The Michelin tyre company's investment in machinery and its work force has enabled it to survive and prosper in a hugely competitive market, producing high-quality products at a distance from their market. In both instances, high-quality, well-paid jobs have been sustained to fuel the local economy, which would be much poorer without such jobs.

I believe firmly that the Government's economic strategy has been correct over the past five years, although that has often been hidden by the stormy squalls of political debate in the Chamber and in the pages of a steamed-up press. The strategy was clear: first, get the economy right; secondly, ensure that the structures needed to build a fair society are in place; and lastly, be brave enough to raise taxes when required and spend the money on the programmes necessary to bring relief and succour, to provide jobs and credible incentives to work, and to sustain a flexible work force on which the long-term prosperity of the UK and Scotland depends.

In conclusion, as the Chancellor made clear in his Budget statement, we are perceived as being at a crossroads in the life of this country. It is now time to make fundamental long-term choices as to whether the national consensus that has existed for half a century in regard to our public services is to be renewed for the years ahead. It is clear that the national consensus supported by

most of the parties in the Chamber, which was referred to by the Chancellor, is still as firm as ever in favour of public services and the national health service. However, there is no political consensus on the issue.

The issue of the national insurance increases highlights the bankruptcy of the major Opposition party, whose vision for public services—whether transport, education, housing or health—is a vision of services provided by the private sector, paid for by increased charges and private insurance. The Budget proposals and the Finance Bill put clear blue water between the Government and the Opposition, a situation that I welcome. There is a clear choice between my party—a Government who believe in public services and are willing to put money to good use to sustain and enhance them—and the Opposition, who are seeking to revive and renew the old Thatcherite agenda, which would dismantle them.

I will gladly go into the next general election confident that the banner of social justice, the people's flag, has once again been hoisted by the people's party, which will carry the day.

9.17 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate. I shall follow on from the comments made by the Chairman of the Treasury Committee on the Committee's Budget 2000 report, which was released today. I commend the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) for his measured and sensible comments about the contents of the report, which contrasted with the unusually intemperate comments of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), who I am pleased to see back in his place.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe gave a rather unfair description of the activities of the Treasury Committee yesterday when it drew up the report. He gave the impression that the Opposition members had been on the rampage yesterday in Committee Room 6, forcing into the report all sorts of bizarre and overtly political conclusions that were not warranted by the Committee's deliberations.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman has had a chance to reflect on those comments, especially as he is usually an extremely temperate and moderate member of the Committee, and I hope that when he reflects on the report, he will study carefully the conclusions set out at the back of the report. In particular, I hope that he will study conclusion (s) on the redistributive nature of the Budget, conclusion (j) on the trend rate of growth, and conclusion (h) on the stability and growth pact.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reflect on the fact that, in all those areas, amendments were tabled during the Committee hearings that altered the draft report in a way that was more sympathetic to the Government. I expected some praise from the hon. Gentleman for having proposed two of those amendments myself, including one which, surprisingly, won the support of Conservative members and is now being echoed from the Government Back Benches—that is, the amendment that appears in conclusion (s), which states:

"We welcome the fact that, within the context of a tax raising Budget, the budget measures are broadly redistributive from those on higher incomes to those on low incomes".

Not only did we get surprising support from Conservative Members, but we have now even managed to encourage Labour Members to use the word "redistributive".

How can it possibly be the case that the Opposition Members who serve on the Treasury Committee were making irresponsible additions to the report, given that they forced in such amendments—more Labour than the hon. Member for Broxtowe himself—and that they voted to include amendments such as that which now appears as conclusion (k)? That conclusion states:

"We share the Government's view that the Stability and Growth Pact should be reformed to take account of issues such as"—

the precise issues that appear in the Budget documents are then listed. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reflect carefully on those issues and perhaps now withdraw his earlier comments, and I give him the opportunity to do so.

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am not totally impressed by the brace of fig leaves that he offers. Does he not feel on reflection that it is an undesirable precedent for a Select Committee to determine a report on something as central as the Budget not by consensus, but effectively by 25 whipped votes?

Mr. Laws: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that comment. It is a great precedent that hon. Members who draft Select Committee reports should consider any case on its merits, not on the basis of whether the arguments embarrass the Government. Some hon. Members would like the Select Committees to be the Government's poodles, but many more hon. Members believe that Select Committees should be willing to be the terriers that pursue the Government and which occasionally nip at their heels when they make mistakes.

I have mentioned the parts of the Select Committee report that support the Government's policies. I hope that all Labour Members welcome that support, as it gives the lie to the idea that Opposition Members who serve on the Treasury Committee irresponsibly amended the report. The Select Committee supports some of the Government's policies, but it warns the Government about some issues, such as the change in the growth forecasts. Many outside commentators regard that change as not being particularly prudent, and certainly as having removed the prudence element that was previously in the Government's growth forecast, leaving only as a prudent cushion the surpluses that the Government are projecting on the current balance—something that the Select Committee welcomed in the Government's policy.

I shall deal further with the criticisms in the Treasury Committee report that were backed by Opposition Members, in spite of the reticence of some of the Labour Members who serve on the Committee. If the argument, used by the hon. Member for Broxtowe, that Opposition Members were being irresponsible was well founded, one would expect there to be a huge divergence between the evidence on those issues given to the Select Committee and the wording of the report, but there is no such divergence. That is shown exactly in respect of the Government's decision to increase employers' and employees' national insurance contributions—the first major item of criticism made by the Treasury Committee.

Andrew Dilnot of the Institute for Fiscal Studies gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Treasury. The Chairman asked Andrew Dilnot:

"Are the Budget proposals to increase the National Insurance contribution rates rather than income tax going to ensure that the burden is 'spread as widely and fairly as possible'?"

[Mr. Laws]

Andrew Dilnot, who is well respected, replied:

"I cannot see what coherent strategy for raising tax can be met by these National Insurance employee changes".

He described

"better-off pensioners and those living off unearned income"

as

"not groups that I think it is easy to imagine reasons for excluding."

That justifies the Treasury Committee's criticism on that point.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Laws: I am sorry, but I will not give way because of the time. I regret not giving way because I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would make a pertinent point.

Whom can we turn to on the Government's proposal to increase employers' national insurance contributions, on which no assessment has been made of the employment consequences? Whom can we turn to in support of the Treasury Committee's concerns about the employment effect of that measure, which will increase the tax on jobs? The answer is none other than the Chancellor of the Exchequer himself, who seemed to have forgotten when he came before the Treasury Committee a few days ago that just two years ago when he introduced the climate change levy he cut employers' national insurance contributions and argued in a Treasury press release that the cut in that tax on employment would boost employment.

Apparently, the economic rules have now been overturned, and two years later the Chancellor can increase employers' national insurance contributions without that having any effect on employment. That is a miraculous change, just as miraculous as the fact that the Chancellor can effectively, without in his view abolishing the upper earnings limit on employees' national insurance contributions, extract money through employees' national insurance contributions from every person who now earns more than what used to be the upper earnings limit.

Two other fundamental criticisms of the Budget were made in the Treasury Committee's report. The first has been mentioned by a number of individuals, including the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) in his helpful speech. He warned about measures such as the films tax relief, which was introduced with great fanfare in 1997 and altered in 2001. That was to be a limited cost measure—£15 million in the first year—directed towards great British films, which would be stimulated. Now we discover from the Chancellor that programmes such as "Coronation Street", "Ground Force" and "Emmerdale" are being made with that tax relief—that the money going into the Exchequer from hard-working families is being wasted on such reliefs.

The concern about the Government's tax policy that was expressed clearly in the Treasury Committee's report is not only that we are getting an increasingly complicated tax system but that those complications open up precisely those types of loopholes. No doubt we shall find that other measures, such as the reduced rate of beer duty for small breweries, will open up exactly such problems in the future. No doubt we shall find that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will return in a couple of Budgets' time to announce to much less fanfare that he is closing loopholes and recovering large amounts of money.

It is easy to welcome such measures when they are announced individually, but one would have hoped that the Treasury, of all Departments, would be conscious of the fact that there are no free lunches and that money that is given to the film industry and to "Coronation Street" potentially comes from other areas that could be higher priorities for the Government, such as the Government's agenda on social exclusion, lifting people out of poverty and raising tax thresholds. Surely those priorities should be higher up the agenda than the introduction of silly tax reliefs and gimmicks that merely end up being loopholes that are abused by accountants and others in the private sectors.

In respect of the last major criticism of the Budget that was made in the Treasury Committee's report, surely the measures that my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) criticised earlier—the oil tax and the foreign companies tax measures—should have been consulted on in the pre-Budget report. Many people inside and outside the House welcomed the idea of a pre-Budget report and the opportunity to consult on tax changes before they were brought in so that they could be more sensibly constructed; yet two major tax measures in the Budget, on oil and foreign companies, have been brought in without proper consideration and deliberation and will no doubt be all the worse for that and will have to be unwound in future Budgets.

I hope that the Chief Secretary and others on the Treasury Bench will take that to heart and use their innovation of a few years ago for the purpose for which it was intended, rather than as the sort of mini-Budget for the Chancellor's gimmicks that it has become.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe said earlier that the type of activity in which the Treasury Committee had engaged yesterday brought Parliament into disrepute. I could not disagree with him more on that point. What depresses people about Parliament, particularly at present, is the Executive's huge power—the Government's disproportionate majority—which means that proper debate about measures in the House can be suppressed, which in turn has helped to make the House increasingly irrelevant. If we have more debates and more reports such as the one produced yesterday by the Treasury Committee, the House will be all the better for it.

9.29 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I declare my interests as set out in the register.

This has been a surprisingly good and valuable debate on a Finance Bill that is rather irritating, as it does not cover the Budget's main tax-raising measure and cannot cover two important proposals that are still out to consultation, relating to domicile and residence and the taxation of overseas banking branches in the UK.

However, some interesting political points have been made. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) made it clear that, in principle, the Liberals would be prepared to tax and spend more. They are certainly committed to a 50 per cent. top rate of tax. I was surprised to hear their confidence in the unsubstantiated

assumption that greater NHS spending would improve delivery, but they agreed with the Opposition that the Finance Bill is not good for business.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), the Chairman of the Treasury Committee, gave an extremely balanced and decent review of the Committee's report. In essence, he made the point that it was very much on the basis of evidence given by the professionals who appeared before the Committee that the report questioned whether growth assumptions were too optimistic and whether the Finance Bill would add to, rather than correct, imbalances in the economy. He also made a valuable suggestion about adopting in the UK an arrangement such as the United States green card system to enable people coming from overseas to attend university in this country to add their skills to our economy by working here subsequently.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) made a full and thoughtful contribution. He stressed that the difference between the Opposition and the Government was about how to achieve better quality public services and not about the objective. He welcomed—as we do—the measures that will simplify VAT, help sports clubs and moderate the climate change levy proposals. He also made a very valuable comment on clause 37, addressing schedule E changes. He said that he would like the capital gains tax regime for life assurance products to be addressed in Committee and brought into line with changes to capital gains tax for individuals.

My right hon. Friend was also the first to address in detail criticisms of the proposed 10 per cent. additional tax on North sea oil extraction. In essence, he pointed out that the Government risked causing a major contraction of the North sea oil industry, given the marginal nature of operations in the North sea compared with other parts of the world.

Mr. Connarty: Has the hon. Gentleman taken the trouble to consider the Royal Bank of Scotland's analysis of the impact of the changes, which says that there will be no diminution in the attraction of investment in the North sea? It also said that the assets are so profitable that if anyone wants to divest themselves of them, there are plenty of takers who want to get into the North sea and make money, despite the tax.

Mr. Flight: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, but perhaps he was not present when the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), chairman of the all-party group on the offshore oil and gas industry, very strongly criticised many of the proposals and set out in a balanced and measured way precisely why they were a threat to the North sea oil industry. As he may be aware, the industry does not agree with the Government's assertions that the capital allowances will offset the additional taxation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) contrasted the Chancellor's previous phase of prudence and popularity in the City of London with the Budget measures. He drew attention to the compulsive meddling aspect of much of the Bill, and agreed with my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde that it might be sensible to consider a Standing Committee on the tax system that could make use of expert witnesses.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) rightly stressed the importance of skills training. My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) referred to the damage that could be done to enterprise and the dangers of the oil tax, while giving credit to the positive measures in the Bill.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) explained how the Budget might help Wales, and the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) reviewed the different options that had been available to the Government for increasing tax revenues.

The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) noted that the Budget was negative for small innovative companies, of which there are many in Scotland. The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) pointed out that the aggregates tax issue has still not been adequately resolved and stressed the risks associated with additional North sea oil taxation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) drew attention to the major bias in favour of incorporation that the Bill introduces in relation to small businesses. The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) gave a useful and balanced review of the Treasury Committee's conclusions and why it had reached them.

At the beginning of the debate, the Chief Secretary said that through the Bill the Government aim to build a stronger enterprise culture. Clearly, that has not been the perception of business, and I do not believe that it is likely to be the main effect of the measures in the Budget and the Bill. Conservative Members and business welcome many specific modernising tax measures in the Bill, including, self-evidently, those that are helpful to business. Overall, however, the Budget is manifestly bad for business and has attracted near universal criticism and hostility from that quarter.

The Budget will further reduce our international competitiveness. Over the past five years, we have fallen from ninth to 19th place in the league tables. Since 1997, business taxation has increased by £6 billion a year.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): Has the hon. Gentleman noticed that results out today show that we have leapt up the international competitiveness league tables?

Mr. Flight: I think that the Economic Secretary will find that the tables merely show that we have crept back to the levels at which we stood in 2000, and that we are still well down on 1997 levels. In any case, I assure her that if the Bill is enacted unamended we will drop considerably, because to the £6 billion per annum of additional taxes levied on business since 1997 it will add between £4 billion and £5 billion per annum of additional taxes through a mixture of higher national insurance contributions and the extra £1.1 billion raised by the Finance Bill. UK corporate taxation is 13.2 per cent. of gross domestic product, whereas it is 12.7 per cent. in Germany and 9.5 per cent. in the USA. The measures in the Budget will take the UK proportion considerably higher than 13.2 per cent.

I want to make a specific point about encouraging entrepreneurship. As Ministers know, the limited nature of approved share option schemes and the complexities of the management incentive scheme for small businesses mean, in an overwhelming number of cases, that unapproved share option schemes have to be used to incentivise management. One of the effects of the Budget is that the tax rate will go up to more than 52 per cent.,

[Mr. Flight]

as individuals will not only pay additional national insurance contributions themselves, but, under legislation passed in the previous Parliament, will almost always also pay employers' NICs. The UK share option incentivisation situation is wholly unattractive, and it is particularly unfavourable by comparison with that of the United States.

The Chancellor deliberately put the maximum spin on the corporation tax reduction measures for small business. The Red Book shows that they are worth approximately £265 million in the first year, increasing to about £350 million in the second year. It does not make the point that the national insurance contribution costs to small businesses are £1.3 billion. It is hardly surprising that the Federation of Small Businesses objects strenuously to the total package and is lobbying many Members of Parliament throughout the country.

Some 455,000 incorporated small businesses will benefit from the lower corporation tax rates, but there are 3.5 billion unincorporated, self-employed business activities. They will have a 14 per cent. increase in their NIC charges, from 7 to 8 per cent. Why do the Government want to encourage sole traders to incorporate? That is a waste of money and anti-consumer. To put it crudely, there is less transparency in incorporation than in being a sole trader. It is also likely to lead to loss of tax revenue. I should like to know the Government's motivation for encouraging mass incorporation of small businesses.

Hon. Members may have seen the Inland Revenue package for small businesses, complete with employer CD-ROMs and some 200 pages. Representatives of small businesses in my constituency that employ three, four or up to 10 people have thrown up their hands in horror. Again, the Federation of Small Businesses rightly objects to the complexity of PAYE administration that small businesses must now undertake.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) rightly criticised the length and complexity of the Bill, which does not even cover the main ingredients of the Budget. Although tax measures need to be kept up to date with changing business practice, it is crucial that the rate of change be manageable, especially for smaller businesses. It must be less complex for smaller businesses. The amount of time that people with a small business have to spend simply understanding everything is far too great when they should be concentrating on their business.

Let us consider specific provisions in the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham made clear, we have strong reservations about the 10 per cent. oil supplementary tax. As I said in an intervention, we would like to know how it will work out in relation to double taxation treaties, and whether it will be treated as corporation tax or whether it will be excluded and disadvantage multinationals with UK operations.

The Bill includes several anti-avoidance measures, the motivation for which is understood and justified. However, many accounting firms have pointed out a danger of overkill and unfairness. That applies especially to the new rules for foreign exchange, which have a lack of definition for "unallowable purposes". I hope that we will sharpen that up in Committee.

The stamp duty proposals run the risk of unfair treatment for genuine transfers of business. The vehicle excise duty on cars that are not on the road constitutes yet another burden on loss-making farmers. The proposals for taxing company cars and fuel, when provided, contradict the incentives for companies that provide lower-emission vehicles. I hope that we shall also sort that out in Committee.

The lower duty for one-man breweries carries the risk of helping them but damaging small regional breweries.

Clause 88 is unnecessary. The Treasury needs to agree fair arrangements with the Crown territories in relation to the Primarolo proposals on EU unfair tax competition. It is unwise to add to the tax regime items that contribute uncertainty to multinationals that are based in this country. Doubtless we shall discuss that in more detail.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The hon. Gentleman has talked a great deal about company taxation. Will he tell the House whether the Conservative party will oppose the decision to freeze personal tax allowances for non-pensioners?

Mr. Flight: The hon. Lady may already be aware that that is one of the items that we have put down for discussion in Committee on the Floor of the House next week. We shall make clear our proposals then. We are highly critical in principle of abandoning the Rooker-Wise principles in the area of indexation of personal allowances.

Nationally, the Budget and the Finance Bill are bad news for the British economy. Whatever the justification, they bring back "tax and spend" and the risk of returning to the path that led to the British economy becoming the sick man of Europe back in the 1960s and 1970s. Tax revenues have already increased by £100 billion per annum over the last five years and, if allowances are made for the changes in accounting, the share of GDP taken in taxation, according to the Red Book figures, will have gone up by 5 per cent. between 1997 and 2006—from approximately 35 to 40 per cent. Sadly, it is the view of most of the economists who have commented that therein lies the economic risk.

We have heard a great deal in the debate about productivity. The growth in real GDP per employee has been only 1.3 per cent. per annum on average since 1997—the worst performance since the 1950s, and half the level achieved under the Major Government. The Government say that they are not assuming an improvement in productivity growth. Indeed, the Budget and the Finance Bill will weaken the supply side further, and—at risk of overstating this—my fear is that, as with reunited Germany, a major increase in taxation and Government spending will lead to a reduction in the sustainable rate of growth and to an increase in unemployment. Only last night, someone—not a member of the Conservative party—who heads one of the main charities in this country made the point to me, without being prompted, that that was precisely his reaction to the dangers opened up by the measures in the Budget.

The scale of tax credits will reduce labour markets' ability to allocate employees to where they will be most productive. It will also discourage skills training and productivity growth, and—as the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) has pointed out—be an invitation to fiddling.

Economists, doctors and the public are rightly sceptical that the increase in NHS spending—if the Government are able to deliver it; so far, they have been unable to—will succeed in improving the delivery of health care without radical reform of the system. That is our essential message. There is a danger that the extra spending will be swallowed up by inflation costs as the Government are forced to increase public sector pay. Indeed, the Government's own figures show that they expect inflation to eat up most of the extra cash. Since 1999, public sector wages have increased by 4 per cent. more than those in the private sector. Nearly half the taxation collected is not going to the NHS; it is going on tax credits.

I fear that the Government's real policy objective in increasing taxes is to bring ever more of the economy and ever more of people's lives under Government control and patronage. The biggest beneficiaries of this will be the public sector unions—the Labour party's paymasters.

9.49 pm

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I understand from the closing remarks of the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) that Her Majesty's Opposition have a new way of describing their performance in the House. It is "critical in principle, but no policies yet".

I hope to deal with some of the issues raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris), for Caerphilly (Mr. David), for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan), for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) and for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke). I also hope to deal with points made by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and the hon. Members for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), for Angus (Mr. Weir), for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) and for Yeovil (Mr. Laws). *[Interruption.]*

I am so sorry. I was trying so hard not to forget the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith), and I intended to be suitably gentle in raising my slight disagreement with him on some points relating to North sea taxation.

The Budget demonstrated the need to raise revenues for essential investment in public services. It also demonstrated that that would not deflect the Government from the path we had specified in previous years of encouraging enterprise, modernising the tax system and creating new opportunities for business. With the changes in national insurance, we have sought to achieve a balance that is as fair and equitable as possible—an approach that recognises the interconnected interests of business, the individual and the community in devoting the proper amount of investment to our health service.

In a speech on 27 April, the president of the British Chambers of Commerce told that organisation:

> "Now any of us in business know that we get what we pay for. If we want a world class health service in the UK we need to pay more. The advance of medical science, new treatments, more advanced drugs mean costs are increasing.
>
> The question is not whether we need to pay more".

The British Chambers of Commerce recognised—as have my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Health—that by paying more we ensure that the service is modernised and delivers improved services.

Lynne Jones: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dawn Primarolo: I will give way later. I should like to make some progress first.

Sickness and loss of working days cost business employers some £10 billion or more a year, and cost society as a whole £23 billion. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) mentioned the Budgets of Lord Howe of Aberavon. I remind the House that the first of those Budgets cut public expenditure by £4 billion, raised VAT to 15 per cent. and later to 17.5 per cent., froze child benefit and froze the real value of pensions. During their 18 years in office, the Conservatives also raised national insurance contributions from 6.5 per cent. to 10 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman raised other issues, including one on which a number of speakers have concentrated. I refer to the complexity of the Bill, and its size. I must point out that 152 pages contain tax-relieving measures—I do not want to detain the House at this hour, but I would be happy to read out each clause—and 160 pages contain measures to simplify the tax system. More than 200 pages of legislation have been repealed. More than 300 pages—60 per cent. of the Bill—have been published in advance of the final decisions or have been consulted on. Therefore, the idea that there has not been consultation is simply ridiculous.

Many hon. Members raised the issue of complexity and the need to have a responsive tax system. There were references to the tax law rewrite, and the importance of making our legislation simple and of ensuring that it is clear. It was interesting that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton complained that measures to help small brewers were too complex and a waste of time, but that a measure on film makers was too simple and therefore open to abuse. On the one hand, he complained about targeting—

Mr. Edward Davey: May I put it on the record that I called for the film tax relief to be totally abolished?

Dawn Primarolo: Indeed, the hon. Gentleman did. I understand that he is not a fan of the film industry, but he criticised a simple measure and a complex measure too.

Loan relationships, derivative contracts and FOREX have been widely consulted on. Three different sets of reforms were brought together in the Bill. The research and development tax credit, a boost to R and D in industry, was widely consulted on before it was put into the Bill. Again, the measures on substantial shareholdings and intellectual property rights were widely consulted on before they were put into the Bill.

Lynne Jones: I support the decision on R and D tax credits. I am sure that few hon. Members, particularly Labour Members, would disagree with the need to raise revenues for greater investment in the health service and other public services, but there is concern that the freezing of personal tax allowances adds to the complexity of the tax and benefit system, particularly for poor people,

[Lynne Jones]

and that raising employers' national insurance is a tax on jobs. Why have the Government concentrated on taxing jobs rather than taxing affluence?

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend will have heard the Chancellor explain that the decisions on national insurance were to ensure that all those who contribute to that insurance scheme for the national health service pay a fair share. I am at a bit of a loss to understand why she believes that the Government should shy away from giving money through tax credits to the very poorest in society. I am also surprised that she does not recognise that over 1 million jobs have been created in the economy while this Government have been in office.

A number of hon. Members referred to North sea oil. I know that we will return to that not only on the Floor of the House, but in Committee, but the Government believe that the current North sea fiscal regime fails to strike the right balance between promoting investment and taking an adequate share of profits for the nation from that resource. We believe that introducing reliefs on capital investment alongside the reviews of royalty payments provide the necessary commitments to future investment.

Malcolm Bruce: What signal does the Paymaster General think it sent the oil and gas industry when, having engaged in a two-year consultation about the appropriate tax regime, which the industry thought it had agreed with the Government, the Government unilaterally, without any notice, introduced a change that has shattered confidence in investment in the North sea?

Dawn Primarolo: The presence of 100 per cent. capital allowances gives a clear steer to the industry of the Government's continuing commitment to investment in the North sea.

A number of hon. Members referred to some of the anti-avoidance mechanisms that are dealt with in the Budget and in particular the question of overseas branches. I remind the House that the measure mainly affects branches in the banking system. Currently, there is no limit on debt attributed to UK operations, and large deductions for interest occur, leading to smaller profits in the UK. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has undertaken consultation on this issue. The UK's rules are separate from those of other member states such as France and Germany—they are even separate from those of the United States—and the proposals in the Budget bring our laws into line with those countries.

The hon. Member for Buckingham also referred to clause 88, which deals with controlled foreign companies. It concerns the ability to take a reserve power to protect the United Kingdom, where necessary, against harmful tax practices. I should make a few points clear to the House. The clause will give the Treasury the reserve power, if necessary, to designate jurisdictions, whereby all controlled foreign companies would automatically fall within the tax charge in the United Kingdom. It is a regulating power that is subject to affirmative resolution procedure, so the House would be required to debate the jurisdictions named, and why they are named.

There is a precedent in that regard. In 1971, two double taxation treaties with dependent territories were terminated to defend the UK against tax abuse. In 1985, the then Conservative Government secured provisional powers against a unitary tax system that was an issue with California at the time. Those provisions are still on the statute book. There is therefore a considerable history of all Governments taking reserve powers to defend themselves.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West asked a rather complex question about consumable stores. I have the answer, but given the time available it would be better if I wrote to him with it. The hon. Member for Angus complained about the lack of measures for unincorporated companies. However, if he looks at the Budget and the Government's record, he will see that—in addition to further suggested reforms to the VAT system—the 40 per cent. first-year allowances, the 100 per cent. capital allowances, the over-indexation of the 10p starting rate, the cut in the basic rate of tax, the maximum for quarterly payments on pay-as-you-earn, and the discount for small employers paying tax credits are all about helping small, unincorporated companies. It is not a question of the Government making companies choose between incorporation or unincorporation—a point raised by the hon. Member for Fareham—but of demonstrating clearly the steps to help businesses, whether incorporated or unincorporated, and of allowing them to make that decision.

Much of this evening's discussion has concentrated on the world competitiveness of the UK economy. Today, the Institute of Management Development released its annual competitiveness report. Not only does it show that the UK is now in 16th place; most importantly, on other indicators it demonstrates how the UK has fared better. The UK has the third most resilient economy, ahead of the USA and Germany, but behind Australia and Norway. It is the largest direct investor abroad, followed by France and the USA, and it attracts the third largest amount of inward investment.

Mr. Edward Davey *rose—*

Dawn Primarolo: The IMD states that the United Kingdom has better withstood the uncertainties of the global economy. The Government have put in place a comprehensive set of measures aimed at raising competitiveness and closing the UK's productivity gap with our major competitors.

This is a Finance Bill that takes forward investment in our families and communities, in those who are disadvantaged, in enterprise, in the future growth of the British economy, and in the national health service. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 142, Noes 360.

Division No. 222] **[10.4 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*	Baldry, Tony
Amess, David	Barker, Gregory
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael	Baron, John
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James	Bellingham, Henry
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*	Bercow, John
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Beresford, Sir Paul
Bacon, Richard	Blunt, Crispin

Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Mcintosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
[illegible]rard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim

Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, [illegible]
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Steele, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Wiltshire, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 358, Noes 141.

Division No. 223] **[10.19 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Cassie, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*

Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Randel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sailer, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Heppell and Mr. Graham Stringer.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63(3) (Committal of Bills),

That—

After Second Reading of the Finance Bill, to move that—

(1) Clauses 4, 19, 23, 26 to 29, 87 to 92, 131 and 134 and Schedules 1, 5 and 38 be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

(2) the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

(3) when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

Committee tomorrow.

FINANCE BILL

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Finance Bill, the Standing Committee on the Bill shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

10.33 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will shortly put motion No. 6 on the Order Paper to the House. It will establish a Joint Committee between this House and the other place to consider the Draft Communications Bill.

As you will be aware, the usual channels in this place do not include the minority parties. We are shortly to establish a Committee that will have no representative from Wales even though Wales is the only part of the United Kingdom with a distinct broadcast environment. No representative of any minority party will be on the Committee. As the Leader of the House has made it clear that there will be more of these Joint Committees, is there anything in your remit to protect the interests of the minority parties from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland so that we at least obtain information about such motions coming before us and can liaise correctly with the Whips and with other Front-Bench spokesmen on such matters? We would then, at least, be informed about such motions. Is there any way tonight in which you can re-examine the motion to see whether further consideration needs to be given to the make-up of the Committee?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I would like to put it on the record that minority parties, no matter how small in the House, should always get the protection of the Chair. I look forward to the appropriate Whip from the hon. Gentleman's party coming to see me. On the question of the Order Paper, the Speaker has no control over what is included in it; the Government have control over that, so the main point made by the hon. Gentleman is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would you be kind enough to confirm that the motion is amendable if an amendment

is tabled in time? It would therefore be possible, if hon. Members wished, to table an amendment changing the composition of the Committee.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's question was whether the motion was amendable if the amendment was tabled in time. If an amendment was tabled in time, that is the case; it would be examined and looked at.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

POLICE.

That the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Codes of Practice) (Visual Recording of Interviews) Order 2002, dated 11th April 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th April 2002, be approved.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Friday 24th May, do adjourn till Monday 10th June.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS BILL (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Motion made,

That the Lords Message of 29th April relating to a Joint Committee of both Houses to consider and report on any draft Communications Bill presented to both Houses by a Minister of the Crown be now considered.

That this House concurs with the Lords in their Resolution relating to the said Joint Committee.

That a Select Committee of six honourable Members be appointed to join with the Committee appointed by the Lords to consider any such draft Communications Bill.

That the Committee shall have power—

(i) to send for persons, papers and records;

(ii) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House;

(iii) to report from time to time;

(iv) to appoint specialist advisers;

(v) to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom; and

That Paul Farrelly, Mr. John Grogan, Nick Harvey, Miss Anne McIntosh, Anne Picking and Brian White be members of the Committee.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

Occupied Territories

10.36 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I would like to present a petition on behalf of 1,900 of my constituents who condemn the illegal occupation of the west bank and the Gaza strip by the Israeli defence force.

The petitioners request the Government to do everything in their power

"to effect the withdrawal of the Israeli Defence Force from the occupied territories and support a sovereign Palestinian state";

to end all arms sales to Israel immediately; and to aid

"a UN led Commission of Enquiry (into the recent events in the Jenin camp)"

with access to all areas in the occupied territories.

To lie upon the Table.

Recycling

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

10.37 pm

Mr. Denis Murphy (Wansbeck): I am grateful to the House for granting me this debate.

The issue of waste and the way in which we recycle and dispose of it is a major problem for every nation on earth. The current systems of waste disposal—landfill and incineration—are generating much public opposition. Damage to the environment is still the main reason for objections, but there is a growing realisation of the value to our planet of the materials that are being destroyed unnecessarily. There is a new awareness that our society faces a waste crisis which, quite rightly, has moved the issue of waste management from the margins to the centre of political debate. While much has been done since the 1970s to reduce both the pollution from waste and the amount of waste that we produce, the problems have continued to increase. Future projections are quite alarming.

Mr. Waller-Hunter, the director of the environment at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development stated in 1999:

"Despite nearly 30 years of environmental and waste policy efforts in OECD countries, the OECD-wide increase in waste generation is still in one-to-one proportion to economic growth."

A 40 per cent. increase in the gross domestic product since 1980 has been accompanied by a 40 per cent. increase in municipal waste during the same period. Consumer spending also follows those trends. According to colleagues in the Economics and Statistics Directorate, GDP is expected to rise between 70 per cent. and 100 per cent. by 2020. I would not like to imagine a world where municipal waste generation was also 70 to 100 per cent. higher than the already high current levels. What was initially conceived as a confined policy problem had, by the late 1990s, become a gathering environmental nightmare, which led to waste being named as one of the red light issues in the environment statement of 2001.

Of course, that doomsday scenario need not materialise. We can dramatically reduce those figures. Waste minimisation and recycling should play the main role in that reduction. I read recently of a waste strategy introduced in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In the late 1980s in the Halifax region of Nova Scotia, with a population of 350,000, there was intense public opposition to the expansion of a landfill site in Sackville. The joint councils proposed as an alternative an incinerator capable of dealing with 600 tonnes of waste per day. That, too, was strongly opposed.

The local action groups raised money and hired their own consultants from Seattle, who proposed a cheaper alternative plan for a recycling-led strategy. Subsequently, the council rejected the incinerator proposal and agreed the development of intensive recycling. The council also decided to involve the action groups in designing the scheme. Consensus was the order of the day, and the conclusion from the process was that no organic waste, toxic materials or recyclables should go to landfill. Anything going to landfill had to be stabilised first through composting. The landfill was renamed a residual disposal facility and it is notable for its complete lack of odour and birds.

The result is that from a level of 3 per cent. in 1997, Halifax has reached 60 per cent. recycling within three years. The civic groups estimate that the recycling rate will increase to 88 per cent. within 10 years. There is nothing to prevent us here in the United Kingdom from achieving those targets and working towards the ultimate goal of zero waste in 20 years.

We are fortunate to have in my constituency a company called SENREC, which stands for south-east Northumberland recycling. I had the pleasure of officially opening the plant three weeks ago. The site first opened in 1999 and recycled just a small amount of municipal waste. It was not until March 2001 that the three local councils in the area introduced a twin-bin collection scheme. From less than 1 per cent. being recycled 12 months ago, 11 per cent. is now being recycled and the local authorities are confident that the 25 per cent. target will be reached this year, well in advance of the Government's deadline.

I am pleased to say that in setting the plant up, there was extensive public consultation. The company and the councils worked closely with the community to ensure that it was involved in developments both on and off-site. For any recycling programme to be successful, it relies upon the co-operation of the local population. The residents of Wansbeck should be congratulated on the way in which they have embraced the concept of recycling.

I have only one minor complaint about the setting up of SENREC which concerns a small amount of financial assistance for which the company applied. It was advised to apply for a regional enterprise grant. Unfortunately, the person advising the company went off sick, causing a delay which meant that the operation was up and running before the grant was processed. It was not a lot of money but the company was entitled to it, and I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to give the matter favourable consideration.

The company's recent investment of £750,000 will enable the plant to increase its capacity from 12,000 tonnes to 35,000 tonnes per annum. That will enable all the local authorities in Northumberland to achieve their recycling targets well in advance of the Government deadline. Although that is good news and a huge step in the right direction, it represents only a small part of the facility's capacity. Proposals are being drawn up by the main company, SULO, Wansbeck district council and Blyth Valley borough council to form a public-private partnership to develop a refrigerator recycling plant on the site.

It is estimated the plant could deal with more than 100,000 fridges per annum. It would cover an area from southern Scotland to Cleveland, including Glasgow, Edinburgh, Carlisle, Newcastle upon Tyne and Middlesbrough—almost a quarter of the United Kingdom.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): In that case, would it not be appropriate for the same proposal to cover the whole of Scotland, so spreading that responsibility throughout Scotland and England?

Mr. Murphy: I am sure that that would be appropriate, and I shall deal with that point in a moment.

The proposals for the plant would include state of the art technology, tried and tested by SULO in Germany, where the parent company now operates a refrigerator

disposal plant. That would remove a huge burden from local authorities, which are currently storing fridges, or even transporting them to Germany for recycling.

The two local authorities have applied to DEFRA for a one-off grant of £330,000. That would represent their contribution to the capital costs of the plant and its first-year running costs. It is proposed that any profits from the recycling would be ring-fenced by the local authorities to assist in greater recycling and to develop further their respective waste strategies. The DEFRA grant will be an important component in setting up the new company. Again, I would appreciate my right hon. Friend's ministerial support in securing the funding.

It is possible, with the co-operation of local people, the planning authorities and the other agencies involved with such a proposal, to have a brand new state of the art refrigerator recycling plant up and running in under eight months from now. Again, I would urge the Minister to give the proposals his full support, once he is satisfied with them.

It has been estimated that we need at least four plants of that size to deal with the fridges that need to be disposed of in the United Kingdom. It is important therefore that we get this right. I am very confident that we have the right partnership and the right site.

The site itself is ideally placed to take refrigerators from the whole of the north of England and southern Scotland. The deep-water port of Blyth is situated just over a mile away. The railway line comes to within 50 m, requiring only the construction of a siding. The dual carriageway linking the A1 and the A19 runs past the site, giving it a perfect transport infrastructure. The site is designated for that type of use in the district council's local plan. It has the added advantage of being a brownfield site, situated on an old colliery.

We have a huge national problem with the disposal of refrigerators. The plant could be a demonstration project for best practice in the United Kingdom. It would provide employment, recover valuable materials and safely dispose of CFCs. I am confident that it will be a success, and it would be nice if my right hon. Friend could leave a space in his busy schedule to perform the opening ceremony.

There is also scope on the site to take recycling a stage further. Why should we wait until 2004 to comply with the white goods directive to recycle other electrical equipment? We have an opportunity immediately after the construction of the refrigerator recycling plant to build phase 3 and recycle all electrical equipment. We have demonstrated in Wansbeck that, if the political will exists and the correct partnerships are formed, local authorities can advance very quickly towards the modest targets set by our Government.

In conclusion, I ask that my right hon. Friend lend the full support of the Government to the scheme that I have outlined. I ask him to consider introducing a target of zero waste and to set a goal of 20 years to achieve it. I also ask him to allow the House at a later date the opportunity to debate the much wider issue involved.

10.48 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) on securing this debate. I certainly believe that the environment is one of the most important issues and that such issues are not discussed enough in the House. Waste management, in particular, is an issue of very great importance to the Government and the public.

My hon. Friend was absolutely right to refer to the worrying increase in the amount of waste. As he said, it is increasing at about 3 per cent. a year—roughly in line with economic growth. However, we as a nation need to decouple economic growth, which we want, from waste generation, driving it down from plus 3 per cent. a year towards nought and preferably a minus figure, but we are some way from doing that. But if we do carry on at 3 per cent. a year, in about 25 years the level of waste generated will double, as my hon. Friend said, and that, I think all parties will accept, is intolerable.

I was interested to hear my hon. Friend's views on recycling, and on developments in Wansbeck in particular. The EU landfill directive is driving the policy. It requires the level of municipal waste which goes to landfill in Britain, currently between 80 and 85 per cent.—one of the highest figures in the EU—to be reduced to scarcely more than a third of that by 2016, although there is a four-year leeway, but within 18 years at most. That is a huge shift away from landfill.

To help achieve those legal obligations, we have set some fairly tough, but, I am sure, achievable, national targets for recycling, which I hope are well understood by all hon. Members and local authorities, to double recycled waste within a three-year period by 2003–04 and to treble it within a five-year period by 2005–06. That is underpinned by statutory targets for each local authority.

As my hon. Friend said, increased recycling is absolutely essential. If one goes up the waste hierarchy, landfill is at the bottom; incineration may well have a role but is not popular; and recycling, re-use and recovery are unquestionably the best options. They are almost always the best environmental options, although the very best options are waste minimisation and not generating the waste in the first place. We have to incentivise that more than we have so far managed to do.

The system of tradeable landfill permits will also help local authorities to reduce landfilling by limiting the amount of biodegradable waste that can be disposed of in this way. That system will be enforced by financial sanctions.

I am aware that Wansbeck, and other parts of the north-east, have in the past had low recycling rates, and I would be the first to admit that Oldham in my constituency comes into that category too. Too often the recycling rate is as low as 1, 3 or 5 per cent., and such rates must be significantly increased. The national recycling rate when the Government took office in 1997 was about 6 per cent. and it is now about 11 per cent., but it has to reach 25 per cent. by 2005–06.

I understand that Wansbeck has made much progress. My hon. Friend said that the 11 per cent. recycling rate has been achieved and the 25 per cent. rate would be reached well in advance of the Government's target, and that is excellent news. He also talked about a waste management facility substantially increasing its throughput during the next few years.

My hon. Friend was certainly looking for a substantial grant—I wondered at what point there would be an appeal for money, and I did not have to wait long—for a fridge

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

recycling plant. He will not be surprised to hear that we need investment in plant which can remove CFCs, not just from the coolant but from the foam in fridges. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does not have a sum of £330,000 for that purpose, but my colleagues and I will be glad to consider whether it is possible to find some alternative funding. I make no promise, but I am ready to consider it, whether in the form of regional development grants or whatever. My hon. Friend also mentioned the importance of recycling other electrical equipment in advance of the waste, electronic and electrical equipment directive.

As I have indicated, the Government are very much committed to increasing recycling. We are assisting local authorities through a variety of measures to develop new and existing initiatives. We understand that, as my hon. Friend said, recycling and sustainable waste management in general can involve short-term costs, especially while the necessary infrastructure and markets are being developed. That is why financial support to help local authorities with waste management has increased substantially in recent years.

The 2000 spending review included an annual increase in the relevant local authority spending block. By 2003–04, that spending block will have risen by £1.1 billion on the 2000–01 provision—a very substantial rise. It is for local authorities to decide what proportion of that spending block is directed at waste management and recycling projects. It is the Government's aim under the agenda on modernising local government to give that option and discretion to local authorities, but they must meet the statutory recycling targets.

We have also provided an additional ring-fenced pot of £140 million for local authority waste minimisation and recycling. Wansbeck district council and all local authorities in England can apply for grants from the fund for recycling projects. Applications for funding from that pot of money are being submitted at the moment, and grants will be distributed in August for first-year funding. Obviously, I cannot speak about specific bids.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): While we continue to promote recycling, does the Minister agree that we need to fund the products that have been made through recycling and help them to become acceptable in the marketplace?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is exactly right; he has anticipated what I was going to say later, so in answer to his question, I shall say it now. There is very little point in increasing recycling unless there is a commercial purpose to which it can be put, which means either that there is an input into another industrial process or that what is produced can be sold on in the form of recycled products. There is little point in collecting recyclates and then having to landfill them because of the lack of a market. If recycling projects are to be successful, we must have a strong market for recycled products.

That is why last year we established the waste and resources action programme with £40 million of Government and devolved Administration funding. Its focus is on creating stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and its remit extends across the industrial, commercial and municipal waste streams. WRAP, as it is called—it is one of those wonderful Whitehall acronyms—has already put together a consortium and awarded a grant that will increase the UK's newspaper reprocessing capacity by 300,000 tonnes a year. That is very important in the paper sector. It also intends to fund a project for the sorting and reprocessing of plastic, which is perhaps the most difficult material in this context. That should result in an additional 20,000 tonnes of plastic bottles a year being diverted from the waste stream.

I mentioned the £140 million ring-fenced fund. We consulted widely on proposals for the distribution of the fund. The consultation paper stressed that it is intended not as a replacement for funds that authorities should be spending anyway, but as an extra boost for recycling capacity. A proportion of the fund has been earmarked—I am very keen on this approach—to assist poorly performing authorities that require such a boost in order to get meaningful recycling off the ground. If we are going to get the bottom quarter of local authorities into the middle of the range, they will need support. I am determined that part of the fund will enable them to make that change and that there will be no possible complaint that they have not had full assistance in doing so. That is not a reward for failure, but recognition of the need for additional assistance. A proportion of funding is also earmarked for high-performing authorities, which will tackle the more difficult and resource-intensive waste streams, such as plastic. I mentioned that earlier. I hope and believe that recycling projects in those areas will pave the way for others and help determine the best way to tackle new waste streams.

Future funding for local authority waste management and recycling projects is a matter for this year's spending review. I cannot pre-empt its outcome; I hope that there will be an announcement before the summer. However, I know that central Government need to work closely with local authorities.

Let me use a buzzword that is nevertheless meaningful—partnership. Working in partnership is important, and a proportion of the £140 million fund has been set aside for such working between authorities. We encourage all local authorities to work together—that is often more effective than working separately—and with the community sector.

The community sector has an important role to play and a further proportion of the £140 million fund has been set aside to help to develop community sector initiatives. In addition, the new opportunities fund is distributing £39 million of lottery money for community sector waste re-use, recycling and composting projects across England. I urge all local authorities to engage with local groups in order to achieve their targets.

We recognise that local authorities may have to make large capital investments in recycling facilities. My hon. Friend made that clear. To help deal with that, £220 million of private finance initiative credits have been set aside for waste projects. Perhaps the project that my hon. Friend mentioned can be assisted in that way.

Some local authorities will have the opportunity to be closely involved in working up and bringing forward local projects that are supported by the aggregates levy sustainability fund and linking them with other initiatives. The fund provides nearly £30 million per year for England

for two years. The money will support projects that minimise the demand for primary aggregates, promote environmentally friendly aggregates extraction and transport, and reduce the local effects of aggregate extraction.

My hon. Friend referred at length to fridges. I recognise that the fridge issue is especially worrying to local authorities. The new rules that require the removal of chlorofluorocarbons from fridges are entirely consistent with the general drive to increase recycling rates. Up to the end of last year, many fridges were simply sent to landfill sites. That is not a sustainable form of disposal for an electrical white goods product such as a fridge. Under the new controls, all fridges will be sent to specialist facilities where harmful CFCs and other ozone depleters will be removed and the metal content recycled.

Central Government have worked closely with local authorities on the fridge issue. We have facilitated meetings—I have chaired many—between local authorities and processors to kick-start the development of treatment facilities. There is already one fridge recycling plant operating in the United Kingdom and several more should be up and running during the summer. By the end of June, we expect to be processing more than 50,000 fridges a month.

I am also working with retailers, the voluntary sector and the waste industry to encourage the re-use of fridges that can be restored to full working order. A proportion of them—perhaps 15 per cent. to 20 per cent. of those that would be returned to retailers under the take-back scheme—can be refurbished and sold on. We want to maximise that if possible. On the question of money, we have already provided local authorities with additional funding of £6 million, and I will be making an announcement on future funding—which I recognise is needed—soon.

Generally, I recognise that we still have a long way to go on recycling, and a long way to go to deliver the Government's vision of more sustainable waste management set out in our waste strategy 2000. I liked my hon. Friend's reference to zero waste. That is a meaningful concept, but we are a long way from it. It is ultimately the objective that we should have. That is why we have asked the Government's performance and innovation unit to review the strategy. Its findings will help to identify what extra instruments, changes to targets or regulations and, perhaps, additional funding may be required to ensure that we meet the EU landfill directive.

The direction of travel is clear, however. We must recycle a great deal more to meet the kinds of averages that have already been achieved in many EU countries, and we must landfill a great deal less. Our statutory targets must be met, and I am determined that they will be. I appreciate the inroads that local authorities have made, and the need to continue to make substantial progress in this area. They need to look to the full range of partnerships to deliver this vision—partnerships with the waste industry, other local authorities, the community, packaging compliance schemes—these are very important—and, of course, central Government.

I thank my hon. Friend for the opportunity to have this debate, which has been very useful. With imagination and drive, I am sure that we can achieve what needs to be done.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 1 May 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 8 May.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Castlereagh Police Station

1. **Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): If he will make a statement on the recent breach of security at Castlereagh police station. [51664]

5. **Mr. Roy Beggs** (East Antrim): What steps have been taken to increase security since the recent burglary at Castlereagh. [51671]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): The breach of security at Castlereagh is a matter of grave concern. The police investigation into the incident is ongoing and the House will understand why I cannot go into details while it continues. In parallel to the criminal investigation, I have established a separate review conducted by Sir John Chilcot and reporting to me to investigate all the national security implications. The acting Chief Constable has advised that appropriate immediate measures have been undertaken to increase security and that a detailed security review is ongoing.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the Secretary of State's statement as far as it goes, but does he accept the definition of the Member for Mid-Ulster (Mr. McGuinness), who said that the ceasefire is holding because the IRA is not shooting at the police or the Army? In the light of the intelligence and other activities that have been going on, is it not nearly time that the reviews were concluded and action taken to ensure proper democracy in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that I keep all the ceasefires under constant review. The acting Chief Constable has made it clear that he does not believe that the IRA ceasefire is under threat. I will, of course, continue to discuss these matters with him.

As far as the comments of Mr. McGuinness are concerned, it is years since an attack was made by the IRA on the police and security forces. That is a fact. The IRA ceasefire has helped to create the basis of trust on which the agreement was reached, and in a sense is the reason why so much progress has been made. However—and it is a large "however"—the hard fact is that four years after the Belfast agreement, a ceasefire is not enough. I believe that the leadership of republicanism is committed to the process working, but if there is to be confidence that there is wholehearted commitment to exclusively peaceful means, we need to see an end to paramilitary attacks, targeting and any other such preparations. In a sense, we all truly need to have the sense that the war is over.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Secretary of State fully understand the extent of the horror arising from the breach of security at Castlereagh and the theft of the sensitive materials from that building, which have caused a serious loss of confidence among all law-abiding people in Northern Ireland? How does he intend to restore confidence that those responsible for security in Northern Ireland are competent to protect themselves as well as to provide security for the rest of us?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. It is precisely one of the reasons why, alongside the police investigation, I have asked Sir John Chilcot to consider some of the wider implications of this breach of national security. Of course, there are wider implications, again because of the allegations that are circulating. I will not comment on any subject on which a judicial process is under way. I merely say this: I want this process to succeed, as do the Government and, I believe, all the parties to it, because we have made so much progress in the past four years on new institutions, democratic structures, human and civil rights and de-escalating the military presence in Northern Ireland. In that context and at this time, after four years, that is precisely why it is not acceptable that either the apparatus of violence or terrorism or the preparations for it can be allowed to continue.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Given that the Castlereagh security office would be regarded as one of the highest-security offices in Northern Ireland, does the Secretary of State agree that it is highly unlikely that members of paramilitary organisations could enter that building without being recognised?

Dr. Reid: I have to say to my hon. Friend that the nature of Castlereagh changed significantly when it ceased to be a holding centre, not least as a result of representations from his colleagues. If it is possible for paramilitaries to break out of the most secure premises in Northern Ireland—the Maze prison—it is possible for anyone, including paramilitaries, to break in to Castlereagh.

I shall make no comment on the specifics of the investigation, but there is a possibility that, as in other cases, charges will be brought and evidence given. Time will tell who was responsible for the break-in.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Does the Secretary of State agree that the only major line of inquiry

that the police are following is an investigation into the role of the Provisional IRA in the break-in? If, after a full investigation, it is discovered that the Provisional IRA was responsible, will the Secretary of State judge that to be such a significant breach of its ceasefire that the IRA-Sinn Fein representatives on the Government of Northern Ireland should be removed? The right hon. Gentleman knows that current legislation allows for a voting system that would not exclude them. Is he prepared to change the law to exclude Sinn Fein-IRA if they have breached their ceasefire? Or is he unprepared to change it even if the Law Lords rule against him in a case that will come before them soon? Is he prepared to change it, as his spokesman recently suggested, only to keep Sinn Fein in government?

Dr. Reid: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is wrong on his first point. The investigation to which he referred is not the only major line of inquiry. It is the major line of inquiry, but there are no closed minds when considering evidence. I see the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends laughing. I am afraid that I examine the facts before I make decisions.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a court case. Without prejudice to the wisdom that their Lordships will bring to bear on it, I simply remind him that, on decisions, I beat him the first and second times. I am confident that we will beat his appeal for the third time.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is not the lesson of Castlereagh that the trust between the communities in Northern Ireland is fragile? In that context, is it not important to hold a full and detailed investigation into exactly who was responsible for the break-in and why it happened? Is it not also important for all paramilitary groups to move away from violence for the foreseeable future and make that clear not only in words but in deeds?

Dr. Reid: I agree with my hon. Friend. On trust, there is so much at stake and so much to lose that I cannot believe that those on any side who have contributed so much in the past would put the process at risk. I am talking not only about republicans, because everyone has a responsibility to build confidence. Northern Ireland has recently been scarred by a considerable spate of loyalist violence. Apart from being wrong in itself, it gives a spurious justification to those on the other side of the community who wish to retain arms and the apparatus of violence.

We all have a responsibility. However, those who share in government have a special responsibility: they must be free of the taint of any association with the apparatus or the activity of paramilitaries. All of us must not only be committed, as I believe the republican leadership is, to the peace process and to exclusively democratic means, but be seen to be committed to those means.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Details of the hit list appeared in the press before individuals on it had been informed of their inclusion. What can we do to ensure that such a breach does not happen again?

Dr. Reid: On the first point, the hon. Gentleman suggests that malicious leaking of information may have occurred. In the face of the evidence, I am not in a position to deny that. There may be people in all organisations and parties who wish to see the process fail. After all, all organisations are made up of human beings. Some people may be throwing snowballs at the process. However, the real problem is that someone else may be making the snowballs. As long as people make the snowballs, the underlying reality is that others will be able to use them. I therefore appeal to everyone, notwithstanding the nature of some of the leaks and the way in which reports are exaggerated and misinformed, to ensure that we get rid of that underlying reality, which allows those who want to damage the process to do that.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): But what happens when the snowballs melt? Will the pebbles inside them be revealed? Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that, when the Chilcot inquiry is finished—while we would not want the names of persons to be revealed, for obvious reasons—its principal conclusions will be brought immediately to the House so that we can form an opinion on what has happened in this case? We need to know why someone was able to walk into Castlereagh, go into the most secure office there, obtain these documents and walk away, leaving behind a variety of different smokescreens. Is it not of particular significance that the person who was arrested as a result of the investigations was arrested on the strength of evidence relating to other issues, rather than to anything that was taken from Castlereagh?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend will forgive me if I resist the temptation to pursue the snowball metaphor further. On his first point, it is important to distinguish between the police investigation, which is attempting to apprehend those who carried out the crime—a proper and appropriate matter for the police—and the wider review of national security implications that I have asked Sir John Chilcot to undertake. When Sir John reports to me, I will consider how much of that information we can put into the public domain. His report will not necessarily name names in terms of the guilty people who have committed the crime—that was a false assumption by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara)—

Mr. McNamara: I asked you not to.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. Reid: That is properly the role of the police in this case. I will look at the report to see how much of it I can put into the public domain without further damaging national security.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I hope that the Secretary of State will not disagree with me when I say that the whole peace process is now on trial in a new and very worrisome way as a result of the facts that have emerged over the past two weeks. First, we have heard the suggestions that the IRA is behind the Castlereagh break-in. The murder of a taxi driver in Dungannon has been attributed to the IRA, and there have been authoritative reports that Sinn Fein-IRA continue to target activity against individuals and physical objectives. We know that the IRA has been buying arms in Florida since the ceasefire and since the Belfast agreement, and there are now suggestions that it has been buying arms

even more recently in Russia. Perhaps most dramatically of all, the US House of Representatives produced a detailed report last week which made it absolutely clear that Sinn Fein-IRA—and it is Sinn Fein-IRA—are at the heart of an international network of drug-running and terrorist organisations.

In the light of all that, I shall put a question to the Secretary of State to which I hope he will give a precise and straightforward answer. Is it his view that the level of IRA activity revealed over the last two weeks in these cases is consistent or not consistent with its obligations under the Belfast agreement, with the ceasefire, and with the detailed criteria set out by the Prime Minister in his speech at Balmoral on 14 May 1998 for evaluating those obligations?

Dr. Reid *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the Minister replies, I must remind the House that we are still on Question 1. I am keen to move on to the next question.

Dr. Reid: In almost every case that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, judicial processes are under way. He knows that. I am not, therefore, prepared to comment on what he calls reports, on suggestions, on innuendo or on speculation. In all those cases, the facts will come into the public domain, and that will be the time to take them into account.

If the hon. Gentleman is asking me, as a generality, not about the ceasefire, on which the acting Chief Constable has made his position known, but about whether a ceasefire is a necessary and sufficient condition to maintain confidence in the process, I have already said that I do not believe that to be so. Any activity involving the intention or preparation of violence inhibits confidence in the process. That is a serious question, and I take it seriously. I have tried to make my own serious judgment on that issue public to the House today.

Mr. Davies: I shall put another question in the hope that I get a straight answer to this one. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that in the present circumstances it would be completely wrong to make new concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA beyond those in the Belfast agreement, such as allowing former terrorists to join district police partnerships, and giving an amnesty to on-the-run terrorists? Does he agree that those ideas, on which he has hummed and hawed for several months, should be definitely excluded?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman omitted to mention that former terrorists can become Ministers in Northern Ireland. I thought that he supported that. I am surprised at the gusto with which he is prepared to oppose their being on a local policing board while accepting them in the Government of Northern Ireland.

Decommissioning

2. **Mr. Peter Duncan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): If he will make a statement on decommissioning. [51668]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): The second act of IRA decommissioning, reported on by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning on 8 April 2002, needs to be part of a process that involves all paramilitary groups. Paramilitary groups must end all forms of terrorist activity and dismantle the apparatus of terrorism.

Mr. Duncan: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. I welcome the recent decommissioning, but what reassurance can he give to the House and to the wider community in the United Kingdom that decommissioning remains a positive process? In particular, can he reassure us that, in his opinion, more arms are being decommissioned than are currently being purchased?

Dr. Reid: I think that even the most sceptical Member of the House would accept that the first and second acts of decommissioning were historic in their own terms, given the problems we face. If the hon. Gentleman is asking me whether we have a huge way to go on this issue, as on all others connected with the Belfast agreement, the answer is yes.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): As long as there is a large quantity of arms in Northern Ireland that are available to paramilitaries to use, people will live in fear. That includes people who have been placed in exile, such as Joseph McCloskey, whom I recently took to see the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. As America has had some impact on the two acts of decommissioning that have so far taken place, might it not be a good idea for Joseph McCloskey also to visit the Administration in Washington? He might receive as good a reception as he did from my hon. Friend.

Dr. Reid: Yes. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Under-Secretary recently met Mr. McCloskey and his family. He gave them an assurance that, when reviewing the position of victims, the Maranatha community, with which he was also associated, will be fully involved.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Does the Secretary of State agree with me that the confidence generated by the welcome second act of decommissioning has now been totally dissipated by the flurry of paramilitary activity, of which Castlereagh is merely a part? Although I appreciate what the Secretary of State has in mind, does he not think that it is a little mealy mouthed to say that we all need to have a sense that the war is over? Would it not be much better to say to the IRA and to all the other paramilitary organisations that it is long past time they said clearly that the war is over, and moreover that eight years after the first ceasefire it is about time they started to disband?

Dr. Reid: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman's suggestions and what I said are mutually exclusive. In a tactical sense, my reading of history suggests that the one way to ensure that something does not happen is for a British Secretary of State to demand that it does. Having said that, the thrust of the right hon. Gentleman's comments is true. If there is to be sustained confidence in this whole process, people need to be assured and have the perception that there has been not only cessation of firing—which has been the case for years, and is a major step forward—but cessation of the preparation for firing at some future stage. That, I think, is the kernel of the

present lack of confidence. We must all take account of it, including the leaders of the republican community. I believe they are committed to the process, but they must understand that the question of cessation is beginning to have a serious effect on people's confidence in that process.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): What progress is being made in persuading loyalist paramilitaries that they too must decommission?

Dr. Reid: We are making every effort to ensure that loyalist groups are encouraged to proceed to a ceasefire and engage with the international commission, as some have been doing. Some are not currently on ceasefire, although we keep that under review as well. At the beginning of the year there was a significant reduction in indiscriminate terrorist violence in the cause of loyalism.

My hon. Friend is right, however: not only is such action wrong and destabilising, and not only has it no role in a modern Northern Ireland, but it provides those on the other side of the community with a spurious justification for hanging on to their arms and continuing their preparations for violent activity.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Secretary of State has helpfully distinguished between the Chief Constable's judgments about the IRA ceasefire and the question of other paramilitary activities, including targeting. Tomorrow, the Prime Minister will go to Northern Ireland. Is the Secretary of State saying that, in terms of the criteria laid down by the Prime Minister at the Balmoral showground on 14 May 1998, the IRA ceasefire no longer holds?

Dr. Reid: I have already made it plain that although I keep all these ceasefires under constant review, I rely on the counsel of, among others, my security advisers. The acting Chief Constable has made his view public over the last week, but the important point, which I have already made, is completely in line with what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at Balmoral some years ago. He said then that, if the process was to continue and if people's confidence was to be retained, a ceasefire was not sufficient; the preparations and apparatus for terrorism must be run down. If that was true some years ago, it is even more true today. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who is to go to Northern Ireland in partnership with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will reinforce that message.

Police Service

3. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): What progress is being made in recruitment and training for the new Northern Ireland police service. [51669]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): The first intake of new recruits graduated on 5 April, and the second graduation ceremony will take place on 10 May, involving a further 60 graduates. By next week, some 300 recruits appointed on a 50:50 basis will have started training. Although figures are not yet available for the latest campaign, the response is understood to be, again, encouraging.

Mr. Connarty: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. At least I was listening; not many other people were.

It was, in fact, a very mellow reply, given that Sinn Fein is clearly running a campaign in Northern Ireland to discourage members of the nationalist community from applying to join the police force. Will my hon. Friend convey to the people of Northern Ireland the message that if Sinn Fein wants to be regarded as any part of the peace process and of the approach towards a civilised society, it must encourage the rule of law? That means stepping aside and letting members of the nationalist community choose to join the police, rather than trying to interfere and stop the development of an objective cross-community police force which is necessary for the achievement of the civilised society we want to see in Northern Ireland.

Jane Kennedy: I entirely agree. The response from the Catholic community has been unprecedented; if anything is holding back the process of change, it is Sinn Fein's refusal to endorse the new arrangements, and its campaign to dissuade Catholics from joining the police.

Intimidation from any quarter is utterly unacceptable. We believe that, in the light of the enormous changes that have been made and of cross-party and international support for those changes, the onus is squarely on Sinn Fein to encourage nationalists and republicans to join the police.

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): Given this morning's partisan statement on police recruitment by the policing oversight commissioner, when will the Government begin a recruitment procedure in Northern Ireland that does not discriminate against the Protestant community?

Jane Kennedy: We are entirely confident that the 50:50 recruitment procedure that is in place is meeting the needs of the new Police Service of Northern Ireland. In fact, this morning's publication of the oversight commissioner's report is very welcome. He rightly pays tribute to the work of the Policing Board and the progress of the recruitment programme. It is a report on work in progress, and we will look very closely at the conclusions that he has drawn.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [51697] **John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 1 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

John Robertson: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the economy of Scotland, particularly that of the central belt, is buoyant, and I thank him for that. Can he

assure me that the UK-wide aviation review will be based on fair and open competition, and that any public funding decisions will take into account the effect on local economies? Will he also ensure that airport costs are the same throughout the country, and can he assure me that the links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports, which are vital to Scotland's growth, will be started and completed quickly?

The Prime Minister: The aviation White Paper that will be published shortly will set out the options and deal with many of the issues raised by my hon. Friend. As for the rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports, I think that a clear understanding exists that there is a lot to recommend both projects. We are urgently looking at the matter with not just the British Airports Authority, but the Scottish Executive and the Strategic Rail Authority, and I hope that we will have some news to announce shortly. I know of my hon. Friend's interest in the matter, and I am sure that, given the buoyancy of the economy in Scotland, those projects could add to it.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): In the past week, the Government have announced a new target for violent crime by September, the docking of child benefit from truants, putting police into schools, and giving London 700 more police. Given that the local elections are—strangely—tomorrow, does the Prime Minister feel that it is any wonder that the public are cynical about such gimmicks?

The Prime Minister: It is not merely that we have announced more police officers for London; we have actually provided more. It is not merely that we have announced the measures on youth crime to which the right hon. Gentleman refers; they are part of a continuing series of measures to deal with every single aspect of youth crime. We know that overall crime has fallen in the past five years, but we have a serious problem with street crime and antisocial behaviour. Of course, the difference is that we are trying to deal with this issue, but the Conservatives have opposed every single one of the measures that we are proposing.

Mr. Duncan Smith: All four were gimmicks announced in the past week. The reality is that the Prime Minister has announced extra police officers seven times in five years. Even today, he announces that police numbers are at their highest level, but they have only just reached the level that he inherited when he took office in 1997. As many people are leaving the Met as are joining it. Because of the Government's red tape, the force now needs 12 police officers just to spare one to go on street patrol. Will the Prime Minister confirm that today's gimmicky announcement amounts at best to no more than—in fact, just under—two extra beat officers per London borough?

The Prime Minister: First, we have actually got the highest ever level of police officers. That is the result of investment that the Conservatives opposed. Since we are talking about comparative records, the Conservatives promised in 1992 that there would be 5,000 more police officers. In fact, they cut the number of police officers in that time. We have increased the numbers to a record level.

It is not only the Government who are taking action on street crime. The police are also taking action and the Metropolitan police safer streets initiative is already having an impact on reducing street crime. The difference is that we are sitting down with the police and others in our criminal justice system, working out each and every measure that we need to take to tackle the problems, and the right hon. Gentleman opposes them. He is even opposing the community safety officers that could be out there on the street, helping the police in their work.

What is more, the right hon. Gentleman and the Conservative party are also opposing the measures to confiscate the assets of drug dealers and others involved in organised crime. Some Opposition Members look a bit puzzled by that—they should know what their Front Benchers have been up to. If he is serious about crime, let him support us on community safety officers and on the Proceeds of Crime Bill, now going through the House.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is typical of the Prime Minister, when faced with a requirement for more police officers on the streets, to want to put part-time officers on the streets, not real ones. Just now he said that the Government were succeeding in bringing down violent crime. I remind him that violent crime has risen by 20 per cent. in the last three years. Nobody believes a word he is saying.

Let us get back to one of the gimmicks that the Prime Minister announced this week—taking child benefit away from the parents of truants. The Deputy Prime Minister rubbished it on Sunday and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions rubbished it on Monday. So whose idea was it, and when will it be introduced?

The Prime Minister: First, on the crime figures that the right hon. Gentleman has just given—over the last five years crime has fallen, not risen: it doubled under the Conservatives. However, we have accepted that street crime is a real issue. What I said to him was that recently, as a result of the operation by the Metropolitan police, the figures have been going in the right direction. We need to continue that and make sure that it happens in each of the 10 main crime hotspots.

In relation to child benefit, or any other benefit, we are examining proposals for dealing with antisocial behaviour. We will look at every measure necessary to bear down on the problem of truancy, antisocial behaviour and juvenile offending. If the Conservatives wish to oppose those measures, let them do so. It will show only how completely out of touch they are with the British public.

Mr. Duncan Smith: No one believes a word that the Prime Minister says. Out there, the public know that violent street crime is rising, but he will not even admit that. He pretends that it is falling. It has gone up by more than 20 per cent. The reality is that all the detection and clear-up rates in London have halved since he took power. When will he understand that the public do not want gimmicks: they want crime to be stopped?

The Prime Minister: I have accepted that street crime is a problem. I continually say that when the right hon. Gentleman asks me, because it is true. The question is: what can we do? We are taking action on truancy, action

to ensure that people who are paid benefit take some responsibility in return, action to ensure that persistent offenders are not bailed and back out on the street again and action to provide more police officers because we know that street crime is a problem. The difference is that the Government are taking action to do something about it but he is opposed to that action.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Will the Prime Minister confirm that he has received the largest amount of correspondence from individuals on one subject that any Prime Minister has ever received, given that more than 1 million cards have been received from citizens across Ireland expressing their deep concern about the safety of the Sellafield nuclear plant? Is he prepared to take the necessary steps to remove those concerns?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the concern that has been expressed. However, the Sellafield plant and any other plants in this country are subject to the strictest national and international standards. Those standards are regularly reviewed. The plants are regularly inspected and none of those inspections has ever found a problem, such as the problem alleged in the press and by other political parties. Of course we take the concerns seriously, but there is a proper procedure and it would be wrong to close down nuclear facilities or start putting large numbers of people out of work without sufficient evidence from the relevant bodies to back it up.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Will the Prime Minister say which members of the Cabinet support his plan to withdraw child benefit from the parents of persistent offenders?

The Prime Minister: As I just said to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), when we have a firm proposal, we will put it forward for consideration. However, as I said, we are examining the matter. What is more—*[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Gentleman wants to oppose the measure, let him oppose it. We are not examining the proposal only in relation to child benefit. We are also looking at housing benefit, and the persistent antisocial behaviour and offending by families in receipt of that benefit. The vast majority of people in this country will support the idea that people who get benefits from the state owe some responsibility in return. If the Liberal Democrats are opposed to that, let them say so.

Mr. Kennedy: The Prime Minister seems keen to encourage opposition, but I was merely inquiring about his level of support. Will not this idea go the same way as the half-baked notion that youngsters on a Saturday night should be taken along the street to the nearest cash machine to pay their dues to society? Would not it be better to bury this idea here and now, once and for all?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not agree at all. The right hon. Gentleman may not realise it but fixed-penalty notices are now law. They will start to be issued in July, as will drug treatment testing orders, and the right hon. Gentleman must also bear in mind the introduction of antisocial behaviour orders, parenting orders and reparation orders. We will take whatever measures are necessary to crack down on the problem.

I can tell the right hon. Gentleman and other Liberal Democrat Members that every Labour Member knows that problems of antisocial behaviour and juvenile crime must be tackled, and we will take the measures necessary. Given that 80 per cent. of the children who play truant are out on the street with an adult, I believe that most people realise that it is time we made sure that parents took responsibility for the behaviour of their children.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will have seen press coverage over the weekend of British citizens held in jail in Saudi Arabia. They include one of my constituents, Mr. Alexander Mitchell. The prosecutor in that case has asked for lengthy jail sentences for some, and the death penalty for Mr. Mitchell. I know that some contact has been made with the Saudi authorities and the Saudi royal family. Will my right hon. Friend not only sustain that contact and the pressure, but step up the pressure immediately and treat the case as a matter of urgency?

The Prime Minister: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's concerns about the case of Sandy Mitchell. I realise that this is a very difficult time for Mr. Mitchell and, of course, for his family. I appreciate also the measured way in which my hon. Friend has put his question. We are indeed in constant contact with the Saudi authorities. I believe that it is understood by the family—and I know that it is by my hon. Friend—that the best way to approach the matter is not in a public manner but to act behind the scenes so that we can ensure that we do the very best for Mr. Mitchell in these circumstances. I assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to do so. As I said a moment or two ago, we have contact with the Saudi authorities at every level. We will maintain it, and ensure that we do everything that we possibly can to assist Mr. Mitchell and his family.

Q2. [51698] **Richard Younger-Ross** (Teignbridge): Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister was asked:

"Will there be a debate on a motion in the House before there is any conflict in Iraq?"

The Prime Minister responded that

"we will ensure that the House is properly consulted."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2002; Vol. 382, c. 574.]

Will the Prime Minister clarify that answer? Will he assure the House that a debate will take place on a substantive motion before he commits British service men and service women to any further attacks on Iraq? Yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave before. I simply say that since 11 September, for example, there has been the fullest debate and consultation with the House, and I am sure that that will continue to be the case. However, let me point out that we have not yet taken action in Iraq.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that upholding the principles of justice and the rule of law is as important internationally as it is at home? As the United Nations has decided that it should investigate the serious allegations that war

crimes may have been committed in Jenin, is it tolerable that Israel, as the accused party, should seek a veto over what is investigated, who investigates it and the result of that investigation in advance? If it is not acceptable, is it not time for the international community to say what it is prepared to do about it?

The Prime Minister: I very much hope that the UN mission to find out the facts in respect of what happened in Jenin can go ahead. We are in discussion with the Israeli Government, as are the United Nations, the United States Government and others. I know that those negotiations are at a difficult and delicate stage, and I do not want to say more than that I hope very much that the mission goes ahead. As my hon. Friend may know, we too are working very hard to alter the position that currently obtains at Ramallah, where Chairman Arafat is. I do not want to say more about that at this stage, but I think that the proposed fact-finding mission, headed by the UN, with a responsible delegation, would be right not only for the international community but for Israel. I hope that the obstacles in the way of that mission can be removed.

Q3. [51699] **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating West Oxfordshire district council, whose council tax rate of £40 is one of the lowest in the country? Is he aware that this Conservative-controlled council is investing in recreation centres, social housing and doorstep recycling? Does it not show that we can have quality local services without fleecing taxpayers?

The Prime Minister: Of course, but if we look at the 10 top council taxes that are levied in the country, five of them are levied by Conservative councils and none by Labour.

Q4. [51700] **Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): One of the areas in which the Government have made a real difference in their first five years has been on debt relief and international development. With a few weeks to go to the G8 summit, will the Prime Minister tell the House what progress he is making in building political and financial support within the international community for the New Partnership for Africa's Development?

The Prime Minister: It is one of the Government's proudest achievements to have increased significantly overseas aid and development and also, in moves that have been pioneered by my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development, to remove the very high burdens of debt from the most highly indebted countries. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to focus attention on the partnership for Africa that we hope will be agreed at the G8 summit in Canada in June. That will mean that in return for Africa taking the measures necessary on governance, corruption and conflict resolution, there should be better terms of trade, aid and help given to those African countries. Given that a child dies every three seconds in Africa as a result of conflict, famine or disease, it is high time that the international community faced up to its responsibilities for Africa and, in partnership with African countries, offered some hope for the future.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does the Prime Minister recall his Deputy saying just days after the 1997 election—[HON. MEMBERS: "We won!"] This is what he said:

> "I will have failed if in five years time there are not . . . far fewer journeys by car. It's a tall order but I urge you to hold me to it".

Has the Prime Minister held him to it?

The Prime Minister: It is correct that traffic on the roads has increased. It has also increased, incidentally, on rail and the underground. In part, of course, that is because of the 1.25 million extra jobs in the economy. We have had very high levels of economic growth, as opposed to the recessions that we had under the Conservatives.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Now we know that a promise is only a promise if it is not made by the Deputy Prime Minister—no one ever holds him to it. As the Prime Minister knows, punctuality and reliability on the railways have got worse—that is why people are going back on the roads. Delays on the underground have doubled—that is why people are going back on the roads. The Deputy Prime Minister was the Minister responsible for the whole five years. Now we have a new Transport Secretary and he has completely failed to put any of that right. After five years, is not it always the same with the Government? No one takes responsibility, no one apologises and no one resigns.

The Prime Minister: As I pointed out to the right hon. Gentleman a moment or two ago, the numbers of people on rail and underground have risen, not fallen, under this Government. In respect of the rail industry, yes, there are tremendous problems—in part because of a botched privatisation supported by the right hon. Gentleman and his friends.

If the right hon. Gentleman is asking what we take responsibility for, I shall tell him: the strongest economy for decades, with the lowest inflation and interest rates; the lowest unemployment in the western world; 1.25 million extra jobs; the best primary school results the country has ever seen; more teachers; more nurses; and record sustained investment in the national health service. In addition, there is the minimum wage, banning handguns, banning land mines, extra money for aid and development, and constitutional reform. Yes, there is a lot that we can take responsibility for and be proud of.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Does my right hon. Friend share people's concern about the future of the justice system, where those who engage in serious street crime, burglaries and drugs do not get custodial sentences, yet people who find lost property can end up with a custodial sentence? Will my right hon. Friend look into that to see what we can do to ensure that the justice system in this land is fair and efficient?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly look into the point that my hon. Friend made at the end of his question. He is right to draw attention to the very serious problem

of people being bailed and back on the street again when they have a serious record of criminal offences and are then charged with another criminal offence—especially when it involves people with a known drug addiction who have previously committed criminal offences. That is precisely why we are tightening up the law in those areas. As I have already said, I will look into the point made by my hon. Friend.

Q5. [51701] **Mr. James Paice** (South-East Cambridgeshire): Contrary to what the Prime Minister said a few minutes ago, the issue is not one of civilians supporting the police, but of giving civilians police powers. If he wants community support officers to be able to detain people for up to 30 minutes, but not to arrest them, what does he imagine will happen when a gang of young thugs does not want to be detained? Would not it be far better to ensure that proper police powers are given only to people who are fully trained, properly paid and fully qualified, rather than introducing a system that smacks of policing on the cheap?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's point would have some validity were we decreasing the number of police officers: we are not—we are increasing them. Conservative Members are completely wrong in their opposition to community safety officers. For example, in constituencies where such support officers currently work informally with the police they have been immensely successful at reassuring the public and also in having a deterrent effect on local crime. Of course, it is the case that we need more police officers. We are providing more police officers and they have the appropriate powers, but I think it wholly wrong of the Conservative party to oppose the idea that, as well as police officers with the full range of powers, we have community safety officers who can act in support and give a real sense of security to local communities. Like many other measures that we have introduced, I am sure that, once they are actually introduced, the Conservatives will say that they supported them all along.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the current international situation—especially the priorities of Afghanistan, the middle east and Africa—it is vital that the World Service receives adequate funding to continue broadcasting in languages such as Pushtu, Persian and Urdu? Will my right hon. Friend, with the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary, look favourably during the comprehensive spending review at the World Service's bid for further moneys from the Foreign Office grant to continue broadcasting in those languages?

The Prime Minister: First, I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the World Service, which does a magnificent job. I saw for myself, in the interviews that I did with Pushtun radio for Afghanistan, how hugely important it was in getting a message through to ordinary people in that country. Obviously, the spending review is being conducted during the next few months. I shall take that as a very bold and good early bid, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been listening.

Q6. [51702] **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): Bearing in mind today's Select Committee findings on the individual learning accounts that the Government failed to take early advice and failed to heed the warnings of the potential for abuse, does the Prime Minister agree with the Select Committee's findings that there is at least a moral case to pay compensation to training providers who acted in good faith, but whose schemes were terminated by the abrupt ending of the scheme?

The Prime Minister: It had to be terminated for reasons that I am sure the hon. Gentleman understands, but we have just received the report. We will consider it carefully before making detailed determinations on it; but, of course, we will study very carefully the conclusions of the Committee.

Q7. [51703] **David Hamilton** (Midlothian): I believe that I am now living in possibly the most dangerous time that I can ever recall in my lifetime, and I was at school during the Cuban crisis. I believe that the problems in the middle east are of such a nature that we are living in a tinderbox. I refer to the question asked earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden). At what point does the Prime Minister feel that it would be appropriate to take action against Israel, which is committing atrocities against the Palestinians?

The Prime Minister: As I have said before—not today, but when answering questions on this in previous Question Times—the most important thing for us to do is to try to resolve the situation. I know that there are very strong feelings, understandably, about what has happened in Jenin and elsewhere. Of course it is always important that we say also that there are tremendously strong feelings in Israel about the terrorist acts that have meant the loss of so many innocent civilians in Israel, too.

I regard our best role as working with the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and others to try to resolve this. That is why the most important thing in the immediate term is to deal particularly with the situation at Ramallah, which is very serious indeed, and at the Nativity Church in Bethlehem. We are working very hard to try to give both sides a way out of the immediate impasse and then, in the longer term, we have to restart the political process. It is not a lack of concern that means that we are not out there every day with statements that Israel should do this, or that the Palestinians should do that.

We really believe that the best way to be influential and effective in this situation is to work with the parties to get something done. We can all condemn what is happening and, for understandable reasons, people take very strong positions on it, but the main thing is to get the situation resolved because I agree with my hon. Friend totally that this situation is very dangerous, not just for the middle east, but for the wider world.

Q8. [51704] **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): Will the Prime Minister comment on his Chancellor's biggest change in personal taxation, which was to put a duty on pension funds through the changes in advance corporation tax, which means that pension funds are £5 billion a year worse off than before? Does he realise that that is a major contributor to the closure of final salary schemes, which means that millions of people in their 30s and 40s will no longer be able to look forward to a retirement with

independence and security? Will he apologise to those people, or is it part of the Government's policy to put people on means-tested benefits?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that, and I do not accept that that measure has the consequences that the hon. Gentleman suggests. I would also point out that, of course, we have massively cut corporation tax for businesses. In addition, it is extremely important that we have now altered the situation that we inherited five years ago, when we were paying out so much in interest payments on the national debt that it exceeded all the money that we spent on the school system. It was therefore important to ensure that we brought that debt under control. That has made for a more stable economy, more and better financing and a situation where the stock market has risen. All those things help pension funds, rather than not. So I simply say to the hon. Gentleman that I do not accept the premise of his question. In particular, I do not accept that we were wrong to take that measure; it was necessary both in its own terms and to sort out the problems of the economy that we inherited from the previous Government.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is aware that I have nagged him and his Ministers relentlessly about the need for a new Scottish air traffic control centre. Will he therefore accept my welcome for today's announcement that, in future, Prestwick will control almost 70 per cent. of all UK air traffic? Does he agree that this should confound the critics who said that the centre would never come about, and does he accept that it illustrates the advantage for Scotland in its partnership within the UK?

The Prime Minister: We promised the modernised Prestwick centre, and we promised that to my hon. Friend's constituents. Like so many other things, it has been delivered.

ROYAL ASSENT

3.31 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Football Disorder (Amendment) Act 2002

Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002

National Heritage Act 2002

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002

Greenham and Crookham Commons Act 2002

Speaker's Statement

3.32 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have carefully considered the important matters raised on Monday by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) concerning evidence obtained for the Lockerbie trial. I must inform him that acts by prosecuting authorities in Scotland are devolved matters for which no Minister in the House bears responsibility. I am sure, however, that those responsible will have noted the matters that he raised in his point of order.

The Table Office will, of course, offer any assistance to the hon. Gentleman about any international aspects of the Lockerbie case which may fall within the responsibility of United Kingdom Ministers.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I thank you and your advisers for the care that you have given to this complex matter? Is not part of the difficulty the imprecisions that were not addressed on the passage of the Scotland Act 1998? Is there not an important matter of principle, however? When there is a long report from Dr. Hans Koechler, who was appointed by Kofi Annan for the United Nations, should not the subject of that report—the conduct of the trial—also be a matter for the House of Commons? After all, United Nations matters are surely matters for Westminster and not for the Mound.

Mr. Speaker: I have nothing to add to my statement.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have a constituent, Dr. Jim Swire, whose daughter Flora died in the dreadful Lockerbie incident, and who feels very concerned about these matters. Could you advise me on how I can best represent his interests, as I am a Member of this Parliament but not of the Scottish Parliament? Could you give Members such as me advice on that?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady will note that I said in the last paragraph of my statement that the Table Office will give any assistance that it can on this matter.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Are there not constitutional implications affecting the position of the House of Lords as the supreme court in this country? Would you be prepared to reflect on that point and speak to the House again?

Mr. Speaker: This matter was the subject of a criminal trial and there would be no appeal to the House of Lords on that.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Following the points that have been made, led by the Father of the House, may I register the fact that I am the constituency Member representing Mrs. Ann Mann, whose brother, his wife and their two children—the whole family—were killed in that dreadful disaster? By your ruling, there is now a serious issue as to whether I have the powers of representation—

as the constituency Member in the national Parliament of the United Kingdom—that I would expect on behalf of any constituent in the privilege of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: We all feel for the relatives of the Lockerbie victims and our hearts go out to them. The hon. Gentleman can continue to represent Mrs. Mann. The Table Office and any Officer of the House will seek to give as much assistance as possible to help the relatives of Lockerbie victims who live in any Member's constituency.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker, and to the point raised by the Father of the House. My constituent, Martin Cadman, lost his beloved son on that flight and he is very concerned by Dr. Hans Koechler's report. Mr. Cadman is anxious for me to initiate an Adjournment debate in the House. If I apply for an Adjournment debate, will it be in order, given your earlier ruling?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should apply for the Adjournment debate. He will not get the debate unless he asks for it. If his Adjournment debate is against the rules of the House, I will not be able to grant it. However, if it is within the rules of the House, he stands a good chance of securing it.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): On a separate and much simpler point of order, Mr. Speaker. A week ago, I tabled 14 questions to the Home Office about specific matters relating to immigration. Two of the questions were subsequently transferred to the Lord Chancellor's Department, and I have no quarrel with that. I asked the questions specifically for a named day—yesterday—and I gave the Home Office six working days to answer the questions when I could have given it just three.

Twelve of the answers came back to me last night, and all of them contained the words, "I will reply as soon as possible." I have spoken to the Home Office and I have let it know that I believe that to be wholly unsatisfactory. The Home Office has apologised for the lack of answers, but I raise this point of order because answering parliamentary questions is not a voluntary option for Departments or Ministers. A named day is specified so that Members receive replies on that day. Will you, Mr. Speaker, be good enough to say, at the very least, that it is your wish that Ministers answer parliamentary questions on the day they are due?

Mr. Speaker: I am very keen that all Back Benchers should receive proper replies that are delivered in decent time. I promise the hon. Gentleman that I will look into his complaint and I will reply to him.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): Further to the point of order raised by the Father of the House, Mr. Speaker. Are we, in effect, being told that there are functions of the Crown in this country that we cannot refer to a responsible Minister in this national Parliament?

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Scotland Act 1998 went through the House and there are devolved matters. I refer him to the last paragraph of my statement. On any question or matter that he wishes to raise, he is entitled to seek the assistance of Officers of the House.

Port Protection Authority

3.39 pm

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a Port Protection Authority to exercise those powers and responsibilities now exercised by port health authorities, trading standards authorities and HM Customs and Excise; to monitor the legality, quality and integrity of imported goods and to collect any duties upon them; and to report annually to Parliament on its effectiveness in carrying out its duties.

The purpose of the Bill is to strengthen import controls at sea ports and airports by simplifying the structures and making the lines of accountability more transparent. There is much public concern about the control of imports into the United Kingdom. Large quantities of drugs, tobacco, alcohol and meat are smuggled into Britain each year. The current system of import control is complex and involves a number of different agencies, including Customs and Excise, which is responsible to the Treasury, trading standards departments, which are a local authority function, and port health authorities, which are local authorities in their own right.

The arrangements have evolved for historic reasons and do not meet the challenges of modern trading practices. Port health authorities, for instance, were originally established to keep out human diseases such as plague and cholera, but are now mainly responsible for food imports of animal origin. There are no port health authorities at our airports and they operate in only some sea ports. Local authorities take over those duties in the authority's absence. For instance, three different local authorities are involved at Heathrow airport because the various warehouses and buildings are situated in different authority areas. The Food Standards Agency is responsible for imports of food stuffs of non-animal origin, but the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for meat and food stuffs of animal origin.

All those bodies have different powers of enforcement and function. The complexity is immense. Naturally, Customs and Excise is mainly concerned with the collection of import duties and discovering illegal drugs. Other illegal imports are of a lower priority, yet Customs and Excise is the authority with the greatest power to stop, search and detain goods.

The volume of contraband entering the country poses a real threat to the health and wealth of the people of Britain. Evasion of duty on tobacco and alcohol puts at risk the viability of our pubs and shops. At the same time, the Treasury is losing millions in revenue each year. Illegal food imports can have very damaging effects on human and animal health. I am not criticising the people in those agencies who are battling to stem the tide of illegal imports, but current structures mean that although some responsibilities overlap, there is a lack of coverage in other areas. There is also the problem of agencies sharing intelligence in the fast moving world of imports and exports.

There is reason to believe that the number of personnel involved in this work has been reduced. What is needed is a simpler structure with sufficient resources to collect more of the duty that is being lost and to prevent the importation of diseases such as foot and mouth into this country, which cost our taxpayers more than £4 billion.

Owing to the time constraints, I shall concentrate on illegal meat and food imports. They raise three serious concerns and consequences: first, the danger to human health; secondly, the danger to the health of domestic and wild animals; and, thirdly, the possible effect on endangered species as a result of the importation of bush meat and wildlife. The potential for damage to human health is enormous—damage from a number of exotic viral diseases such as Ebola, simian immune deficiency virus, monkey pox and the Nipah virus, all of which are possibly transmitted from animals and meat to human beings. Other more common pathogens, such as E.coli and salmonella, could be present in imported meat, particularly chicken, and even on some salad crops.

Many non-European Union countries have production systems that involve animal welfare standards, antibiotics, other drugs and insecticides that are not allowed in this country. Some of the residues are harmful to human health. Even EU countries have been found exporting food to us that contains specified risk material, such as spinal cord in beef carcases that could be infected with the BSE prion, which in turn could go on to cause new variant CJD in humans. All those risks are substantial and need to be monitored. Some meat is imported illegally, with forged documentation and false health stamps, while other consignments are hidden in non-food containers or containers of fruit or vegetables.

I turn now to animal health risks. Although it cannot be claimed for certain, it is highly likely that foot and mouth disease entered this country through some type of imported food. It is only one example of how this country suffers during an epidemic, and it shows how vulnerable we are to such diseases. Foot and mouth is only one such disease; there are many others, including classical swine fever and sheep pox.

There are many theories about how such diseases could enter the country. One idea is that they may enter in waste food from airports and ships, but there is already a requirement to destroy such waste rather than feeding it to pigs as swill, and since foot and mouth the feeding of swill to pigs has been made illegal. Many suspect that diseases are introduced by individuals bringing food into the country, and I shall refer to bush meat imports in a moment. At present, it is legal for an individual to bring in 1 kg of cooked meat in an hermetically sealed container. Many travellers do not understand the law and bring in much more than that, and sometimes the law is deliberately flouted.

Most countries have far stricter regulations on individual travellers than we do, and they undertake far more stringent surveillance. People entering those countries have to sign a declaration and deposit any food in waste containers. Britain has a far more lax approach, and lacks the resources to implement the regulations that we do have.

Bush meat imports are definitely on the increase, with an estimated 1,000 tonnes of illegally imported meat entering the UK each year. Bush meat gives rise to all three problems that I have identified. It is a threat to human health; it is a threat to animal health; and it is a threat to vulnerable species in danger of extinction, including species of monkey, leopard, antelope, porcupine, and chimpanzee and the great apes. Bush meat is subject to no health standards in its country of origin, and it is very often brought into the UK by couriers in domestic luggage without any refrigeration or consideration for hygiene. The effects on

the animal population and on human health are potentially devastating. I may mention here the campaign against bush meat and live imports by the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner).

More and more goods, including meat and other food, are being traded across the world. Britain imports 50 per cent. of its food. It is the duty and responsibility of our Government to protect our people from disease and inferior quality products. The present complex arrangement is failing to achieve an acceptable level of protection. A new single-purpose authority, adequately resourced, would not only raise additional sources of revenue but protect this country from the worst threats of disease. It would not curtail trading, which is so important to us, but would increase the confidence of consumers and customers, so trade would be enhanced.

I welcome the recent Government action plan on meat imports, but there remains the problem of which body or bodies will enforce it. The only sensible solution is to set up a single body to take responsibility for activities in air and sea ports. It should report annually on its effectiveness to a combined Select Committee representing all those with an interest in the body.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Roger Williams, Lembit Öpik, Mr. David Heath, Matthew Green, Albert Owen, Mr. Simon Thomas, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mr. Colin Breed and Mr. Alan Reid.

PORT PROTECTION AUTHORITY

Mr. Roger Williams accordingly presented a Bill to establish a Port Protection Authority to exercise those powers and responsibilities now exercised by port health authorities, trading standards authorities and HM Customs and Excise; to monitor the legality, quality and integrity of imported goods and to collect any duties upon them; and to report annually to Parliament on its effectiveness in carrying out its duties: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 132].

ENTERPRISE BILL (PROGRAMME) (No. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the Order of 10th April (Enterprise Bill (Programme)) be amended by the substitution in paragraph 3 (Proceedings in Standing Committee) of the words 'Thursday 16th May' for the words 'Tuesday 14th May'.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Ways and Means

NATIONAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS

3.49 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): I beg to move,

That provision may be made for, and in connection with, increasing national insurance contributions and for applying the increases towards the cost of the National Health Service.

There is a simple reason to support the motion: to secure high-quality public services and an NHS comprehensively available and free at the point of need. The motion paves the way for the Bill that will introduce changes to the national insurance legislation. It is right that the House should have the opportunity to debate it prior to the Bill.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Given the great emphasis placed on the proposed national insurance changes by the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, is my right hon. Friend surprised by his absence? Perhaps it is symptomatic of the shambles that is Her Majesty's Opposition these days.

Mr. Smith: That is a matter for the Opposition. I can only conclude that the shadow Chancellor did not relish debating the issues yet again this afternoon. I shall have more to say later about his record and that of his right hon. and hon. Friends.

We are continuing the principle established in the 1940s of raising resources towards the cost of the national health service through national insurance contributions. The Bill will allocate those resources to a modern health service, building on the Beveridge principles to provide a system of comprehensive care on which we can all rely and of which we can all be proud. An NHS free to all at the point of need has been the subject of a consensus that has endured for the past 50 years. It is the fairest and most efficient way of funding health care and it was, until the last general election, the policy of the Conservative party.

I remind Conservative Members of the promise that they made at the last election. The shadow Chancellor stated at the time:

"There will be no charges. Do not believe the lies which are being spread by our opponents. Conservatives will retain a free and comprehensive national health service."

That is what they said then, but they refuse to give that commitment now. While the Conservative party is abandoning its promise and commitment to the NHS, we are delivering on ours.

Together with far-reaching reform, the extra resources that we are providing will deliver a health service worthy of a consensus of support for the years to come. I believe that the British people will draw a sharp contrast between the clarity, purpose and energy of our proposals, and the vacuous, evasive and world-weary cynicism of the shadow Chancellor and the Conservative Opposition, saying in public that they do not know what their policy is, while saying in private that charges—the shadow Health Secretary's self-pay system—are the way forward.

In contrast, the Government believe that national insurance contributions are the fairest way of raising additional resources for the NHS. Using national

[Mr. Smith]

insurance will ensure that people contribute according to their ability to pay. It will also ensure that vulnerable groups on fixed incomes, such as pensioners, will be protected, and that incentives to save will be unaffected.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I should like to impart to him a piece of information. The proposed national insurance contributions will increase by £900,000 per annum the take from Solihull council alone as an employer, quite apart from the cost to its employees or all the other employers and employees in Solihull. In other words, there will be many, many millions of pounds annually of extra money from my constituency. I will do a deal with the Minister. If he will give us a 24-hour accident and emergency facility at Solihull hospital, he can keep the change.

Mr. Smith: I take it from those comments that the hon. Gentleman means that, having talked to his constituents in Solihull, he will support us if the extra money goes into the national health service and raises standards as we propose. Were he to do so—*[Interruption.]* Either he wants the money for Solihull hospital or he does not.

Mr. Taylor: I am asking the right hon. Gentleman to spend the money not in the ways that he proposes, but in the ways that I propose.

Mr. Smith: We will spend the money in the way in which the patients and public of Solihull need it to be spent. Commitments and reforms are being introduced that will deliver higher standards, shorter waiting times and more nurses and doctors—the very things that I am sure his constituents want.

Mr. Taylor: I accept that remark in the spirit in which it was made, and I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what the people of Solihull want: 24-hour accident and emergency facilities at Solihull hospital. That is what they want and what they have told me to tell him.

Mr. Smith: And I am sure that they want a national health service that is comprehensively available and free at the point of need. That is the commitment that this party and this Government are making, but which Conservative Front Benchers refuse to make. The hon. Gentleman might like to take that message back to the people of Solihull and indeed to reflect on it himself.

To increase resources, employees and the self-employed will pay an extra 1 per cent. of all their earnings above £89 a week, so someone on the median income of £410 a week will pay £3.70, and those on higher incomes will pay more, while those on lower incomes will pay less. Indeed, half of families with children will pay less overall because of the introduction of the child tax credit and the working tax credit. As employers have a strong interest in having a healthy work force, they will make an equivalent additional contribution. It was the Confederation of British Industry that estimated that workplace absence cost British business more than £10 billion in 1999. I am sure that many employers would regard investment in their employees' health and welfare as not only a social obligation, but an economic necessity.

The extra money that we are investing must secure extra results, so my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has already announced vital new reforms, including new financial incentives for hospital performance, greater freedoms for high-performing hospitals and trusts, powers and resources that are devolved to front-line staff and primary care trusts, reform of social services care for the elderly and a series of measures increasing choice for patients. For the first time in the history of the NHS, there will be independent audit, inspection and scrutiny of patient complaints with a duty to account and report to the public on money spent and standards achieved. In future, an annual report to Parliament will be prepared by the new independent auditor, accounting for the money allocated to the NHS, where it has been spent and the results of the expenditure.

There will be a new system of financial incentives for NHS organisations. Hospitals that can treat more patients will earn more money. Traditional incentives have worked in the opposite direction; indeed, the poorest performers have often received most financial help. We will therefore introduce a new system for money to flow around the health service, ending perverse incentives and paying hospitals by results. The incentive will be to treat more NHS patients more quickly and to higher standards.

Patient choice will drive that system. Starting with those who have the most serious clinical conditions, patients will have a greater choice about when and where they are treated. From this summer, patients who have been waiting six months for a heart operation will be able to choose a hospital that has the capacity to offer quicker treatment.

So on the basis of reform and modernisation, we have announced the largest ever increase in investment in the NHS, raising United Kingdom NHS spending on average by 7.4 per cent. in real terms each year—an annual cash rise of 10 per cent. not just for three years, but for five years.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): The Chief Secretary said that the fairest way to fund the extra money for the health service was through national insurance. Does he accept that some of the richest people in the land live not on earned income but on dividends and investment income, and that they will not pay a penny towards the increase to help the health service? Would not it therefore have been fairer to use income tax?

Mr. Smith: No, we do not accept that. The hon. Gentleman must accept that if we raised the money primarily through income tax, many pensioners on fixed incomes would have to pay more, and it would deter saving. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman mutters about affluent pensioners from a sedentary position. I remind him that many moderately affluent pensioners are on fixed incomes and watch every penny of their expenditure. Any Government would need to consider carefully before raising the money through them.

Mr. Webb: The Chief Secretary is generous to give way again. He may have misheard my sedentary comment. The Government repeatedly tell us that two thirds of pensioners do not pay any tax. We therefore

exempt all pensioners, rich and poor alike, but we put a levy on some low earners and exclude the filthy rich who live off dividends and investments.

Mr. Smith: We reformed the national insurance system to take out the lowest earners. As I have already explained, the combination of the working tax credit and the child tax credit means that half of families with children will not pay extra in overall terms, even allowing for national insurance contributions.

As a consequence of what we are doing, and yearly increases in investment, UK health spending will grow from £65.4 billion this year to £105.6 billion in 2007–08. Even after inflation, that is a 43 per cent. increase over five years. That is a real-terms doubling of health service investment since 1997. United Kingdom health spending will therefore rise from 6.7 per cent. of national income in 1997 and 7.7 per cent. of national income this year to 9.4 per cent. by 2007–08.

Let me give some examples of what the new investment will mean. It will deliver 35,000 more nurses, 15,000 more doctors, 40 new hospitals and 500 primary care centres, which will all provide better care and quicker treatment times. We will realise our commitment on the national health service and make clear the choice about our public services. The debates on the Budget and the Finance Bill show that the dividing line is not only between those who support raising national insurance and those who do not, but between those who support a national health service that is comprehensively available and free at the point of need and those who would abandon it.

The country faces a clear choice between a high-quality national health service that fulfils the needs of the British people and that is funded through general taxation, and a system whereby families are forced to take out private insurance and have to pay more for treatment through charges. We choose the NHS, the Opposition choose charges. We are providing record new investment, combined with reform, to deliver results as we reaffirm the basic principle of the national health service: health care should be available on the basis of need, not ability to pay.

To vote for the motion is to back the NHS, which the British people want and deserve. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Speaker: I inform hon. Members that I have not selected the amendment in the name of the nationalist parties.

4.4 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): The Government's aim in tabling the motion and introducing the national insurance contributions Bill, whenever it eventually makes its way to the House for a belated Second Reading, is to perpetuate the two great myths about the Chancellor's recent Budget.

The first is that the Budget is almost solely about increasing expenditure on the national health service. The second is that raising taxes in the manner proposed in this motion will be sufficient to bring about the kind of improvement in the quality of health care that all of us want—whatever our political party.

The Conservatives believe that both those Government claims are misleading. The first claim—that rises in national insurance contributions are all about funding the NHS and nothing else—was blown out of the water by the research carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). Drawing on figures prepared by the House of Commons Library, he pointed out that the Government plan to increase their spending on the NHS by a smaller amount than the increase planned for the expenditure on benefits and tax credits.

That leads me to a number of more detailed points about the motion, which I hope the Chief Secretary or the Paymaster General will respond to if time permits at the end of this debate. The motion will allow for provision to be made for increasing national insurance contributions, and for applying those increases towards the costs of the national health service. Does that mean that the Government are proposing that all revenue from those increases in contributions will be applied exclusively to health expenditure? If not, what proportion of the revenue from those increases will be so applied?

This is an important point, because the Government have got themselves into a tangle over their own arguments. If all the revenue that will flow from the proposed increases in national insurance contributions in 2003–04 were spent on the NHS, that sum would, according to our calculations, be greater than the planned rise in NHS spending, much of which was funded anyway. Surely the Chancellor also said in his Budget statement that the income from freezing personal allowances was supposed to go towards helping the NHS and not towards other Government expenditure. We would be grateful for further elucidation on those points.

The truth is that we are faced with this motion today because the Government are trying to pretend that they are not putting up taxes on income when, in fact, they are, and that all the extra money is intended for the NHS when it is not.

The second myth about the Budget is that, by implementing this motion and the Bill that will follow it, the Government will finally be able to bring about the improvements in health care that Ministers have promised us repeatedly over the past five years but have so far failed to deliver. In his opening speech, the Chief Secretary said—as we have heard other Ministers say over those five years—that additional expenditure has been provided and that there will be important new health service reforms to ensure that that money is properly spent.

In a recent statement, the Secretary of State for Health made what Conservative Members might regard as one or two encouraging noises. There was talk about the money following the patient, and the Chief Secretary is now talking about patient choice receiving greater priority. Indeed, one might suggest that the Ministers should christen these reforms "the internal market", were it not for the fact that that would cause too much embarrassment on the Benches behind them.

We are sceptical, partly because we have heard all this so many times before, and partly because the ministerial language about greater freedom of choice, more flexibility, and decentralisation contrasts starkly with the experience of the health service in our constituencies. When I went to talk to my local primary care trust just a few days ago, I was told that it had been given clear

[Mr. David Lidington]

instructions by the NHS top management that it must give priority to meeting the Government's acute hospital waiting list targets, rather than any other targets that the PCT might wish to set to reflect its own judgment of what was best for the health of the people in its area, or any other targets specified by the Department of Health as those that PCTs were created to implement.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. Last week, the chair of my primary care trust said that, as a result of the Chancellor's previous Budgets, there were already well-advanced plans for three new health centres in Harworth, Worksop and Warsop in my constituency. The hon. Gentleman can look at my website to get the details. Is he mistaken in his view? Never mind the increases announced in the current Budget, the Chancellor was able to fund increases from money provided in previous Budgets.

Mr. Lidington: I can only contrast the hon. Gentleman's experience with that in my part of the world, where the primary care trust, far from talking about improvements in health care, is, sadly, having to discuss reductions in health care. It cannot replace district nurses or speech therapists because of the debt that it inherited from its predecessor organisations.

The point that I was trying to make was that there needs to be much greater decentralisation and devolution of power to take decisions in the national health service. I am sceptical about whether that is what we will get from the Government. Our scepticism derives partly from seeing the record of how the money that the Government have allocated to health expenditure in recent years has been spent.

In the financial year 2000–01, no less than £629 million of the money that was allocated by the Government for the national health service was never spent. According to the report published this week by the Select Committee on the Treasury, the Government have been extremely slow in producing measures to ensure that money allocated is effectively spent, and that necessary reforms to the management of those resources are introduced. Paragraph 39 of the report was agreed unanimously by members of the Committee from all parties without any division during the deliberative sitting. The Committee concluded:

"On the issue of underspending, and of the matching of money to reforms, promised by the Chancellor . . . it remains far from clear what sanctions are proposed and how they might be implemented."

I believe that, without change, we will not see the difference to the quality of health care that all hon. Members want.

John Mann: My hospital has a new accident and emergency unit, which was created in the past two years. Has not the hon. Gentleman's hospital also had one?

Mr. Lidington: The straightforward answer is no. If the hon. Gentleman looks back at the history of the health service under 18 years of Conservative government and five years of Labour government, he will find that there are examples under both Administrations of particular units being redeveloped and new facilities provided. At the moment, the Government—certainly in the form of the Labour party chairman—have admitted that performance in public services is patchy and in some cases has been getting worse. There is a vast gap between the improvement that people expect, and believed that the Government had promised them, and the standards being delivered.

The Government would have us believe that the answer is simply to enable large amounts of public money, raised through additional taxation, to be spent on the health service, without the thorough reform that is necessary. To spot the problems with that we need only look at Scotland and Wales, where spending is much higher than in England but the service is worse in some important respects, and becoming worse still.

Of course our constituents want more to be spent on health care, and so does my party. I want to make that clear beyond question to the Chief Secretary. People also want the United Kingdom's health service to match and, if possible, surpass the highest standards that patients can find in other developed countries. Again, so do we. The Government are in danger of underestimating the extent to which members of the public now assess, with increasing interest, the service available in some European countries in particular, and ask why treatments and waiting times provided by our partners in Europe are better, in certain key respects, than those in the national health service. They want to know why we cannot learn lessons from the experience of our neighbours.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Perhaps the people to whom the hon. Gentleman refers are employed by Conservative central office. Opinion polls have shown that 70 per cent. of the nation warmly welcomes the Government's commitment to funding the health service publicly. How can he say that the general public view is that the service should not be funded in the way that we propose?

Mr. Lidington: I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman maintains such a closed mind on the subject. The same opinion polls show that the public do not believe that the measures announced by the Government will deliver the improvements in health care that they want. Polls also show increased readiness to look at experience elsewhere, especially since some patients from south-east England in particular have begun to experience treatment in European hospitals as a consequence of measures introduced recently by Ministers.

Mr. Andrew Smith: While on the subject of open minds, perhaps the hon. Gentleman could open his mind a little and share his thinking with us; otherwise, when the public judge these matters they will conclude that he and his party are in an intellectually and politically bankrupt position. The Conservatives say that they recognise the need for extra money for the health service and that they respect certain of its principles, but they will not say how much they would put in and where they would get it from. Will he give the public an idea of how much extra money he is talking about, and where he would find it?

Mr. Lidington: The right hon. Gentleman protests too much. He has heard what our position is from my right hon. Friends the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor, and from other Conservative Members.

Mr. Smith: What is it?

Mr. Lidington: The right hon. Gentleman knows that we are committed to giving the people of this country a

health service of world standard to which everyone will have access, and that we believe that top-quality health care should be available to the British people irrespective of their ability to pay. He is right that we have not yet produced a finished, costed policy proposal, but I remind him that when my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) was elected Leader of the Opposition roughly seven months ago, he instituted a thorough policy review including, naturally, a review of our policy on health care.

The public would expect of a party such as mine, which suffered a right clobbering in two successive general elections, a period of careful and thorough reflection on its policies.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston) *rose—*

Mr. Lidington: They would expect Conservatives to examine the experience of other countries, and to offer clear and costed proposals when we have completed that period of analysis. That is what we shall do—and well before the next general election.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Yesterday's *Financial Times* states:

"The Conservatives have put back plans to unveil policy announcements on health for at least another year, believing voters still have too much faith in the government's ability to turn round the National Health Service."

Is that true?

Mr. Lidington: No. The timing of our announcement will be determined by our satisfying ourselves that we have the right policy mix to provide the top-quality service that people expect and are entitled to, and by our working out how that service should be financed and what it will cost. We can then put forward detailed proposals that will stand up to the rigorous debate and scrutiny that we will be happy to submit them to.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lidington: No, I shall not give way again now. I have given a clear explanation of where we stand on this matter.

The way to secure the improvement that people want is to learn from the experience of others. We should not, as the Government would have us do, close our minds to lessons from abroad on how we could modernise and improve the quality of health care.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): As the hon. Gentleman does not want closed minds, he is presumably aware that a large range of systems exists throughout Europe: from the Danish system that, although a little more decentralised than ours, is similar in most respects, to the French system, in which people pay to see their doctor. As he suggests, all European systems deliver quicker treatment for patients and shorter waiting times. However, that can surely be attributed not to the existence of many different funding systems—including systems such as ours—but to the fact that every single other country has more doctors per head of population.

Mr. Lidington: I have already told the House that we accept the need for additional resources for health care. We must get right the amount of money that goes into health care, but we also need a much greater degree of decentralisation and devolution of decision-making powers than exists under the current system. The record shows, however, that we are not going to get that from the current team of Ministers. We further need to decide on a way of funding the health service that will lever in resources in the quantity achieved by the European countries to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Matthew Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is unsure about how to reform funding, but he agrees that we need more doctors. He and his party agree that we need to put more money into social services, so that we can pay for care for elderly people in residential and nursing homes and in their own homes, thereby freeing up hospital beds. Why, therefore, should we wait to implement those measures until his party has come up with an alternative that it has yet to think of? Why not act now and spend the money on social services, and on the provision of the extra doctors whom he agrees are needed?

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman is ignoring the fact that the Government were elected five years ago, and again last year, on a programme of promised improvements to the health service. We believe that reforms are needed to deliver those promised improvements in quality. The Government have not come forward with the necessary proposals for reform, and on those grounds we do not believe they have justified the tax increases that they propose today. I am only sorry that the hon. Gentleman has been left alone in the Chamber today by his colleagues and I wish that he had been able to persuade more of them to attend.

We intend to hold the Government to their word, both on the reforms that they have promised but failed to deliver to the health service and on employees' contributions to national insurance. The Chancellor, in his evidence to the Treasury Committee in December last year, said that he had made a pledge not to raise income tax because the Government "wanted to reward work". He said that that was

"an essential part of the Government's strategy in encouraging and reinvigorating the work ethic."

It would be hard to devise any measure better calculated to blow a hole in that strategy than an increase in taxation that hits only those people who are in work. As the Institute for Fiscal Studies has pointed out, the increase in contributions and the removal of the ceiling

"delivers a tax increase which is very, very close to being identical to an increase of 1 per cent. in the 10 per cent., 22 per cent. and 40 per cent. rates of Income Tax."

Other groups at work will be hit disproportionately hard. We have about 100,000 older women and widows on low pay who rely on their husbands' pension provision through the national insurance system and pay only 3.85 per cent. rather than the standard 10 per cent. rate. A 1 per cent. increase in the rate payable by those mostly older women, many of whom are now approaching retirement, means an effective rise of a quarter in the contribution that they pay to the Treasury.

Mr. Hendrick: It is strange that the Liberal Democrats are criticising us for not putting a penny on income tax while the Conservatives are accusing us of doing precisely

[Mr. Hendrick]

that. What is the reason for the difference between the two Opposition parties? I would have thought that opposition is opposition.

Mr. Lidington: One thing I have learned in my time is not to attempt to claim responsibility for what happens on the Liberal Democrat Benches. We also intend to hold the Government to account on what they have said on the national insurance ceiling. The present Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said in May last year:

"We've got no plans at all to raise that ceiling on national insurance contributions . . . It is not going to happen."

However, the Chancellor and his team still cling to the pretence that the ceiling remains in place. As the Chancellor said when delivering his Budget:

"Save for this 1 per cent. contribution, the ceiling . . . remains in place".—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2002; Vol. 382, c. 591.]

Mr. Tom Harris: I wonder what position the hon. Gentleman held in the Conservative party in 1979, when Sir Geoffrey Howe promised the country that his party would not double the rate of VAT, but subsequently did so when it got into office. I also wonder what position he held when John Major, the former Prime Minister, promised not to extend VAT but then did so after the 1992 general election.

Mr. Lidington: On the first point, I was a student at the time. There is little point in going back and looking at what happened 20 and more years ago. I do not recall members of the Labour party praising Conservative Ministers for being ready to change their minds on those measures. Instead of going into the pros and cons of the Budgets of 1979 and 1992, we should remember that the key point, in the wake of the 2001 general election result, is that we agree that the quality of public services should take priority in the framing of policy for the future of this country, but we believe that the Government's approach will not deliver that quality. The Government's proposal will hit individuals and companies very hard through the imposition of tax increases.

How can the ceiling remain in place when people are paying national insurance contributions on income above that level? The Treasury Select Committee was surely right to conclude earlier this week that Government rhetoric on the matter was mere sophistry. That is a pretty damning indictment of the arguments employed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and by others on his team.

However, I noticed that the Chief Secretary did not speak at all in his opening comments about the nature of the powers that the Government intend to assume. The Treasury Select Committee has rightly asked that the national insurance contributions Bill be framed in such a way that further primary legislation would still be needed before the rate of charge above the upper earnings limit could be increased. I hope that Ministers will make it clear later in the debate whether that will be the case. It would be wrong for the Government to include in the Bill an enabling power that allowed them to rush through further breaches of the national insurance contributions ceiling without adequate debate and scrutiny.

If the Paymaster General is unable to give that pledge when she winds up the debate tonight, that will only reinforce the widespread and growing suspicion that the Budget is only the first step towards the Government's objective of scrapping the upper limit altogether. People and companies must have real doubts about the Government's intentions, given the increasing scepticism expressed by many independent observers, as well as Opposition Members of Parliament, about the reliability of the Government's forecasts for economic growth. Such doubts were expressed most recently in a study published by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

The Chief Secretary did not refer either to the position of self-employed people. The Government have rightly talked a great deal about the need to encourage enterprise and competitiveness in this country, but the proposed increase in national contributions for self-employed people will act as a disincentive to enterprise, and will discourage it. Even allowing for the offsetting effects of tax deductibility, the proposals mean that a self-employed person with an annual income of about £20,000 a year could expect to pay an extra £143 a year, that one on £30,000 a year could expect to pay £232 more, and that one on £40,000 could pay £868 a year in additional national insurance contributions.

However, we intend to hold the Government to their word on employers' national insurance contributions. The proposals have rightly been dubbed a straightforward tax on jobs. The Labour party's business manifesto last year stated:

"United Kingdom business taxation levels, including employers' social security contributions and corporation tax, are competitive with the rest of the European Union. This is a situation we intend to maintain."

The motion breaks that pledge too.

All over the country, businesses and trade organisations are reckoning up the risks that the motion poses to their competitiveness and future success. Representatives of the glass industry told me only this morning that the increase in employers' national insurance contributions will give rise to an extra bill for them of around £1.5 million each year.

John Mann: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lidington: No, I have given way to the hon. Gentleman twice already.

This week, the director general of the Confederation of British Industry said that businesses around the country are accusing the Government of

"talking an enterprise game . . . and yet on a major thing—something that overshadows it all—they are actually going backwards."

Even before this Budget, the CBI's figures showed that the business tax burden is higher in only one of our major trading partners than it is in the United Kingdom.

If business has to pay out more on national insurance, it will have less money to spend on other things. If business has to pay out more on national insurance, it will have less to invest. It is no wonder that the Item Club concludes that

"the Budget levies will further depress business investment".

The CBI fears possible cuts in capital spending, training, research and development. Business leaders are surely right when they say that pension contributions could also be hit.

Mr. Tom Harris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. Members on both sides of the House

know how important it is for manufacturing industry in particular to invest. The fact is that with interest rates half what they were under the Conservatives, companies are finding it much easier to find the capital to invest now than they did then.

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman needs to listen to what businesses have been saying in the past week about the Budget. They have been scathing—*[Interruption.]* I hear the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) shout, "Whingeing." That will be a very interesting indicator to business and business organisations of the true attitude towards them of too many Labour Members.

What is shocking about the Government's approach is that they appear to have made no assessment of the effect of the increase in contributions upon jobs. I have read the compliance cost assessment that the Inland Revenue published today in respect of the Bill, which has yet to be published. I was disappointed that the compliance cost assessment made no attempt to analyse the impact of a higher rate of employers' contributions on jobs. The rise in employers' contributions is nothing other than a direct tax on jobs.

Mr. Webb: As for whether employers' national insurance is a tax on jobs, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that there was a ceiling on employees' but not employers' contributions, but that it was abolished in 1985. I will leave him to recall who did that. Does he think that that was a mistake and that it was a tax on jobs?

Mr. Lidington: The record shows that if all the changes to basic rate income tax and national insurance during the 18 years of Conservative government are taken together, the marginal tax rate was still significantly lower when we left office than it was in 1978 to 1979. I wish that Ministers would understand that as the director general of the CBI said recently:

"It might just be the straw that breaks the camel's back in a boardroom decision on whether to get rid of people."

Oxford Economic Forecasting, an independent body, reportedly estimates a potential cut in jobs growth of up to 100,000 over the next three years, depending on how great a cut in annual pay increases workers are willing to accept. The Government may have a more optimistic assessment of the impact on jobs of this increase in contributions than does Oxford Economic Forecasting. They owe it to the House, to business and to the wider public to make a clear statement and to place their analysis in the public domain so that their assumptions and figures can be judged against those made available in estimates by outside organisations. However, I fear that no such assessment has been carried out, for when asked by the Select Committee whether he had carried out any impact assessment of the increase in employer national insurance contributions, the Chancellor replied, quite simply, no.

We are being asked to vote through a motion without any assessment having been made of its impact on employment. This comes from the same Chancellor and Treasury team who two years ago claimed that the lower national insurance contributions that accompanied the climate change levy

"will act to promote employment opportunities."

We have a Government who think that lower national insurance contributions help to create jobs, but who refuse to acknowledge the damaging effect on jobs of higher national insurance contributions. Nor have they analysed the additional problems that these tax increases will cause to the very public services that Ministers say they want to help.

The Local Government Association reckons that the cost to local government of the rise in employers' contributions will be £300 million a year. That is equivalent to an increase of about £17 in the average band D council tax.

The national health service faces an increase in its payroll tax of about £250 million. We have it on the authority of none other than the Prime Minister's official spokesman that the total bill for the public sector is expected to be about £1.2 billion.

What about individual public service workers? Nurses, police officers, teachers and firefighters will all get hit, too. The place worst hit will be London, where the cost of living is higher and average wages, too, are higher. This tax rise might have been designed to clobber Londoners.

What will happen to those public servants? An operational fire station officer on £30,600 a year will pay about £289 more a year in national insurance. A police sergeant earning £33,400 will pay about £308 more a year in his national insurance contributions. I cannot see how that will do anything other than worsen the already desperate problems in recruitment and retention of key public service workers in London and elsewhere in the south-east of England.

All those workers, and many like them in both the public and private sectors, have been let down by the Government. Everyone relying on public services has been let down, too. The Labour party has no answers on how to improve the national health service. The Budget was a final and desperate throw of the dice. Business, taxpayers and, above all, the patients who actually use our health service will pay the price of the closed minds of the Labour party and Labour Ministers.

A Government who have talked long about enterprise have introduced a measure that is damaging to enterprise. A Government who said that there would be no tax rises are bringing in tax rises. A Government who promised no more money unless there was reform in the public services are now promising money but have failed to deliver the reforms. It is time to hold the Government to their word. That is why we shall vote against the motion.

4.42 pm

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I shall speak briefly on the resolution, which, as my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury told the House, is a paving measure for the legislative framework to increase national insurance contributions in order to raise much-needed extra investment for the national health service.

None of us is so naive as to believe that money alone can solve the problems of the national health service. Structures must be reformed and there must certainly be a cull of many aspects of bureaucracy. None the less, without extra investment there will be no hope of solving the problems and of recreating a world-class national health service.

The last time that I spoke in the House when the Government of the day were seeking to raise national insurance contributions to benefit the public sector was

[Denzil Davies]

25 years ago. I am sorry to say that that was in 1977. I had the invidious task of winding up a debate on something called the national insurance surcharge.

My right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench may be interested to know that, at that time, unfortunate Ministers were unable to obtain any real briefing from the civil service, because the Department of Social Security said that the surcharge was a tax but the Inland Revenue said that it was not. Ministers were able to overcome those problems, however. I am sure that they no longer exist and I certainly do not want to engage in the sterile—almost metaphysical—argument as to whether national insurance is a tax.

Many hon. Members may remember, although they were not here at the time, that the surcharge was a direct and immediate consequence of the Rooker-Wise amendment. That amendment was forced through the Committee that considered the Finance Bill in 1997 by two Labour Back Benchers: Lord Rooker, as he is now—he is also a Minister of the Crown—and Mrs. Audrey Wise, who is sadly deceased.

Although it was said at the time that perhaps the voices that enunciated that amendment were clearly those of Rooker and Wise, the hand behind it all was said to be that of Mr. Nigel Lawson. I do not know whether that is correct, but the Rooker-Wise amendment was agreed to in Committee at about 3 o'clock in the morning, when the then Labour Government had a majority of two. Of course, the two Members who went across to the other side at that occasion were Rooker and Wise.

The amendment was about indexation, and it enabled personal allowances to be indexed at a time of very high inflation. Unfortunately, as a result of what happened in the early hours of that morning, the possible loss to the Labour Government was about £3 billion. A very distinguished economist, Mr. Nicholas Kaldor—or Lord Kaldor, as he became—was the special adviser to the then Chancellor of the Exchequer. In those days, special advisers were special. He was very special indeed; he came up with the splendid invention of the national insurance surcharge—presumably not very different from an increase in national insurance contributions.

However, times have changed—the wheel is turning full circle, and the Chancellor announced in his speech, as has been mentioned, his decision that for the next year at least personal allowances will not be indexed. Indexing came in 25 years ago and I do not know whether it is going out now, but with very low inflation there may be an argument for not indexing personal allowances. With next year's non-indexation, another £700 million will be available, according to the Red Book, for public expenditure and the national health service, but I merely mention the fact that all the funding for the NHS will not come from this ways and means resolution or from non-indexation; funding will also come from borrowing.

Just as indexation is on the way out, the old public sector borrowing requirement is coming back. Most hon. Members have perhaps never heard of it; its name has changed over the years, but I will still call it the public sector borrowing requirement. Looking at table 2.7 on page 33 of the Red Book, I see that it has another name—it is called a treaty deficit. That is all right; what is in a name?

I notice, en passant, that the treaty deficit column is headed "treaty commitments". I will not develop that point, but I take it that that is uncharacteristically sloppy drafting by the Treasury because, of course, the figures listed are not treaty commitments. They will not be treaty commitments until we sign up to the dreaded growth and stability pact under the Maastricht treaty. Leaving that to one side, the PSBR is now called the treaty deficit.

I see from table 2.7 that, taking the first full year, the treaty deficit—the PSBR in my language—will be 1.1 per cent. of gross domestic product next year. The following year, it will be 1.1 per cent. of GDP. In the year after that—let us take a three-year period—it will be 1.4 per cent. of GDP.

Now, let us take GDP as shown in table C3 on page 211 of the Red Book. In fact, that table shows the GDP that the Treasury uses for the public expenditure assumptions. My mathematics may not be terribly good, but we come up with a figure of about £12 billion next year and about £12 billion the following year. The sum then jumps, because of the 1.4 per cent. figure, to about £17 billion in the third year. That is about £42 billion worth of PSBR—treaty deficit—within three years.

To return to the Chancellor's Budget statement, he said:

"The monetary and fiscal figures that I am publishing today—

he said it with some flourish—

"also show that we are well within the Maastricht criteria for the euro".—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 580.]

Of course, that is right. Those who were here at the time, and who debated the provisions ad nauseam, know that the Maastricht criteria for the euro require a rate of 3 per cent. The world has moved on since the Maastricht criteria, however, because we now have an absurdly named growth and stability pact—or is it now the stability and growth pact? I think that the name is changed every year depending on how the European economy goes. The growth and stability pact is a fearsome pact because it says that we cannot borrow at all—or virtually not at all—at this stage of the economic cycle. That is one of the problems faced by Germany with its 2.7 per cent. of GDP borrowing, which it must eliminate by 2004—it does not matter whether Herr Stoiber or Chancellor Schröder wins the election, or what the German people want to vote for.

I was not surprised to note that the Chancellor did not refer to the growth and stability pact in his Budget statement. Despite some heroic attempts at reinterpretation, interpretation and analysis of the growth and stability pact by the Chancellor—who has done his best—we are not within the growth and stability pact on the basis of the figures to which I referred. On those figures, if we were part of the euro, we would have to find £42 billion over three years.

Mr. Hendrick: Would my right hon. Friend accept that, although we are not within the euro, this country is subject to treaty provisions for the multilateral surveyance of budgets, as are Sweden and Denmark? Would he also accept that it makes sense, when a country has such a low ratio of debt to GDP as Britain has, that countries should be able to borrow for investment in times of declining growth?

Denzil Davies: I do not want to prolong this debate, but, first, surveyance is different from being forced to do something. Secondly, although there may be various

interpretations of this treaty, there must be almost balance at this stage of the economic cycle, and we do not have it. I merely hope that we will not find ourselves, some time in the future, with another hole in the public sector finances, for which we have to find £42 billion. I would not wish my right hon. and hon. Friends to have to introduce another national insurance surcharge to cover that hole, which some of us had to try to cover years ago.

In 1977, the motion was carried—no doubt because of the brilliance of the Minister replying to the debate—by a majority of two. It was said that those two happened to have been Mr. Brian Walden and Mr. John Mackintosh, who were very distinguished Members of the House at the time. They did not always find their way into the Aye Lobby, but, thankfully, they saved the illustrious career of the Minister winding up—they found the Aye Lobby at around 11 o'clock at night and registered their votes. I understand that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General is winding up tonight, and I think that she will secure a better majority than two. I trust, hope and believe that she will have a slightly gentler winding up than her counterpart 25 years ago.

4.54 pm

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Although we have some criticisms of what the Government have done—I shall come on to them—it is our intention to support the resolution for two fundamental reasons. The Conservative party should consider both reasons.

The first fundamental reason is that we do not want to stand in the way of the investment that will improve the health service, attract the doctors and nurses that it needs and free up beds for the elderly by funding improvements in local authority spend so that people can leave hospital and go into nursing or residential care or receive care in their own homes. Given that the Conservative party's spokesman, the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), has agreed that such things are important, it is odd that that party should stand in the way of such investment.

The Conservative party accepts that money is needed and it has identified areas in which it could be spent. If we care about patients in the national health service, surely the proper thing to do is to release funding into the health service. If the Conservative party wishes to propose different reforms from those that the Government have put forward, it can make that case. However, given the size of the Government's majority, the chance of there being an election in the next three years is extremely slender. There is an urgent need for expenditure in the NHS now, and the Conservative party should support such expenditure given that it accepts the need for it.

The second and even more fundamental reason why the Conservative party should support the resolution is that it is not about the national insurance increases but, in effect, about the hypothecation to the NHS of the money derived from those increases. It will specifically allow the increase in the national insurance take to be devoted to the NHS. That is a requirement under the legislation covering the national insurance fund, but that requirement appears to have escaped the Government. That is why we are having to go through this somewhat awkward procedure of debating Budget resolutions and then this resolution before we get on to discussing the national insurance legislation. Nevertheless, that procedure must be followed.

The Conservative party is worried about tax rises and how they will be used, but this is one occasion on which the House can have a direct say about how money is spent and make sure that it is devoted to the NHS. The House hardly ever takes that opportunity, because we hardly ever debate in detail the way in which money raised is devoted to specific expenditure. Parliament devotes some days of the year to such discussions, but the debates are hardly ever put to a vote. The last time that a specific vote took place was when the then Lord Chancellor decided to redecorate and add a bathroom to his residence. I do not, of course, refer to the current Lord Chancellor, because that took place many years ago. In the past century, the House has hardly ever taken the opportunity to put such matters to a vote, so the Opposition should welcome this opportunity to nail the Government's feet to the floor and ensure that the money goes where they say it will go.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): The hon. Gentleman has laid great stress on the argument that the motion will hypothecate all the yield from the increased rates of national insurance contributions to the national health service. However, his argument is blown clean out of the water by the Red Book. The yield from the changes is £8 billion, but only £2.4 billion is being voted to the national health service.

Matthew Taylor: At the end of my speech, I shall consider the weakness of hypothecating increases. When one spends more money than the increase on a service area, one can hypothecate the rise but there is no guarantee that money will not flow out at the other end of the expenditure. I shall come to that point, because I have a proposal for the House. However, the extra sums of money raised from national insurance over the next few years will broadly link in with the extra money going into the health service.

Mr. Dorrell: Hang on a moment. The hon. Gentleman bases his argument on the principle of hypothecation, but the Red Book makes it clear that the increases in the financial year beginning next April will raise £8 billion. In the same year, according to the Red Book, we are being asked to vote £2.4 billion of that to the NHS. By my arithmetic, that leaves £5.6 billion going spare.

Matthew Taylor: I have already told the right hon. Gentleman that there is a problem with the proposed form of hypothecation. However, although the forward spending figures show a shortfall for the early years, that is reversed later on and the national health service will end up getting more money than is proposed. I agree that there is a problem with the clarity and effectiveness of hypothecation, but there is no sleight of hand in the long run because the Government are devoting more money to the NHS than they are raising through hypothecation. So the right hon. Gentleman is wrong in the long run.

The public are concerned about three things: honesty, whether their money is well spent and whether it goes to the NHS. On honesty, as I have said before, it is impossible to believe that the Government were not aware before the general election that they had to raise extra money for the NHS by increasing taxes. That is not credible because the general public knew that that had to happen. Indeed, they told the Government that they would have to raise taxes to sort out the NHS and

[Matthew Taylor]

overwhelmingly supported the idea. Interestingly, when the Liberal Democrats proposed such increases, we were told that the public would not support them in practice, but the Budget is phenomenally popular. It has received overwhelming public support, even among the majority of Conservative voters.

The problem, however, is that the Government were not honest. They attempted to evade the issue even to the point that while ruling out income tax rises, they were prepared to change their position on national insurance. It is only on the most extreme technical reading of the Government's position that the Chancellor can defend the Budget by saying:

"We have kept all our promises on tax. It is a complete falsehood to suggest we haven't."

It is clear that they did not set out that they would increase tax to save the NHS when they knew that they would have to. Indeed, the Chancellor's aides, before and since the Budget, said time and again that he knew all along that that would have to happen.

Frankly, had the Prime Minister explained the real position in the 1997 manifesto, the Government would still have had a clear mandate, albeit for a different purpose. Rather than saying that they would not increase income tax or have no plans to increase national insurance or raise its cap, it would have been more accurate and honest for them to say, "We will double NHS expenditure in real terms within a decade. In our first term, we will raise taxes by stealth to pay off the Tory deficit. In our second, we will raise annual taxes openly by £8 billion on jobs and incomes to secure the future of the NHS and education." They say that they have done nothing dishonest because they told people exactly what they would do, but few would agree with them.

The Government will discover at the ballot box that they have done a great disservice, both to themselves and to politics. Whatever they say at the next election, people will find it harder to believe them and, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) said, this is not the first time that this has happened. The Conservatives did the same thing in 1979 and, more relevantly, in 1992, when the re-election of the Conservative Government was followed by the biggest tax increases in history. The Government are eroding public confidence in the political process and politicians. Even our party is made aware of that lack of confidence, and we spelled out the true position in those election campaigns.

Nevertheless, when we knock on doors we find that there is now palpable cynicism about politicians in general. There is every reason to suppose that in tomorrow's local elections we will see an even lower turnout because of increased reluctance to vote for politicians and perhaps, although I hope not, electors turning away from mainstream political parties, in some cases towards extremes. If that happens, it will be partly because of this House.

Mr. Tom Harris: I disagree very strongly with the hon. Gentleman's conclusions. This Government have done more than any other to make sure that their manifesto commitments are precisely enacted. I challenge the hon. Gentleman to tell the House where, in the 1997 or 2001 manifestos, Labour says other than that it would not increase the basic or higher rates of income tax. Nothing in the proposal before the House today contradicts anything in those manifestos, and that is because this party is the honest party of government.

Matthew Taylor: It is very difficult to publish a full list of everything that one will not do, but it is fairly common in a manifesto to concentrate on the things that one will do. It is clear that the Government knew that they were going to introduce a very large increase in tax for the NHS, and they declined to put that in the manifesto. That may be the hon. Gentleman's view of complete and utter honesty, but he will find, on the doorstep, that his electorate disagree with him.

We have seen an increase in tax on incomes broadly equivalent to a 1p increase in the basic rate of income tax, plus another penny on the rest of income tax. The difference that the Chancellor seeks to set out between the national insurance increase and the income tax increase that he has ruled out is nothing but a fig leaf, and frankly that leaves him unpleasantly exposed.

The issue for a Labour Government, however, is worse than that. In his latest excuse, the Chancellor struggles to argue that his measure protects pensioners, but of course it does not protect pensioners as a whole. The great majority of pensioners—two thirds—pay no tax. The measure protects pensioners who are in the fortunate position of having a large income, many of whom live off large investments. At the same time, the policy increases tax for some people on very low incomes—the people whom the Labour party has traditionally sought to defend. Multi-millionaire pensioners have never been particularly high on Labour's list of priorities, so it is a little surprising to find that they are now a higher priority than some of the very poorest in this country, who work and try to earn an income.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North) *rose—*

John Mann *rose—*

Matthew Taylor: I shall give way in a moment, but first I want to give figures to support my case.

The Treasury's own figures for changes in the overall tax burden in Labour's first term show that, taking all taxes into account, tax on the poorest quintile of households in the country rose 3 per cent., from 38 to 41 per cent. The rise for the highest quintile was only 1 per cent., from 36 to 37 per cent. The net result is that a 2 per cent. gap favouring the richest has risen to 4 per cent. since Labour took office.

John Mann: I want to clarify an extremely important point about the Liberal Democrats' policy on pensioners. There is a new group of relatively wealthy pensioners—those workers, many of them ex-miners, who are to receive compensation for industrial injury and asbestos-related conditions. In my constituency, there are 7,500 such people, and there are many more in other constituencies. They will receive a significant amount of capital, from which they will earn income, and they will also receive a small occupational pension from the National Coal Board. Some of them may move into taxation. The hon. Gentleman speaks of rich pensioners. I would say that those whom I described, a significant

group, are getting deferred earnings. They are being paid because of employer errors in the past or poor management. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that they should be taxed?

Matthew Taylor: The problem is that if such people were 55, had been involved in an industrial accident, had received a pay-out and had the sort of income that the hon. Gentleman describes, they would be asked to pay a tax increase, but if they happened to be 65, they would not. It has always been the view of the hon. Gentleman's party and ours that people should pay according to their means and their ability to pay. Of course their real costs must be taken into account, but I do not see the differentiation.

I pick on the argument because it is the one that the Chancellor is using to defend his position. In order to hold to their income tax pledge while in effect introducing an income tax rise, Labour has picked a slightly different form of tax, which has a peculiar effect. A pensioner with an income of £100,000 a year—a retired chief of a conglomerate, perhaps Rupert Murdoch if he happened to live and pay taxes in this country—would pay no extra tax towards the NHS, but somebody working part-time on less than £5,000 a year would be subject to a tax increase.

In terms of equity and fairness, that seems a peculiar choice for the Government to have made, were it not for the fact that they are trying to use it as a fig leaf so that they can say that they stuck by a policy, when anyone with common sense knows they have not. They might as well have admitted it, because the public agree with the policy that they have followed. The public do not make the distinction that the Government think they do, so the Government might as well have said to people, "We did not tell you the truth before the election, but we do believe that this is important for the NHS, so we're spending your money even without your permission." That is exactly what has happened.

Mr. Rooney: For clarity, will the hon. Gentleman tell us at what level of pensioner income the Liberal Democrats propose a tax increase?

Matthew Taylor: We have made our position clear. We believe that there should have been a 1p increase on income tax and a rise to 50 per cent. for the top rate of tax on income over £100,000 a year. The straightforward answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that it would depend on the pensioner's income. A rise in income tax would have fallen far more fairly. Because of the Government's income tax pledge, every time they have raised taxes, the increase has fallen harder on the poor than on the rich. The figures that I presented earlier show that the rich have been even more advantaged by Government policy, compared to the poor.

Mr. Tom Harris *rose—*

Matthew Taylor: I shall give way once more, then I must move on, as I have been speaking for some time.

Mr. Harris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. How does he square that claim with the fact that in the four years to 2001, the poorest 20 per cent. of households saw their income grow at exactly the same rate as the richest 20 per cent.? He should compare that with the years up till the Labour Government were elected, when the richest 20 per cent. of households saw their income increase by 30 times the rate of the poorest households.

Matthew Taylor: If the hon. Gentleman reads my speech from last week on the Budget resolutions, he will see that I said that the two ways in which the Government have spent the money is, first, on paying off the Conservative deficit and, secondly, on measures of redistribution. However, that redistribution has been limited in its target. Low earners without children have been disadvantaged by the Government's policy. The overall tax burden has shifted against the poor, which I think is wrong. I acknowledge some of the changes that the Chancellor has made, but they have been at the expense of the investment in health and education that we believe is necessary.

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The hon. Gentleman has been at great pains today and yesterday to quote the Treasury Committee's report on the Budget. Does he recall that one of the Committee's conclusions was that the Budget is redistributive, which the Committee welcomed? That included both the working tax credit and the child tax credit.

Matthew Taylor: I have just acknowledged the redistributive nature of the Budget, but it is not as redistributive as it could have been. Indeed, the overall policies are not as good as they could have been if the Government had not become hitched on their income tax pledge for purely political reasons. I do not think that anyone in the Treasury seriously believes otherwise. After all, the Chancellor has two hats: that of Chancellor and that of chairman of the Labour party general election campaign team in two elections. The idea that he did not know what he was doing is very hard to accept.

There is another peculiarity. The Government chose to raise employers' national insurance rather than to take the route for which we argued and adopt a new top rate of tax. Again, that decision was based on a Labour pledge, although briefings from the Chancellor's friends suggest that he would have preferred the 50 per cent. rate. However, his manifesto—after all, that is what it was—ruled that out, so he cannot take that approach. The result is a taxation policy that increases tax on employers and hits manufacturing in particular, as well as other businesses with low margins and high employment. At the same time, it does relatively little to put any cap on the consumer boom that is forcing up house prices in London and the south-east—increases that are driven not least by the many people on very high incomes in that area.

From any normal reading of the state of the economy, one would suggest damping down the consumer side but giving some help and encouragement to manufacturing, which has suffered from some 150,000 job losses in the past year and, according to the OECD, some 400,000 job losses since 1995, as well as a substantial loss of competitiveness. Of course, a disproportionate number of Labour Members represent the areas that have been hardest hit by that decline and by the current exchange rate. Again, the only possible interpretation is clear. After all, the Treasury issued press releases as recently as 1999 arguing that the reason for the cut in NICs was as follows:

"We are cutting tax on employment . . . encouraging employment opportunities".

[Matthew Taylor]

The Treasury therefore acknowledged the link between employers' national insurance contributions and the effect on jobs. The only possible conclusion is that the Government were prepared to sacrifice jobs in the wider community for the sake of protecting jobs on their own Benches in the general election.

I shall be very brief on the further issue of importance: how the money is spent. Indeed, I think that I have said almost enough about that; I have spoken longer than I intended in order to answer questions. It is quite clear that training more doctors and nurses is a crucial target for investment if we are to have the doctors and nurses that we need for the future. It is crucial to put money into local authorities for expenditure on social security placements and supporting people in their own homes, and on nursing and residential beds, which can very quickly free hospital beds.

It is also vital to invest in better pay and conditions for professional low-paid staff in the NHS—an issue about which the Government have made some worrying statements in the past few weeks. That investment is crucial not for moral reasons—we can all talk about the wonderful job that doctors, nurses and others do in the NHS—but for a practical and economic reason: these people are currently fleeing the NHS because they cannot afford to stay in it, especially in the areas of highest housing cost. It is impossible to deliver a better NHS if its experienced staff are leaving it and we are not training sufficient numbers even to replace them.

Finally, I should like to mention another aspect of the Government's peculiar position on tax. I gather from Ministers who argue in favour of a national insurance rise and against an income tax rise that it remains the Government's position to rule out income tax rises in this Parliament, but not further national insurance rises. That is the only logic in their position. Given that the National Institute of Economic and Social Research said today that it believes that the Government's figures could create a medium-term funding gap, the Government may have to resort to further increases.

Since the national insurance contributions Bill has not been published, perhaps the Chief Secretary will clarify what we will be asked to vote for. Will it be an enabling measure that allows further changes without more legislation, or can the Chief Secretary guarantee that a similar legislative proposal will have to be made before any such change can take place?

Dawn Primarolo: Yes.

Matthew Taylor: The Financial Secretary says yes. I hope that she is right because that is important.

Mr. Webb: My hon. Friend mentioned the need to tackle social services problems. The money that the Government raise will be spent on social services, and the local authority national insurance bill will match that sum. Yet if social services departments do not perform, they will be fined. Does not he believe that the Government must tackle that, even if we generally welcome the extra revenue?

Matthew Taylor: My hon. Friend is right. Most social services departments spend much more than the Government standard spending assessment. Even if the Government give extra money that is theoretically tied to social services, money is already being spent and national insurance money is being lost from elsewhere. There is therefore no guarantee that the extra money will contribute to improvements to support the elderly in the first year. After that, there will be increases.

I have already argued that the matter is urgent because beds in hospitals are currently blocked. The sooner we get the money in the better. I hope that the Government have the chance to do that because the comprehensive spending review is still to come. I also hope that they will seriously consider local government problems. I fear that if they do not tackle them, the improvements in getting elderly patients out of hospital beds that they do not need and into residential, nursing or supported care will not be made as quickly as they should. The beds will not be free for other patients and the improvements in the NHS will not happen. That is the Conservative party's only chance of rubbishing the NHS and making its case for ultimately dismantling it.

Let us consider hypothecation. For many years, we have argued that it is possible to hypothecate a rise. That is now happening and we welcome it, although it was not done as honestly as we would wish. At least the Government have taken the advice. We have witnessed the popular support for the action, and that is some vindication of our argument. However, in the long run, if we hypothecate £2 billion, £3 billion or £8 billion to a budget of £60 billion, £70 billion, £80 billion or even, in future, more than £100 billion, there is no guarantee that the Treasury will not decide that it is short of money for transport, education or a new plane for the Prime Minister and grab some of it back because the NHS is no longer so high on the list.

Even if the Government remain in office, there is no guarantee that, in the long term, the money will go where they say it will. Of course, if the Conservative party is elected, there is no guarantee that the money will remain with the NHS. The Government can hide behind snatching the money, leave the provisions for national insurance as they are but use the money for other purposes.

The Chancellor ruled out the suggestion, but I urge the Government to consider hypothecating a whole income stream to the NHS so that it can have greater certainty and transparency. People would know when they paid the tax that it went straight to the NHS and that any change would help the NHS, or hurt it if the Government chose to take money away.

The two national insurance figures that the Government have published show that in 2007–08 the figures are close. Therefore, why not hypothecate national insurance? That has happened historically, and there has been a link with the NHS. Such hypothecation would provide a broad-based income stream that increased broadly in line with growth in the economy. It would give the NHS a good base, and when people paid that money they would know that it went to the health service.

The Government have chosen a route that includes an opportunity that is worth considering. The national insurance system could be reformed; people may believe that using a different tax is a better route.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me again. This is a relatively old potato.

If the Liberal party is really going to nail its colours to this mast, it must ensure that its supporters understand that, when the economy goes into a dip—all economies go up and down—the result of its policy will be NHS cuts. Will he explain that to his supporters?

Matthew Taylor: The answer to that is that we would treat this income flow in exactly the same way as the Treasury now wisely treats its overall income flows. It plans on the basis of long-term growth in the economy rather than short-term swings up and down. If it undershoots on its growth figure this year, as it is, it will not cut expenditure because it knows that, provided it remains in line with the 2.5 per cent. growth forecast, it will get the revenue back in future years.

That is not a difficult process, and it is one that the Government have already introduced. The real issue is whether we can find ways of reconnecting the electorate to the tax that they pay and the decisions that are taken about it. The population are cynical about politics at the moment, and do not believe that the money they pay goes where the politicians claim it will go. Our proposal represents a way of addressing that problem, and of reconnecting people to the spending decisions being made.

The Conservative Opposition seem to be in the most appalling position at the moment. They are denying the NHS the money that it needs now for doctors and nurses, to back a policy that they have not even invented yet and will not be able to introduce for at least three years. If that policy turns out to be about tearing up the NHS, they will not be able to introduce it in the lifetime of any of those on their Benches, because I do not believe that the public would support the break-up of the NHS. The Conservatives also have to get over the problem that people remember just how badly they treated the NHS when they were in office. People remember the destruction and underfunding of services and the appalling treatment that patients received over many years. If there are problems now, they are in large measure the inheritance of what has gone before.

We know the excuse that the Conservatives make, because we heard it yesterday from the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). When questioned on an event in 1995—not that long ago—during their last term in office, he said:

"I disclaim all responsibility for it immediately on the ground that I was not here, I did not know, I am not responsible, I cannot be brought to book, and it is a matter of the most stupefying irrelevance to me."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 822-23.]

Unfortunately for the hon. Gentleman, the British people were here when the Conservatives had charge of the NHS. They know what happened, they hold the Conservatives responsible and they still consider that highly relevant. As long as that is the case, the Conservatives will not be in a position to influence the future of the NHS, thank God.

5.28 pm

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Thank you for calling me to speak in this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. I had the good fortune to be here yesterday during all seven hours of the debate on the Finance Bill. I would like to take this opportunity to take to task some of my hon. Friends who told me afterwards that it was a waste of time if one did not get called to speak. I am sure you would agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it is not a waste of time when you are enjoying the eloquent contributions from both sides of the House on a subject as important as the Finance Bill, and that there is more point to being in the Chamber than simply speaking. I am delighted, however, to be given the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) has, apparently, been talking to a great many public servants, including nurses and police officers, who are appalled at the content of the Budget and who are absolutely opposed to the proposed increase in national insurance contributions.

I am sure that every hon. Member has shared my experience of being identified by friends and family, immediately after being elected to this place, as a spokesperson for a party or for the Government. After I was elected, I received not only congratulations, but much criticism and many appeals from friends, some of whom work in the health service. They pleaded with me to use my considerable influence with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to get him to increase taxes or national insurance contributions to bring about a huge investment in the NHS. That view is reflected in opinion polls.

I spoke to nurses in my constituency before and after the Budget. Before the Budget they said, "Please give us the extra money. We don't mind paying extra taxes", and after they Budget they said, "Congratulations. Fantastic. That is such a welcome Budget." I have never experienced such popular support for any Budget.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): Does my hon. Friend accept that that view is held not only by workers in the NHS, but by 74 per cent. of the general population? The majority of Conservative voters also believe that this is a good Budget.

Mr. Harris: My hon. Friend is correct. I am somewhat bemused by the hostile reaction of Conservative Members to a proposal that enjoys great support among their dwindling band of supporters.

I should like to refer to the comments of the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor). There is an old story, which is worth re-telling, about the person who phones the Liberal Democrats' headquarters one night, gets the answer machine and is told to leave a message after the high moral tone.

The Liberal Democrats constantly criticise the Government and the Conservatives for being dishonest. Me thinks that they protest too much. We know their strategy. We have all been involved in by-elections and we have seen the way in which they behave during campaigns. It is purely a device to allow them to take the moral high ground. They take every opportunity to criticise the honesty of the Labour party and the Conservative party—I am not defending the Conservative party: I will leave that to Conservative Members. The hon. Gentleman, by the language he uses, tries to create and encourage the electoral cynicism that he criticises and that is a major problem in society today. I do not accept that he does that with the correct motives.

The Budget, especially the increase in national insurance contributions, was described by many commentators as representing a sea change in the direction that the

[Mr. Harris]

Government are taking. One commentator described it as the first Labour Budget since 1979. I completely disagree. Yes, it is a redistributive Budget—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the debate is about national insurance contributions.

Mr. Harris: I appreciate your direction, Madam Deputy Speaker. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies), who managed to bring the euro into the debate. That was very impressive, but I shall try to keep to the subject.

The rise in national insurance contributions is a redistributive measure. There is no doubt about that. Some Labour candidates have to say "redistribution" in a lower voice than they may have used in previous years, but I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary nodding when I describe the Budget as redistributive. *[Interruption.]*

The Budget and the national insurance contribution rise have been welcomed by many of my constituents. I am interested and fascinated to learn that the Conservatives will vote against this measure. They have compared it with a 1 per cent. increase in the bottom, middle and higher income tax brackets. Thus, I assume that, instead of supporting the national insurance rise, they will propose a 1 per cent. increase in the bottom, middle and higher rate of income tax. I am sure that at some point in the next three years we will know whether that comes to pass.

If Opposition Members have a copy of the 2001 Labour party manifesto to hand—I am sure they all do—I challenge them to say now where it refers to our keeping national insurance contributions at the existing level. The fact of the matter is that the Government made a commitment to keep the basic and upper rate of income tax at 2001 levels.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Can the hon. Gentleman explain the difference between income tax and a tax on income?

Mr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that national insurance contributions are a tax on earnings, not on income. The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell pointed out that many pensioners would not have to make national insurance contributions if they were earning money from their savings. There is an obvious difference between the two mechanisms, which is one reason why I am delighted that the Government have chosen this one.

Mr. Lidington: Does the hon. Gentleman think, then, that the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill) was straying off message when he said on 4 June 2001

"we have absolutely no plans to raise the ceiling on National Insurance"?

Mr. Harris: I cannot speak for my hon. Friend, but I know that when I was campaigning for the 2001 general election I explained to my constituents exactly what was in the party manifesto, and I know that the Government have stuck to the commitments in that manifesto—which is more than the Conservatives ever managed to do.

Although yesterday's debate was not about increases in national insurance contributions, it focused on the Budget and national insurance was mentioned. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee, said that the reason why the increase was on the cards was the NHS. I disagree with one thing he said, however. He said we should be trying to recreate the consensus between the two parties in favour of the NHS. In 1948 there was no consensus in the House for the creation of the NHS, but there are close similarities between the position now and that in 1948.

Like the Attlee Government, the present Government face a Tory party that will always side with the vested interests of the medical profession rather than with patients. They face a party that opposes the public financing of the NHS, and has yet to commit itself publicly to an NHS that is free to all at the point of use. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to commit his party to that aim, I shall be delighted.

Dr. Murrison: I am not going to commit my party or indeed myself, but I would like to make an observation, as a member of the medical profession. The hon. Gentleman said that the medical profession would always side with the Conservatives; I think that our experience over 18 years suggests the opposite.

Mr. Harris: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has raised that point, because I wanted to deal with a proposal that I know to be supported by many of my colleagues.

We have talked of the importance of reform of the NHS, hand in hand with the increased investment. Every health service employee works full time for the health service and is paid full time by it, but the problem of waiting lists can never be dealt with through the national insurance increase until we can get consultants' contracts sorted out.

If a consultant is paid full time by the NHS, he or she should work full time for the NHS. That is an important reform that must be made if the money we are asking people to contribute from their income is to be used properly. I expect considerable opposition to that proposal from the Conservatives: after all, the idea of a consultant's working full time for the NHS is presumably anathema to many of them.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has read a document called "Delivering the Change", which is the Government's blueprint for delivery of the NHS plan. It refers to increasing the provision of health care provided by the private sector. If the hon. Gentleman rules out consultants' working—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a little wide of the subject. I again remind all Members that we are debating national insurance contributions. There can be reference to the financing of the NHS.

Mr. Harris: Again I am grateful for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I shall try not to deviate further.

As I have said, national insurance is not an income tax. I believe that the modest increase proposed by the Chancellor is welcomed by the public, and should be

welcomed by the House. I know it will be welcomed by nearly all those employed by the NHS, and by all who are treated in the NHS.

5.39 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): I begin by declaring an interest. I am a director of, and a shareholder in, two businesses that operate in this country. They employ people, so they have an interest in the burden that this national insurance measure will impose on employers' costs, and which I want to discuss.

I think it fitting that the House should debate this increase in national insurance contributions on the fifth anniversary of this Government's election. The fact that the increase forms the centrepiece of this year's Budget finally strips away any shred of respectability from the balloon of rhetoric that secured the Government's election in 1997. They were elected on the basis that new Labour was going to be different from old Labour, that the third way was something different from what we had seen before in British politics, and that it would usher in a new way of doing business in politics.

It is worth reminding ourselves of why we were asked to believe that new Labour was different. We should look at such claims in the context of this Budget and the national insurance contribution's role as its centrepiece. The most important claim made for new Labour, as distinct from old Labour, was that the latter was in favour of tax and spend but that the former had somehow found a new way of dealing with the dilemmas at the heart of the delivery of public services. New Labour was going to be something different. Amid all the rhetoric, it was not entirely clear why it was going to be different, but under new Labour we were definitely not going to witness merely a return to the tax and spend ways with which we became extremely familiar under Labour Governments of the 1960s and 1970s.

I enjoyed the contribution of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies), who does not worry too much about the distinction between old Labour and new Labour. In his own rather endearing way, he reminded the House that the centrepiece of this year's Budget is the national insurance surcharge that he himself had justified as a Treasury Minister 25 years earlier. The fact that the man who introduced the tax increase that was necessary under the old Labour days of the Callaghan Government is supporting—on exactly the same basis as 25 years ago—this year's increase rather makes my own case for me. He said that he introduced the national insurance surcharge 25 years ago, and that he is happy to support in the House of Commons today the introduction of the same policy under a new Labour Government.

As I said, the right hon. Gentleman is not too concerned about distinctions between new Labour and old Labour. He recognises the essential truth of this Budget: the national insurance contribution increase is a simple, straightforward, £8 billion tax increase. That is what this Budget introduced, and that is what we are debating in today's ways and means resolution.

Mr. Luke: Is it not true that the UK's economic situation was completely different 25 years ago? One major initiative of this Government was to put the power to change interest rates in the hands of the Bank of England. The past five years have been very prosperous. The right hon. Gentleman is talking about different era.

Mr. Dorrell: I suspect that you might interrupt me, Madam Deputy Speaker, were I to discuss monetary policy. I do not propose to go there, other than simply to observe that I actually agree with that aspect of Government policy. What I disagree with is a return to tax and spend, and that is what we are debating this afternoon.

Of course, the distinction to which I referred was not the only one that we were asked to believe that the new Labour Government, led by the current Prime Minister, would draw between themselves and old Labour traditions. We were asked to believe that whereas old Labour had been distinctly suspicious of the wealth creation process and tended to regard the business community as a milch cow to pay for its public spending ambitions, new Labour would be totally different. After all, it had—we were told—spent many years in opposition on the famous prawn cocktail circuit, it had many friends in business, it understood the wealth creation process and it would be a business-friendly Government. However, in recent months and years, the business community has grown more and more suspicious of the developing record of the Government. In the light of the Budget—especially the £8 billion tax increase—it is crystal clear what the friendship between new Labour and the business community is worth.

Despite all the crocodile tears about the manufacturing sector, the difficulty of trading in a global economy on the basis of a strong pound, and all the rhetoric about the importance of employing people, about wealth creation and about a Budget for enterprise, we have already had a £5 billion tax increase on pension funds in the Government's first five years—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is well aware of the comments I made earlier, and I remind him of them.

Mr. Dorrell: Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I was linking the £5 billion increase in tax on pension funds that has already been introduced with the £4 billion—of the £8 billion that we are discussing today—that will land directly on the cost of employing people in the British economy. When we consider whether that is a sensible tax policy, we should recognise that those two measures alone—ignoring all the smaller measures that the Government have introduced—constitute a direct increase of £9 billion in the cost of employing people. Through those two measures, this pro-business new Labour Government will be responsible for a £9 billion increase in the cost of employing people. The two measures that we are discussing today alone constitute a tax increase of £8 billion from 6 April next year.

I agree with my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that we should oppose this ways and means resolution tonight, because I regard it as simply a tax increase. What is worse, it comes on top of previous tax increases that have already constituted a substantial increase in the cost of employing people.

[John Mann]

John Mann: The right hon. Gentleman talks about tax increases on business. Have the corporation tax and capital gains tax paid by his businesses gone up or down?

Mr. Dorrell: I am delighted to say that the corporation tax burden is lower than it used to be, but I am focusing the attention of the House on what is alleged to be one of the policy objectives of the Government—the encouragement of the employment of British people in the British economy in the wealth creation process. It is an odd way to encourage something to happen to put an extra tax burden of £9 billion on that activity.

Mr. Hendrick: When unemployment is a fraction of what it was under the Conservatives, does not the right hon. Gentleman accept that this Government's judgment is better than his own was as part of the previous Government?

Mr. Dorrell: I am coming to exactly that point, because I wish to explore why I am opposed to tax increases in this economy at this time. I shall talk about health later, in which I have a political interest, but I wish first to focus the House's attention on the economic consequences of the tax increase and the reasons why we should not support it.

It is important not to allow ourselves to spend—as we have—many years focusing on the importance of competitiveness and the need to compete in a global economy, and then to throw that analysis out of the window the moment that we have some tough decisions to make on health. Simply because it is said to be necessary for the NHS, a tax increase of £8 billion is allowed to go through with no questions asked. The line adopted by the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) was that we should be content to vote through the tax increase simply because the Chancellor has said that it is needed for health.

Before I return to that argument, I shall focus on the economic case against a tax increase. Britain led the way in Europe towards a low-tax, competitive, flexible and market-oriented economy. We did not do that through any great foresight. By the end of the 1970s, Britain faced worse problems than any other country did. We had no choice but to cut taxes and make the economy more flexible so that we could be more competitive.

After 18 years in opposition, the Labour party finally said that it had taken the point and that it understood the need for a low-tax, competitive economy. Since the Labour Government came to power, however, they have started to increase the tax burden again. I have already mentioned two measures, and there are many others. This Budget takes the process a big stage further, just when our competitors around the world are understanding the importance of cutting the tax burdens on their economies.

The hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) asked about the low levels of unemployment and Britain's economic success in recent years, and it is true that there has been more competitive economic activity and more successful wealth generation here. That has happened because we have had a lower-tax, more flexible economy than our competitors. The Government are reversing that: they are raising taxes in the British economy just when Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the United States and Japan—our competitors in an increasingly open and flexible world market place—are cutting taxes.

It is not good enough for hon. Members to say that a private problem in Britain with respect to health care means that we are locked out of the global economy. We are throwing to the winds everything learned in the past 25 years, and we are raising taxes just when the lessons that we learned the hard way are being applied by our competitors to make their economies more competitive.

Mr. Tom Harris: The right hon. Gentleman decries the Government's decision to treat the NHS as a priority. Does he not agree that, if the Government to whom he belonged had treated the NHS as the priority that it was in the 1980s, we might have avoided the crisis now facing the service?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall come to the NHS later, but just now I shall simply observe that the Government cannot say that difficulties in the NHS must give rise to a tax increase. I am depressed by the fact that we have been misled by Government spin in this debate. I congratulate the Chancellor on the way in which he has presented his tax increase. He has introduced a big, tax-increasing Budget and has invited us to debate health care.

If I wanted to introduce a tax-increasing Budget in today's world, I should take the same approach, but that does not mean that we—the legislators being asked to approve the tax increase—should vote it through just because of a convenient argument in support of the Budget. I believe that we should look at the downsides of the case that the Chancellor has presented. One of the key downsides is that the rise represents a significant increase in the tax burden on business, and that it will significantly undermine our economy's competitiveness.

Matthew Taylor: There is an argument—it is legitimate, but I do not agree with it—that says that tax burdens need to be lowered to improve competitiveness. That can be done in two ways. First, one can build up a big deficit. That is not a legitimate approach: it happened under the previous Conservative Government, although I admit that they planned to reduce it later with tax rises. The second option is to cut expenditure. How would the right hon. Gentleman cut expenditure significantly, and in which services? I remind him that Conservative Front-Bench Members have ruled that out.

Mr. Dorrell: I shall make my speech in my own way, as the hon. Gentleman did. However, I wanted to focus the House's attention on the fact that this is a tax increase. That rather obvious point seems to have escaped much public attention so far.

In his speech, the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell said that we needed to reconnect voters with the political process. He may find that tax increases are quite a good way to achieve exactly that.

There is another reason for attacking this tax-increasing Budget, and this proposal in particular, which represents the bulk of the tax increases. Several speakers, including the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell, have noted that the Government said that the increases would not be necessary. Indeed, before the last general election, the

Government cut income tax. They cut the direct tax burden and told people that they would do more of the same if they were re-elected.

The Government's actions are breathtakingly cynical—there is no other way to describe them. The Government cut income tax before the election, but raised national insurance contributions after it. Labour Members should not be surprised at what happens when their constituents come to understand that the NHS will not change overnight, but that their tax bills will, on 6 April next year. Labour Members will then have to explain why tax bills are rising, despite their repeated assurances less than 12 months ago that no such rise was necessary.

How do the Government defend the tax increase? I repeat that the Chancellor has introduced a tax increase and tried to persuade us to avert our eyes from all conventional economic arguments and focus on the health argument. It has been said that the tax rise is necessary for health.

In an intervention on the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell I said that that is simple arithmetical nonsense. The Chancellor is raising £8 billion in extra tax, and is spending £2.4 billion of it on the NHS. He must therefore justify the other £5.6 billion. He cannot say that all of it is needed by the NHS, as he is not committing to the NHS well over half of the sum that he is raising. In fact, he is committing at least as much to the tax credit programme as to the NHS, as my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), the shadow spokesman on work and pensions, has made clear. So it is arithmetically untrue to say that the tax increase is justified by increased health spending.

There is another argument to be made. As the Red Book makes clear, total Government expenditure in 2003–04 will be £390 billion. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is asking us to believe that we must accept all the economic damage flowing from this huge tax increase in order to deliver an extra £2.4 billion to the NHS next year—extra money that amounts to 0.6 per cent. of expected Government expenditure.

This Government say that they embrace the need to make hard choices. Does any hon. Member really believe that it is impossible to find, in total Government expenditure of £390 billion, an extra £2.4 billion for the NHS? If the Chancellor and the Prime Minister want those extra resources to be made available to the NHS, is it impossible for what the Prime Minister has called hard choices to be made to free up those resources?

Mr. Hendrick: If the right hon. Gentleman wished to find that money from elsewhere in the £390 billion he mentioned, which services and provisions would he cut?

Mr. Dorrell: It is one of the joys of government that the Government have to make choices. I am simply asking people to embrace the concept that in £390 billion of public expenditure there is not, somewhere, £2.4 billion—roughly 0.5 per cent.—that could not be better spent on health. I challenge Labour Members to say that they could not find, if they really had to, 0.6 per cent. out of that budget to spend on health.

Mr. Tom Harris: The right hon. Gentleman served in a previous Government as Secretary of State for Health. Can he tell us from his experience how easy it would have been to persuade his Cabinet colleagues to surrender £4 billion of their own budgets, and if it was easy, why did he not do it?

Mr. Dorrell: It flatters my vanity but achieves almost no other purpose to tell the hon. Gentleman of the headline that said, "Dorrell wins £4 billion for the national health service". I guess that that answers the hon. Gentleman's question.

There is no escape from the conclusion that the Government are introducing this tax increase because they are running away from the need, to use their own rhetoric, to make hard choices and decisions.

Is the economic damage associated with the tax increase at least mitigated by the fact that extra money is being voted into the national health service? I stand as a strong supporter of the principle of access to health care. We must continue to embrace the ideal that health care should be available on the basis of clinical need, not on ability to pay. We should also embrace the ideal of delivering world-class health care to those who need it on the basis of clinical need. Last year, the World Health Organisation concluded that we were among the worst performers of any European country against those two ideals.

The question is whether the Budget can be justified by the fact that a proportion at least of this tax increase is being committed to health care. To answer that, I invite the House to cast its mind back to a day that we shall all remember—11 September 2001. It is, of course, carved in history as a day of infamy. However, when the Prime Minister got up that morning, he wanted 11 September 2001 to be remembered for a quite different reason. On that day the Prime Minister was planning to address the Trades Union Congress about the need for fundamental reform in the delivery of public services.

There had been extensive briefing ahead of 11 September that the autumn of 2001 was going to be when the re-elected new Labour Government engaged with their supporters about the need fundamentally to reform delivery of public services in Britain. The Prime Minister was making it clear that there would, in principle, be extra resources available, but that those resources would be conditional upon the delivery of reform.

I believe that the Prime Minister played a distinguished role in international events at the end of last year, and I do not criticise him for not following those plans through. However, when he re-engaged in British domestic politics at the beginning of this year, we had another round of briefing about the importance of fundamental reform of the delivery of public services. That was to be another of the reasons why new Labour was different from all its predecessors. However, while the Prime Minister was away, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had taken control of the argument. The Chancellor had, by the beginning of the year, made it clear that there was to be more money for the health service and despite what the Prime Minister wanted and had briefed about last autumn, it was not going to be conditional on the delivery of fundamental reform.

The Red Book has one fleeting reference to the importance of conditionality associated with the money going into the national health service. The message that comes out of the Budget and the tax increase is that the

[Mr. Dorrell]

Government are absolutely committed to a £30 billion increase in health expenditure over five years and—in parenthesis, and very much sotto voce—that that is conditional on reform. At its annual conference immediately after the Budget, the Royal College of Nursing made it crystal clear that it understood that the money was available and the conditionality had simply disappeared.

The Budget introduces a huge tax increase, avoiding the need for difficult decisions in public expenditure programmes, and the Government are vacating the ground of fundamental reform of the national health service. We are being asked to bless a huge increase of extra resources for a fundamentally unreformed structure.

I come back to the point with which I began. Today, five years on from the election of the new Labour Government, we see that they are, in truth, simply another tax-and-spend Government who run away from the hard decisions about choices within public expenditure and the need for fundamental reform of public services.

6.7 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I have attempted to glean more information about the hard choices perceived by the Opposition. That is difficult because they are reserving judgment, so I took the liberty of examining the websites of their Treasury Front-Bench team. Only two have websites. That of the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) is called the Flight Site, but, unfortunately, it crashed repeatedly, so I could not judge his views.

Luckily, however, the website of the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) was available. Unfortunately, I could find no comment on the Budget, health, taxation or national insurance contributions, but there was a questionnaire that his voters could use for giving feedback. [Hon. Members: "On the Budget?"] Not quite. There were several questions eliciting voters' views on immigration, but none on the Budget. I therefore propose that he add to his website a question or two on the Budget asking whether his electorate are in favour of it and prepared to pay the additional national insurance contributions.

My website outlines my view. It spells out that I will use my vote for the NHS. The electorate in Bassetlaw are very clear about where I stand on the issue. I have gone beyond the website in letting the local population know my views on the Budget and the hard choices. I hope that the hon. Member for Aylesbury will do likewise. I commend him on his questionnaire, which is well laid out. This is an ideal opportunity for him to do that. I have asked my researcher to monitor his website daily over the next week to see whether those questions are added. Perhaps we could have an analysis of the results as well.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): In the hon. Gentleman's efforts to find out the views of the people of Bassetlaw, has he asked them whether they believe that the extra money on national insurance will actually transform the national health service? The evidence of the opinion polls is that people have profound doubts that it will make a difference.

John Mann: Of course I ask that. I note that the hon. Gentleman has a website, too; I should have investigated it for good hints and tips. As I listen to the debate, I seem to be living in virtual reality but, yes, I do go out in Bassetlaw.

Indeed, this very week, the huts that were put up as wards for Bassetlaw hospital in 1938 are being knocked down. On the eve of the Budget, in a presentation to the Bassetlaw chamber of commerce, the general manager of the hospital outlined her vision of what the hospital would be like if the resources were available—the additional provision of acute services and the use of the land on which those huts have stood since 1938. She had some answers, but what did the Bassetlaw chamber of commerce have to say? Its president, as a business man, described it as "A fair Budget".

Like the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), I should, of course, as a shareholder and a former director of a business, declare an interest because of the implications for employers' national insurance; but I also have an interest in the corporation tax reduction. For me, profitability means that I shall receive a greater net benefit due to the reduction in corporation tax this year than the total net increase even if the higher national insurance contributions had already been in force for a year.

Of course, the capital gains tax change for budding entrepreneurs such as myself, the right hon. Member for Charnwood and others is phenomenal: the difference for entrepreneurs in my constituency, or anywhere in the country, is formidable. I have not sold my shares, although I have an offer for them. I do only one job at a time; as an MP, I do not want two jobs. It is almost embarrassing when we consider the difference that the Chancellor and the Government have made for entrepreneurs through successive Budgets—Budgets for entrepreneurship.

Of course, employers never want to pay more, but what are the alternatives? Let us consider them, because they have not been spelt out. There are various European models for increased taxation. Each takes more of the national income in taxation than we do, however that is dressed up. We might call them the European continental model. It has not been adopted by the Government. Some people may suggest that it is a good model, but, despite the nuances in some of the remarks of Opposition Front-Bench Members, I have not heard that from them yet.

Another model is the American one, which is extremely interesting. There appears to be a presumption in the debate that employees and employers in the United States do not pay for their health service through taxation. That is true. In the United States, 45 per cent. of small businesses do not offer their employees private medical insurance. That possibility is not open to the 45 per cent. of employees who earn less than $7 an hour. That is one of the fundamental problems of the US health care system.

I offer the House an example using a theoretical company. I note that the shadow Chancellor, as a Minister, employed five special advisers. If the company was American, we could call it "Special Advisers Inc.", but I shall discuss the American model later. A UK company might be called "Special Advisers Ltd."

What would be the cost to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, as an employer of five employees, of the increase in employers' national insurance contributions? It would be less than half the cheapest rate that BUPA

quoted me for insurance for such a company. BUPA offers a cut-price version, because it relies on the national health service. It has no accident or emergency facilities and there are all sorts of get-outs.

How could I get a cut price? I should have to make a judgment about the special advisers. Currently, there are 19 of them among the Tories—11.6 per cent. of the parliamentary Conservative party were special advisers. I took an average age of 38. I thought that to take a higher age would be unfair, because, as we all know, with the American model of private health insurance, the older people are, the worse it is.

Furthermore, in the American system, people with mental health problems cannot obtain the same insurance and they have to pay more. Discrimination against those with mental health problems has been debated in Congress during the past few weeks.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman's exposition is fascinating, but I am uncertain why he is giving it: as he will be aware, the shadow Health Secretary has said clearly that we are not considering the American model.

John Mann: At present, the Conservatives do not appear to be considering any model—not the higher-tax, European continental model, not the American model and not the UK model. I have not yet seen a new model, although I am sure that one will emerge.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Who is in government?

John Mann: We are in government. We have made the decisions and, as I said earlier, I applaud them—so does the population. However, it is fair to discuss these points in a major debate on health and the funding of an expanded and improved health service. I am sure that everyone concurs that we want that. The debate is about how best to achieve it.

I want to turn to the American model—Special Advisers Inc. In the American system, those 19 employees—the 11.6 per cent.—would join a union. In America, 99 per cent. of large employers have a collective bargaining agreement with a union. I picked an American union at random; it was the first website to come up when I checked—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying rather wide of the mark; he should come back more specifically to the matter before the House.

John Mann: I wanted to develop the point that five options are available. Employers and employees in America pay for the funding of the health system through the collective bargaining agreement—each pays part of the cost. In principle, there is no difference between that and the changes to national insurance contributions that have been made in this country—employees and employers both pay. Anyone who suggests that the American model is different is highly misguided.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): The shadow Chancellor might not have referred to private health care, but the shadow health spokesman clearly did. Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the United States, people in work have access to health care, but when they fall on hard times—if they are made redundant or their family circumstances change—they no longer have access to the private health schemes to which he referred? It is estimated that about 40 million Americans are not covered by any health insurance at all.

John Mann: In the United States, 45 per cent. of workers on low wages are not offered medical insurance. The co-chair of the American social security commission, Daniel Moynihan, proposes that the retirement age should be raised to 70. That seems rather extreme because most people suggest an age between 65 and 67, but he does co-chair the commission.

That is another alternative: we could raise the retirement age, and stop people receiving their pensions. That would be one way to solve some of the NHS funding problems in this country. It is an alternative that I entirely reject, but it is part of the debate currently under way in the United States. On average US pensioners, spend 21 per cent. of their income on health care.

Dr. Murrison: My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) has already pointed out that our hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) dismissed the American model as a possibility. Presumably, Labour Members have done the same thing, so the hon. Gentleman is talking hypothetically.

John Mann: I am making a contribution to the debate by suggesting that there are three models: the United Kingdom model; the European continental model, which is a higher-tax model; and the American model. Of course, there are nuances and variations in each model, but they are the three options. There are no other alternatives, and we have to decide on one of them.

Chris Grayling: With respect, the continental model is not a higher-tax model. In no part of the rest of western Europe does any state attempt to fund its health care system wholly by taxation through one large national bureaucracy. That is the difference in this country, and the Conservatives are challenging the status quo because we see no sign that it is delivering the kind of improvements that other countries enjoy.

John Mann: In France, employers pay more than the national insurance contribution in this country—about twice as much. There are different ways of funding, but those employers and employees pay more. There is no such thing as a free meal ticket, so expanding the NHS—or private health, or whatever alternative is proposed—requires more expenditure. That expenditure does not come from anywhere else, unless a Government unwisely borrow money that they have not got and pretend that they can spend money now, although doing so will become a legacy for years to come.

Thankfully, the Government have definitely chosen not to borrow. That is a difference from the past. Of course, increases in national insurance contributions are no new thing. What happened in 1981 and 1984? National insurance contributions went up in both those years. After the 1979 and 1983 general elections, national insurance contributions rose. I cannot recall whether they went up

[John Mann]

later, under the right hon. Member for Charnwood, but national insurance contributions repeatedly rose throughout that period.

Let us consider the tax burden under the Conservatives—the so-called business party. In 1980, 8.4 per cent. of the total tax take came from corporate income. By 1990, the figure had risen to 11.6 per cent. and, by 1997, to 12.2 per cent. In other words, a higher burden was repeatedly placed on business. It is no surprise that so much of the country's wealth had to be spent on paying for unemployment benefits and on the debt repayments involved in borrowing money to try to hold the nation together. This Government's major achievement is having moved away from both those positions.

Under the Government's proposals, tax will rise as a proportion of national income from 37 per cent. in 2001–02, to 38.3 per cent. in 2005–06. That figure is still lower than those recorded in virtually every year of Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership. The difference is that the Government have stable spending plans based on real money, not on borrowing with hyper-inflation and high interest rates. There is a stable economy, and they are using real money, not theoretical money with a price to pay in the future. That is why the national insurance increases will not seriously damage the British economy.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I am intrigued. The farmers in my constituency are trying to recover from last year's foot and mouth outbreak, and the one thing that no one in rural areas wants at the moment is another tax increase. We are an eternally taxed economy. Unemployment is very low, but people are being driven out of jobs in rural areas. Will the hon. Gentleman accept that?

John Mann: I was living on a beef farm during the foot and mouth crisis. My constituency is primarily rural. Some 360 square miles of it are rural, so I am very aware of the rural economy. People in the rural economy tell me that they want a health service in which they are not discriminated against. A big problem in rural areas is that people have to travel further to facilities. Such areas do not have the concentrations of support that exist in more urban areas, so people in rural areas do not get such a good service. That is precisely what the new investment will address.

In my constituency, three new health centres—in Warsop, Harworth and Worksop—are already beyond the planning stage and moving to implementation, and that is happening before the increase. That is what the rural economy wants: good services with a rational calculation of how to pay for them.

Of course this is a tax increase—no one has suggested that it is not—but it is popular and it will not damage the economy because of the strength of the economy. We have the fastest growing economy in the G7. We remain a low-tax economy, especially compared with our European competitors. There is a 3 per cent. difference between us and the EU average tax rate. The main rate of corporation tax—30 per cent.—is lower than that in any other major European country. Of course the low tax position is even better for small businesses such as the one in which I have been involved.

Mr. Hendrick: Does my hon. Friend agree that, contrary to what the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) said earlier, this country can afford this tax increase because corporation tax and other business taxes in this country are lower than those of our European competitors? We can afford this small increase.

John Mann: Our economy is growing well. Interest and inflation rates are at their lowest since the 1960s. The unemployment rate—3.1 per cent.—is the lowest since August 1975. An extra 1.5 million people have been employed since May 1997. We have a strong and stable economy, so it is a question of choices.

I shall end on the choices that are available. Private health care is like travel insurance, and we all know what happens with that. We can insure against delays, but we all know about the opt-outs in the small print and how difficult it is to make claims. We can make baggage claims, but we do not take many bags with us and we all know what the baggage excesses are. What we really pay for is emergency health insurance while we are away.

Everyone in the country knows what the private health care premiums would be for themselves or their families. We all know that the more infirm people are, the higher the premium they pay. If people have had a serious illness, if they have just come out of hospital or if they are pensioners or disabled, their premiums are higher and the exclusions in the small print are greater. That is the only other real option; it is the American system, and we do not want it here.

What we want here is a system where people do not have to read the small print first or calculate the excesses and do not have to beware of the opt-outs. From the cradle to the grave, in sickness and in health, I want health professionals to identify the most effective treatment for me, not to calculate the profitability of my life.

6.28 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I should say at the outset that the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) accused me of lacking a spirit of generosity towards the Government. On reading the *Hansard* report yesterday, my generosity towards the hon. Gentleman was dimmed slightly, possibly by his comments.

We are pleased to support the Government in this ways and means resolution because we accept the central tenet. As the Wanless report accurately stated, we have had 30 years of underinvestment in the health service in particular, under successive Labour and Conservative Governments. We have some reservations about the means that the Government have used to generate the extra investment, but anyone who is familiar with our public services could not fail to support any measure, however imperfect, that would generate extra investment in those services.

I listened with great interest to the contribution made by the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), which was, as ever, interesting. He very successfully demolished any lingering doubt as to whether this is anything other than a rise in personal taxation. It is clearly

a tax increase, although perhaps there has been an attempt by those on the Front Bench to mystify things, and perhaps there might be a greater degree of honesty in the attitude to public finances.

Where I disagree is that I cannot see any correlation between competitiveness and economic success and the level of spending in the public sector. If we consider the index of competitiveness, which Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen have always been keen to use, perhaps until this week, we realise that there is no linear or non-linear correlation between the level of taxation and public expenditure across various countries. There are high-tax, high-public expenditure countries that are economically successful, and, admittedly, there are low-tax economies with low spending in the Government sector, which are also successful. The issue of taxation and expenditure is not principally one of economic efficiency but one of political decision. Society ticks in terms of the relative allocation of resources between personal or family consumption and social or collective consumption. Tax and spend works both ways—it can be personal tax and personal spend.

We welcome the additional resources going into the national health service. I am the second Welshman to contribute to this debate on national insurance. The predecessor to the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies)—Jim Griffiths, who was Minister of National Insurance—came from my home town of Amanford. Of course, we have all dusted down the National Insurance Act 1946 and the National Assistance Act 1948. We should not forget that Lloyd George, another illustrious Welshman, did some of the ground work in 1911.

As I understand it, the original Act provided for mandatory contributions from employees and employers that were principally aimed at supporting benefits, although a small proportion went into the health service. It was anticipated that the Government would take up the shortfall. We are now in the opposite situation—I am sure that the Government would argue that it is down to their sound management of public finances—in which the national insurance fund has a record surplus of more than £15 billion, according to the latest figures that I have seen. We are now using the national insurance fund to support general Government expenditure. The former Member for Llanelli might have had difficulty with that because it cuts across the contributory principle that lay at the heart of the national insurance system, which was an earmarked social insurance system.

We have already heard from the right hon. Member for Charnwood that even next year, with around £8 billion raised, only £2.4 billion is going into the national health service. Clearly, that figure will increase in years to come. Even when we are talking about national insurance increases, however, we are not talking about any form of hypothecation. The Treasury Committee is absolutely right to argue that it is wrong to exclude unearned income. If we accept the argument that there is a case for greater contributions through personal taxation, direct taxation is the most socially equitable means of raising those funds. That point was made eloquently last night by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones).

National insurance is also a tax on a social good—employment. According to the figure from Oxford Economic Forecasting, it may reduce jobs growth by about 100,000 over the next few years. Other economic forecasters may have different views, but that one has been echoed by all the main business organisations. Even the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry [illegible]d that it had been a most unwelcome surprise—I presume that she included herself in that.

We support the objective of renewing the public services through extra investment. We would have liked the Chancellor to go further and faster in undoing underinvestment by successive Governments. That is why we may reconsider the issue of exempting the public sector from the employers' contribution. The Government have been very careful to herald the increase in public spending, but they kept a little quieter about the proportion of the money that will be clawed back through the employers' contribution—£1.2 billion a year, as we heard. The employers' contribution will cost the NHS some £26 million a year in Scotland, and some £11 million in Wales.

If we accept that the central tenet of the Budget is to renew the national health service, it seems curious to use the payroll tax for that purpose. As we know, the national health service is the biggest employer in Europe—apart from the Russian armed forces, I believe—with 1.5 million employees. The payroll tax is therefore probably the last policy tool that should be used to effect an increase in new resources available to the national health service in the short term. Of course, other public sector employers will also be hit badly. Consignia—I presume it is still in the public sector—is losing £1.5 million a day and, I believe, it is coming before the Welsh Affairs Committee. It will have to pay an additional £35 million to £40 million a year on top of that, thereby adding to its financial difficulties. As we have heard, local authorities have particular problems in the care sector, which the Chancellor addressed specifically through the Budget. Because of the revolving door of Government revenue, however, whereby the Chancellor gives with one hand and takes away with the other, local authorities in Scotland are losing about £35 million and those in Wales are losing some £15 million.

Apart from the clawback, there is also a danger that the employers' contribution will add further to worries about wage inflation in the public sector. The value of the extra money going into the NHS could be lost to inflation. As the King's Fund told the Treasury Committee, 40 per cent. of the extra cash for the NHS could go straight into higher pay and prices. We are aware of the comments of one of the City economists, Michael Sanders of Schroders, that public sector wage inflation is already increasing apace—an average of 4 per cent. compared with 2.3 per cent. across the economy as a whole. That has implications in terms of the Chancellor's stated aim of increasing the NHS budget by 7 per cent. in real terms. If inflation in the public sector is higher owing to wage increases and the fact that the Government are less reliant on cheaper imports, it could eat considerably into the 7 per cent. increase.

To a certain extent, the pent-up demand in the public sector for wage increases is understandable. For 20 years, public sector employees were treated as the poor relations. Their pay was restricted, their conditions were undermined, and their status was downgraded to a certain extent. It is therefore no surprise that the Government find it difficult to recruit the doctors, teachers, nurses and police needed to staff existing services, let alone the huge increases of 35,000 extra nurses and 30,000 extra therapists that the Secretary of State for Health has talked about.

[Adam Price]

The Secretary of State for Health has said that pay is not a something for nothing arrangement. The same applies to recruitment. The only way to recruit that number of people in what is admittedly a tight labour market is to offer serious additional incentives in terms of public sector pay. That, on top of the changes in employees' and employers' national insurance contributions, will make a very difficult environment for the public sector in the next few years. The fear is that the extra spending will be swallowed up by salaries and additional inflation that is unique to the public sector. Therefore, although the increase in investment is necessary, it is insufficient to deal with 30 years of underinvestment in the health service.

Of course, what is true for the health service is true right across the board for the public sector. Although I do not want to stray into wider territory in terms of the economy, there are widely expressed doubts about the Chancellor's arithmetic in terms of economic growth. The Government's own figures from last week show a 0.1 per cent. increase in the first three months of this year, and that comes on top of a zero increase in the last three months of last year. That clearly suggests that the economy will not meet the Chancellor's growth forecast for this year. If that develops into a wider economic problem, it will impact seriously on the public finances. The Institute for Fiscal Studies and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research have also pointed to the hole, as they see it, in the Government's arithmetic for the public finances even if the Chancellor meets his economic targets.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Adam Price: I may give way to the hon. Gentleman later in this Parliament, and I think that he understands the reasons for that. In any case, I am about to wind up my speech.

I hope that we will be able to table more detailed amendments when the Bill is before us. Obviously, our natural enthusiasm got the better of us in the amendment that we drafted to the resolution, but there is a legitimate argument for providing an additional cushion and additional stimulus for the public sector by exempting it from the national insurance increases. We look forward to having that debate.

There has been much talk about the rebirth of old Labour, but I have not been convinced by that talk. We can look back to the past, and the right hon. Member for Llanelli will know the figures because, to quote Max Boyce, "He was there." Between 1974 and 1976, there was a 5 per cent. increase in public expenditure as a proportion of GDP, and that was in the first two years of that Labour Government. We are now in the second term of this Labour Government, and even with the changes announced by the Chancellor, we shall see only a 1 per cent. increase in public expenditure as a proportion of GDP over a five-year term. The figure is even lower than that for the last year of the Government of whom the right hon. Member for Charnwood was a member. Suggestions of the rebirth of old Labour are possibly overstated.

I hope that these proposals are not the final word but the beginning of a new debate, a new dispensation and a new honesty about the relative balance in the United Kingdom and in the countries of the United Kingdom between private affluence and public welfare.

6.42 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): The ways and means resolution before us illustrates the way in which the Government have sold the Budget. They have said that the increase in national insurance contributions will pay for the cost of increased spending in the NHS. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) pointed out so clearly, in the first fiscal year in which the increase in national insurance contributions will affect businesses, the cost of £8 billion will far exceed the amount that will actually be spent on the NHS. It is not surprising that the Chancellor has decided to sell the Budget as a Budget for the health service, because that is a good way of avoiding the message that describes the pain that will be inflicted on public services as well as businesses next year.

In my borough of Fareham, it is estimated that the cost of the increased national insurance contributions will be £91,000. That is a relatively small figure because it is a small local authority, but it will translate into a 1 or 2 per cent. increase in council tax this time next year. I talked to representatives of the charitable sector earlier this week, and they estimate that the increase in employers' national insurance will cost the sector more than £50 million a year. The cost of more than £200 million has already been cited for the health service and, in an answer given earlier this week, the Department for Education and Skills identified that the additional costs for teachers' salaries will be about £140 million.

Once those increases are taken into account, it is not surprising that a total cost to the public sector of £1.2 billion will arise from the increase in national insurance contributions. That demonstrates the sheer scale of the increases and the impact that they will have on the provision of public services—about which the Government speak so proudly—and on the improvements in delivery that the Government expect to see.

One sector that will be particularly affected by the increase in national insurance—it is relevant given the rationale that has been given for the increase—is the care home sector. It has already lost 50,000 beds since 1996–97, and it has been interesting to note reactions to the Budget from people in the sector. Frank Ursell, chief executive officer of the Registered Nursing Home Association, said:

"For those care home owners who are already teetering on the brink, this tax increase on wages could be the final straw. Many care home owners could say 'I've had enough'".

Sheila Scott of the National Care Homes Association said:

"Stealth taxes are killing my members. This tax increase may push some care home owners over the edge".

Philip Scott, chief executive of Southern Cross, one of Britain's largest nursing home owners, said:

"We've very quickly done a calculation of what this will do to our payroll costs, and it seems to increase them by about £600,000."

Many nursing homes are small and have thin margins. Their wage costs account for about 80 per cent. of their total costs, so a 1 per cent. increase in national insurance

will reduce their margins by about a fifth. That will push many of them over the edge. We cannot simply accept a decline in the number of nursing home beds.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us how we can improve and increase expenditure on the health service if not through an increase in national insurance contributions? The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) said that business should not have to pay more tax and the hon. Gentleman suggests that the public sector will also be heavily hit by the proposal. If the public and private sectors are not willing through their national insurance contributions to pay more tax, where will the money come from? Furthermore—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making an intervention, and he has already done well enough.

Mr. Hoban: The hon. Gentleman asks how we are going to fund the increased expenditure. My contention is that the increases in national insurance contributions will make the situation worse, not better. The closure of nursing home beds as a consequence of the increases will lead to more bed blocking and longer waiting lists. The health care changes that the Government suggest will come through will not materialise. This tax increase will be counterproductive. Over the past five years, the increases in health care spending that the Government have announced have not translated into better standards of care.

A number of my constituents have written to me about podiatry services. In Portsmouth, 10,500—

Mr. Hendrick: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the House is holding a debate on national insurance increases and the Government have put forward their proposals, is it in order for the Opposition not to put forward any proposals? Is that a proper debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order; it is a matter of debate.

Mr. Hoban: As I was saying, increases in health service spending over the past five years have not been translated into improvements in the quality of service offered to people in my constituency. Some 10,500 pensioners in the Portsmouth area now no longer receive podiatry services despite all the Government's promises of better standards and more care. The case is yet to be demonstrated.

John Mann: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoban: I will not give way, because I am conscious that other colleagues wish to speak.

Previous promises of increased expenditure have not led to improved services. Without fundamental change in the NHS, the tax increases in the Budget and the increases in national insurance contributions will not translate into better health care. The Government have shown an unwillingness to adopt fully a programme of change and reform in the NHS that would lead to improvements in the delivery of health care. I fear that businesses, the public sector and care homes—indeed, a host of affected interests across the country—will suffer pains as a consequence of increased national insurance contributions. I cannot envisage the NHS gaining from that unless there is real change in the provision of health care.

6.50 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): We have heard that the increase in national insurance levied in the Budget will be used to fund the national health service, so it is on that that I shall focus. Although I am mindful of the comment that only a proportion of that take will be spent on the NHS, it is important to explain that the NHS is not just about cash. I regret the remarks made by the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor), who seemed to suggest that the NHS started in 1997, so nullifying everything that went before. I trained in the NHS in the early 1980s and have worked in it. I regret such remarks, which will reflect poorly on the hon. Gentleman when they appear in *Hansard* tomorrow.

The Chancellor should not fall into the trap that because he has turned on the taps, the NHS is going to blossom like the desert after the rains have come. Recent experience suggests that that will not be the case. The Science and Technology Committee, of which I am a member, found that the £570 million that was pledged as part of the NHS cancer plan ran into the sand. Professor Gordon McVie, director general of the Cancer Research Fund, told us:

> "I think there is still some mystery about where some of the money is and whether the cheque got lost in the post or whether it has been absorbed like creosote into the fence post of the administration of the health service."

That is quite damning. Notwithstanding the Government's commission to audit and check that money is being spent as it should be, we need structural change to ensure that that is not required. We do not want Parliament to get another damning report suggesting that money has run into the post like creosote. However, as there is no evidence of structural change, we are concerned that the money will not be well spent and will not be focused on what really matters. It is not just a case of spending money on the NHS or health services broadly defined. I believe that our constituents want to see the outcomes of health care policy.

The Government's stance on alternative funding has hardened in recent months since the Chancellor asked Mr. Wanless to craft his report. The Wanless report cannot be seen as independent or even objective, but even it admits:

> "The degree of individual choice tends to be relatively limited under tax financing . . . in a world where patient expectations are rising rapidly and people are increasingly looking for health services which offer greater personal choice in non-clinical services, it may not be acceptable or equitable to meet all of these additional demands through public financing."

Acceptable and equitable are important terms indeed.

I do not know whether our system, funded overwhelmingly through general taxation, can sustain us, and I am prepared to examine other models. We have to accept that our system is unique and we have got it either very right or very wrong. Either way, we have to be prepared to countenance other models of health service funding. We should compare a system based on rationing that will always be driven by available resources—the United Kingdom is the exemplar of that—with

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

demand-led systems elsewhere that focus on cost containment. It is a great shame that the Chancellor has put his faith exclusively in the former.

John Mann: Does the hon. Gentleman rule in or rule out the scheme in the United States?

Dr. Murrison: Hon. Members have repeatedly said that no one on either side of the House is interested in the American system. For myself, as a humble Back Bencher, I do not think that the system works particularly well in the United States and it certainly would not work well here. I hope that that gives the hon. Gentleman, for the last time, the answer that he seeks.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: He does not want to believe it.

Dr. Murrison: I fear my hon. Friend is correct.

John Mann: What alternative does the hon. Gentleman propose?

Dr. Murrison: If I can crave your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall have to labour the point. I do not know how we should best fund health in this country, but I am prepared to examine alternatives. Rather like Lewis Carroll's Red Queen, the Chancellor has closed his mind without first examining the evidence. I hope that the Opposition continue to examine what is best for the British public so that we get the very best health outcomes. That is the important consideration, not institutions. I say that as someone who worked in the NHS and has every respect for it and its staff. Frankly, my constituents would consider surrendering the nine-minute average GP slot that they get under the current system for 20 minutes in the not-for-profit Californian system run by Kaiser Permanente.

The recent Treasury Committee Budget report makes the pertinent observation:

"The proposed increases in NICs for employees and the self-employed will deliver a tax increase to those groups that is very similar to a 1 per cent. increase in the rates of income tax. However, unlike increases in income tax, increases in NICs will not affect pensioners and those living off unearned income, who benefit from the insurance provided by the National Health Service, and may be in a position to make a contribution. We think that the Treasury has, as yet, failed to make the case for choosing a method of revenue raising (higher employer and employee national insurance contributions) which excludes well-off pensioners and people living comfortably off unearned income from making a contribution to higher NHS spending."

The House should bear it in mind that that is an influential, Labour-dominated Committee.

The public policy campaign group, Reform, listed a series of concerns that it has about the NHS. It points out that the Department of Health estimates that 16 to 20 per cent. of the NHS budget is lost as a result of poor management, fraud, blocked beds, hospital-related infections and other aspects of mismanagement. We need to address that urgently. We know that Scotland spends the EU average on health care, yet public health figures tell us that it enjoys among the worst health care in Europe. In other words, it is not just about money; it is what we do with it. The tax cost of the NHS to the average family has more than doubled in 10 years, but is that reflected in the improvements in their health care? Probably not.

As an aside, as someone who worked in the NHS and who has viewed health care with interest for most of my adult life, most of the extremely positive advances in the past 50 years have not been due to the number of the doctors on which the Government are so fixated. It pains me to say that. I am a doctor and I would love to be able to tell the House that the problems could be solved by recruiting more doctors. Sadly, that is not case. It is far more complicated than that.

The Adam Smith Institute estimates that only 17 per cent. of any new resources for the NHS end up in front-line services, which bears out the findings of the Science and Technology Committee. The Secretary of State for Health described the NHS as

"the last great nationalised industry".

The Institute of Directors points out that Government policy remains set on sending

"more men over the top"

instead of opening up new fronts. The Institute of Directors represents many small and medium-sized organisations. We need to pay due credence to what it says because they generate the wealth that, at the end of the day, funds the public services that we all want.

Let me conclude by citing two of the most prominent medical men in the country. The chairman of the British Medical Association recently said:

"the NHS in its current state cannot survive without radical change".

The president of the Royal College of Surgeons recently stated:

"things are in such a mess, much worse than I would have imagined possible . . . the NHS is in a desperate state."

6.59 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): May I begin by apologising to the Chair and to Members on both Front Benches for missing the start of the debate? I was at a sitting of the Transport Sub-Committee; clearly, I view attendance at Select Committees as particularly important, especially this week.

I feel strongly that the increase in employers' national insurance contributions introduced in the Budget is foolhardy and will damage a wide range of organisations. It is worth thinking back to the comments made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer two years ago, when he said that a small adjustment downwards in employers' contributions was an employment-creating measure. By definition, his decision to increase employers' contributions this year must be an employment-damaging measure; the two facts inevitably go together.

The impact will be felt, first and foremost, in business. I know that the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) has argued that the public sector will be the problem, and I will go on to reinforce many of his comments, but it is not only the public sector that will be affected. As a result of this change, small businesses throughout this country, particularly in manufacturing, which has suffered as a result of adverse exchange rates in the past few years, will take on costs that they can ill afford.

Yesterday, at Scotland Office questions, I pointed out that employment in manufacturing in Scotland has fallen to a historically low level, yet the Budget will take £50 million out of Scottish manufacturing companies. That cannot happen without it having an adverse effect on employment. I do not know the comparable figures for Wales—I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me—but I am certain that the Budget will also lead to a loss of tens of millions of pounds for manufacturing companies in Wales and other parts of the country, which they can ill afford at this time.

It is easy for Ministers to talk about small amounts for individual companies. It is true that a small service firm with a turnover of £500,000 a year will end up spending £3,000 or £4,000 a year extra as a result of the measure, but where does that money come from? In most small companies, costs are fixed: salaries have to be paid, the rates have to be paid and the bills for heat and light have to be paid. There is relatively little discretionary spending in any company's budget, and when adjustments have to be made the money comes from such sources as sales and marketing, the training budget or the investment budget—perhaps the company will buy fewer computers that year. No small business can afford to give up those things.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) is no longer in his place. He mentioned profitability. Whatever the Government have done for profitability, many of our growth companies do not make a profit in their first few years, but they still employ people and so carry the costs of employment. Those businesses in particular will suffer as a result of the change.

The measure will also have a huge impact on our biggest companies, such as Nissan in the north-east, which has been struggling to deal with the high exchange rate and is a substantial employer. For Nissan, being in business in this country is now less viable. The same is true of Corus, which has been forced to make cuts in south Wales, which we all regret. How many more jobs with Corus will be lost as a result of the Budget?

The truth is that businesses both big and small will suffer, but there will be an equally huge impact on our public services, and I want to say a little about how the measure will affect our education system. In the past few days, I have been finding out in a series of written answers exactly what the impact on schools and colleges will be. Can Ministers assure the House that local authorities will be fully funded so that they can address the shortfalls that schools will face as a result of the higher employers' contributions?

Some of the figures that I have been given are frightening. I asked the Department for Education and Skills about the total amount of national insurance contributions paid, directly and indirectly, through its budget. Using the available data, it said, it estimates that the cost of contributions paid by the Department in this financial year will be £3 billion. That means that, next year, with a 10 per cent. increase in the national insurance rate, approximately £300 million extra in employers' contributions will have to be found. That money will come out of education budgets.

If we could be certain that the schools and colleges that will have to pay those bills would be refunded, we might be reassured, but a further written answer about colleges gave me further cause for anxiety. It said:

"The additional cost in employers' national insurance contributions in 2003–04 for all English colleges (including sixth form colleges) providing further education is estimated to be about £25 million. This cost will be considered alongside other priorities and pressures in the 2002 spending review."—[*Official Report*, 29 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 572W.]

So there are no guarantees that those funds will not come straight off the bottom line. I suspect that a cost of £25 million spread across all colleges may equate to the cost of a teaching post in each one.

I have figures for primary and secondary schools. The cost of the increase in contributions will be £20,000 for the average secondary school, which is about the same as the cost of a teaching post for a new graduate. The cost will be £4,000 for the average primary school, which is more than most of them have to spend on books and equipment every year. Will that money be refunded to schools through next year's education settlement, or will they find that it has been cheese-pared away and that local authorities have been underfunded for next year's pay settlements? Even Ofsted does not escape. I have a letter from the chief inspector, who says:

"I estimate that the additional cost in 2003–04 will be about £½ million."

That is £500,000 that will not be available to fund school inspections.

There is no logic whatever in taxing our schools and colleges to pay for the NHS, or indeed, as hon. Members have said, in taxing the NHS to pay for the NHS. The Government are taxing hospitals, primary care trusts, social services and, outside the public sector but equally importantly, care homes. The flaw in the amendment to which the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr put his name is that it does not mention care homes. They are privately owned but they depend on a small cadre of staff who are dedicated but not highly paid. They are businesses that often operate close to the margin. They will have to fund this extra tax, and they may well be unable to afford it.

Throughout the country, small and large businesses and, in the public sector, the health service, our schools and colleges, our police forces and our councils will pay extra. It is far from clear that they will all get their money back and that services will not suffer as a result. The measure is ill-thought-out, and it will do far more harm than good. It is far from clear that it will deliver improvements to the health service of the kind that are undoubtedly needed. It is a bad measure and it should be opposed by the House.

7.7 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I, too, must apologise to the House for being slightly late.

I want to begin where I left off in my intervention on the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), in which I spoke of the effect that the increase in national insurance will have in areas such as mine that have been affected by last year's foot and mouth epidemic. Rural economies are fragile at the best of times; they have very little meat on their bones to keep themselves going. Last year, we saw the meat on those bones devastated in entire constituencies.

[Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger]

We lost all our tourist trade. Tourism is now trying to bring itself back from the brink. Last year, business was down by 80 per cent., and those companies depend totally on part-time rural labour. The problem in tourism now is that people are beginning to say to their banks, "I can see my way out of this." They hope that they can trade their way out of the problems. This national insurance increase will make that much more difficult. These companies have very little to play with, and they have made budget predictions, not only for this year but for a couple of years, which will now be wrong, and, as we well know, banks are somewhat less than forgiving.

What about farming itself? The industry has gone through a massive change in the past five years. It has cut the number of people employed on the land, and the problem now is that it will have to make further cuts. The average income for a farmer is £5,000. If a farmer employs somebody, he will lose 1 per cent. of that person's wage in national insurance. That is yet another increase that farmers and rural businesses can ill afford. There is no way out for farmers—they have to be on the land, working the land. Are we seriously suggesting that, despite the working time directive, farmers will now have to work 24 hours a day because they can ill afford to employ people to help when they need it most?

What about small businesses in seaside towns? I was talking to a company that supplies slot machines. It has a problem because business is cyclical, so it shuts for six months of the year. It takes on part-time workers and, after the six months of work, it gets rid of them again. With an increase in national insurance, any business that is cyclical and totally dependent on one sector of the community will find it very difficult to expand.

I wonder whether the Government are aware that over the past few years there have been £6 billion a year of extra taxes and £5 billion a year of extra red tape. In my constituency, we have Butlins, which has 9,000 guests a week. It employs 750 people who are all local part-time workers. Butlins will be affected by the increase, because red tape is a disaster for such a business. People will go overseas on holiday. That is what Butlins is competing with. The market is large and aggressive, and it is fickle, depending on what the pound does that year or at the time.

I also have a tea company in my constituency. It obviously relies on imports from around the world to blend and make tea. It is a tiny company that has done very well. I am trying to get its products into this honourable place. The increase will affect such a company in the long term. The company will find it more and more difficult to get the sort of people that it wants, because of the overhead costs. A tea blender or a tea taster is a professional person, not just someone who can be picked off the streets and trained. We would not be very happy downstairs if that were the case.

Productivity growth has slowed under this Government and is faster in the United States. Royal Ordnance plc in my constituency is looking to move production to America, because its overheads make it uncompetitive in this country. Its parent company, BAE Systems, is looking to move Royal Ordnance overseas because it is not economic. Its production in this country does not make the money that is required.

I recently introduced the Patents Act 1977 (Amendment) Bill. In that connection, I was intrigued by the fact that Mr. Dyson is moving his production overseas because of the increased cost of his work force in this country. The reason for introducing the Bill was to protect people such as him. As a result of the increases in taxation, they will now go offshore—in Mr. Dyson's case, I believe, to Malaya.

Whether or not a company is making a profit, it still has to pay national insurance contributions, so companies that have been affected over the past year by circumstances beyond their control are still being charged NICs, which cannot be healthy.

Another aspect of the problem is the cost to local authorities. For instance, West Somerset district council has a budget of only £4 million. The increase will make a substantial difference to the local services that it can provide. Somerset county, which is Liberal Democrat-controlled, increased its provision by 12.9 per cent. That will cost more this year because of the rise. Over the past few years Somerset has lost 248 care beds, and will lose more. Somerset county cannot afford to pay the money necessary to keep the beds going. Greater pressure will be put on county and district councils because of the increases in taxation and red tape.

I do not believe for one minute that the Government have thought through the implications of the measure. Areas such as Somerset can least afford it. It will result in a substantial lack of investment in long-term help for the elderly and in care homes. If we continue to shut care homes at the present rate, bed blocking will become even more prevalent.

We have three cottage hospitals. The pooling of resources could mean that those hospitals will come under threat. With the loss of care home places, people will end up being bed blocked because there is nowhere else to put them. The local hospitals that provide some relief to doctors and to larger hospitals will have gone. That is the depth and width of the problem that we face.

Raising taxes penalises people in rural areas who can least afford it. Companies such as Nissan have been mentioned. Those have a better chance, but the Government cannot take away what we have not got. Many people in rural areas will go out of business because they cannot afford to continue.

7.14 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The debate has been fascinating. It was about the £8 billion increase in tax and the Government's litany of broken promises:

"We've got no plans at all to raise that ceiling on National Insurance Contributions—it is not going to happen."

That is what the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said to the "Powerhouse" programme on 29 May 2001 during the general election campaign. The Government have broken their promise to the electorate about employees' national insurance and abandoned their own words about employers' national insurance.

On 6 October 1999, the Government responded to the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry dated 19 July 1999. In paragraph (i) of their response they stated:

"The climate change levy and the associated reduction in employers National Insurance Contributions represents a shift in the burden of taxation from 'goods' such as labour to 'bads' such as

environmental pollution. The reduction in NI contributions will reduce the cost of labour and thereby encourage employment opportunities throughout the economy."

During the debate the Government have turned those words on their head. If it is true that reducing national insurance contributions will reduce the cost of labour and encourage employment opportunities, then it must be true that increasing national insurance contributions will increase the cost of labour and reduce employment opportunities. That is the charge that the Government must answer.

The speeches of my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) and my hon. Friends the Members for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) and for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) demonstrated that they are extremely sceptical about whether the £8 billion that is to be raised will generate improvements in the health service. They are also gravely concerned about the impact of the additional impost on employers in their constituency, including the public sector.

The point was made earlier that the Government are raising £300 million in additional tax from local authorities. At the time of the Budget, the Government made much of the fact that they would give £300 million to local authorities to help them with the burdens of social services. What the Government give with one hand they take away with the other.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood made an incisive and hard-hitting speech. He spoke of the burden on business and showed that the United Kingdom is increasing tax at a time when our competitors are cutting tax. He drew attention to the fact that of the £8 billion, only £2.4 billion is earmarked to go to the NHS, and he asked what will happen to the other £5.6 billion. My right hon. Friend's most devastating critique was on the issue of conditionality. There are no strings attached to the way in which the money is to be spent.

I can tell the House that I do not have a closed mind. I have an open mind. Last night I attended a fascinating lecture by a Swedish expert on health care. He illustrated how it is possible to have better health care without having to increase tax. He said that in 1991 the funding system in Stockholm was changed to one based on outputs. As a result, health service output increased by 19 per cent. He said that St. George's hospital and other hospitals in Stockholm became independent boards in 1994, thereby generating 40 per cent. extra productivity. In 1999, St. George's hospital in Stockholm was sold to the private sector, producing a reduction in costs of between 10 and 15 per cent. If health care can be improved in Sweden without taxing, spending and wasting, we can do it in this country as well, given the will.

The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) repeated that the people of this country are not taxed highly enough. All I can say is that he is totally out of touch with the reality on the ground. Five years ago today I was elected in Christchurch to succeed a Liberal Democrat who had failed the people of Christchurch. I am proud that this is my fifth anniversary of representing that constituency.

What we want is an end to this tax, spend and waste, and a genuine reform of the NHS. That is why we will vote against the resolution.

7.19 pm

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): It is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) should pray in aid Sweden. I suggest that he look at its tax rates before he goes any further.

I begin with the issue raised about business and its response to the national insurance proposals. Anthony Goldstone, president of the British Chambers of Commerce, said:

"Now any of us in business know that we get what we pay for. If we want a world class health service in the UK we need to pay more. The advance of medical science, new treatments and more advanced drugs means costs are increasing. The question is not whether we need to pay more, but how."

He went on to say that it is also crucial that business recognises the importance of having a health service that is capable of treating and maintaining a healthy work force.

I say to the many hon. Members who have contributed that employers have a strong interest in a healthy labour supply. The CBI has estimated that workplace absence costs British business more than £10 billion a year. Even after the 1 per cent. increase in employers' national insurance, employers in the UK will be paying less than those in France and Germany towards their employees' health needs. The benefits to business of a better NHS are clear, and it is right that it should bear some of the costs.

Britain is a good place to be an employer. UK inflation is the lowest in Europe and the UK is rated by the OECD as having the lowest barriers to entrepreneurship of any major economy. The Budget went further in assisting that. Indeed, yesterday's report by the Institute of Management Development says that the UK has the most resilient economy, ahead of those of the United States and Germany, the largest direct investors abroad and the third largest inward investment. It goes on to say:

"The United Kingdom has better withstood the uncertainties of the global economy."

The economy is strong, but on any proposal that the Government make, Opposition Members constantly claim that jobs will be lost. They did so on the national minimum wage and on every other proposal that we have made.

Let me turn briefly to the points made about how the national insurance fund will operate and what will happen to the revenue. The increase in national insurance contributions is specifically aimed at funding Government spending on the national health service while taking into account other spending priorities, and it needs to meet the strict fiscal rules. The increase in national insurance is to be seen in the context of the five-year pledge on health spending and the Government's fiscal rules and priorities in other places. The proportion of the contributions that is currently allocated to the national health service will be increased by the amount of the increase in national insurance, in exactly the way to which the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) referred.

There was a further question about the need for primary legislation with regard to the 1 per cent. level varying on national insurance above the upper earnings limit. I can confirm that primary legislation would be required if there was to be any variation above that upper limit.

I turn now to the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) and his various boasts. The Conservative Government increased national insurance many times,

[Dawn Primarolo]

but especially in April 1994, when he was Financial Secretary to the Treasury. I looked at his speech on the Budget at that time. Some £10 billion of cuts were made in public expenditure, and he bragged that growth in public expenditure would be less than 1 per cent. He went on, with his Government, to increase national insurance, in contrast with what Lord Howe of Aberavon did, which was mentioned last night; his Budget cut public expenditure by £4 billion, raised VAT to 15 per cent. and froze child benefit and the real value of pensions.

It was 56 years ago yesterday that the National Health Service Bill was discussed in the House. I looked at the comments that Conservative Members made at that time and found that they were the same old Tories. They said that they were in favour of health, but not of the national health service; they were in favour of developments, but not keen to give the money. They were in favour of those things without saying what their policies were. In this debate, they have continued in exactly the same way to argue that they like the health service, but they are not prepared to say how they would pay for it. We know that their aims are the same now as on 30 April 1946. They want to break up the national health service, just as they did in 1979. They want to cut public expenditure, just as the right hon. Member for Charnwood did when he was Financial Secretary.

The motion provides the vehicle for discussion of the national insurance Bill and I commend it to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 314, Noes 137.

Division No. 224] **[7.26 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*

Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bourn'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Morrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That provision may be made for, and in connection with, increasing national insurance contributions and for applying the increases towards the cost of the National Health Service.

Bill ordered to brought in upon the foregoing resolution: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Secretary Darling, Mr. Secretary Milburn, Mr. Andrew Smith, Mr. Paul Boateng, Ruth Kelly and Dawn Primarolo do prepare and bring it in.

National Insurance Contributions Bill

Dawn Primarolo accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for, and in connection with, increasing national insurance contributions and for applying the increases towards the cost of the national health service: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed.

Draft Communications Bill (Joint Committee)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Lords Message of 29th April relating to a Joint Committee of both Houses to consider and report on any draft Communications Bill presented to both Houses by a Minister of the Crown be now considered.

That this House concurs with the Lords in their Resolution relating to the said Joint Committee.

That a Select Committee of six honourable Members be appointed to join with the Committee appointed by the Lords to consider any such draft Communications Bill.

That the Committee shall have power—

(i) to send for persons, papers and records;

(ii) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House;

(iii) to report from time to time;

(iv) to appoint specialist advisers;

(v) to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom; and

That Paul Farrelly, Mr. John Grogan, Nick Harvey, Mr. Andrew Lansley, Anne Picking and Brian White be members of the Committee.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

7.41 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): This measure appears to be straightforward enough, but underneath it lie a number of difficulties. I want to say straight away that we very much support the concept of pre-legislative scrutiny, and that we want to encourage much more of it. We recognise its value, and we are rather pleased that, however belatedly, this example is coming before us. We also support the concept of a Joint Committee of the two Houses of Parliament, because, at its best, it will combine the expertise and impartiality of their lordships with the legitimate, political, representative nature of this House. Provided that we can get the blend of the membership correct, I have no doubt that Joint Committees of this kind can make a valuable contribution to parliamentary scrutiny. That is as it should be.

The problem arises, however, in the composition of the Committees. The difficulties present themselves from a number of directions. The first relates to settling the overall size of the Committee, although it is well established that there should properly be parity of representation of the two Houses of Parliament. That is a legitimate recognition of the different contributions that the two Houses can make, and there should be no controversy over that issue.

Difficulties arise, however, when we consider the composition of the two Houses, and the overall composition of the Houses, in an effort to determine the composition of the Joint Committee. That is because the political composition of the two Houses is quite different, although I do not see anything wrong with that. At present, the Government—one party—have a substantial majority in the House of Commons, and it is proper that that should be recognised in the make-up of the Joint Committee.

The composition of the upper House presents a rather different picture, however. We should recognise that it is the creation of the present Government, in that they have changed its composition and introduced what they like to characterise as a transitional or temporary arrangement—albeit one that seems to be going on for an unconscionably long time. This House, Parliament as a whole and the Government have to deal with the numbers as they are, not as they would like them to be or as they imagine they will be in future. We are therefore faced with the difficult challenge of how to arrive at a composition of a Joint Committee that will give proper recognition to the differing compositions of the House of Lords and of the House of Commons.

In our view, the resolution does not adequately meet that challenge. We have considerable difficulty with the proposed membership of the Committee from this House, which comprises four representatives from the Labour party, one from Her Majesty's official Opposition, and one from the Liberal Democrats. It seems rather odd that my party, which proudly has some 160 Members in this House, should have parity of representation with a minor party that has only 50-odd Members.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): If having 166 Members out of 659 makes the right hon. Gentleman proud, what would make him ashamed?

Mr. Forth: I would never characterise the right hon. Gentleman as being too clever by half, but what I meant to say—I regret it if I failed to convince him of this—was that the contribution that my party of 160-something Members makes is one in which I take great pride. Nevertheless, to have only one member of Her Majesty's official Opposition, which has 160 or so members, on the Committee is neither proper nor adequate. That is at the core of our argument.

There is a need for much further consideration of the composition of such Joint Committees, and it will have to embrace their overall size, the differing representation from the two Houses of Parliament, and the proper representation across the political spectrum of the various parties and interests. I say that because there is—very properly—a large group of Cross Benchers in another place that must never be taken for granted or ignored. It must have proper representation on Joint Committees, given the enormous contribution that Cross Benchers from another place can make. That is a very real issue.

The official Opposition are prepared, on this occasion, to accept the resolution in its present form for the sake of making progress, because we are anxious to proceed with this matter. I also want to make it clear, however, that we are very dissatisfied with the proposed composition of the Committee. I hope that the Leader of the House—if he is replying to this brief debate—will make it clear that, although he welcomes my offer to allow the measure to proceed, this must not be regarded as a precedent, and that, in the Government's view, it is legitimate that we should look at these issues again and arrive at a proper dispensation.

There is another issue which, although it is, perhaps, of secondary importance, must not be ignored; that is, whether we can expect to see Front Benchers or spokesmen from the different parties represented on such Committees. It is not evident at present whether that is the intention. I do not want to prejudge the matter, but I want to flag it up as another issue that needs to be dealt with. The House will realise that, for our part, the names on the resolution reflect the fact that we have chosen to put a very distinguished and experienced Member—

currently a Back Bencher—on the Committee, who I believe will make a positive contribution to its deliberations. All I will say at this stage is that that is not the case for all the parties.

We should look carefully and deliberatively at how we see these pre-legislative Joint Committees operating, what we expect of them and what their role will be. We should then fit all that together in terms of the relative representation of the two Houses of Parliament—reflecting not only their separate composition but their aggregate composition—in the hope that we can arrive at a solution that will properly reflect the will of the electorate, so far as the House of Commons is concerned, and the proper balance of the parties and Cross Benchers in the other place.

I make these points not in any spirit of difficulty or obstruction—tempting though that always is, in my case—but in a genuine attempt to allow this particular measure to proceed now. I hope, however, that the Leader of the House will be able to help me—as I have persuaded my colleagues that they should allow this matter to proceed today—by indicating his clear recognition that this does not set a precedent to which reference can be made in future, and that we will have proper further consideration to resolve the matters that I have raised. In that spirit, I hope that we will be able to allow the matter to proceed.

7.50 pm

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to put on record our concerns about this resolution. I shall not detain the House, as I know that English Members have other places to go this evening—I understand that there is an election or something tomorrow.

The Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru had no intention of opposing the resolution when it appeared on the Order Paper last night, and we have no intention of opposing it this evening. However, we are concerned that we were not properly informed and consulted about the Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament, so had no opportunity to put forward a case for minority party participation on a key Bill that is important to all the nations of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, just as the official spokesman for the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), has expressed concern about the composition of the new Joint Committee, we who represent the majority community in Northern Ireland are concerned that, like other minority parties, we are excluded and cannot participate in it? The Committee should be so composed that minority parties are directly represented.

Pete Wishart: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. The list of hon. Members from this House who have been proposed to serve on the Joint Committee contains no Members from Northern Ireland or from Wales, which is shocking.

The Leader of the House has stated that he intends increasingly to use Joint Committees in the future. I urge him and the Government to consider how such Committees can best be constructed to reflect all the interests and opinions in the House.

We appreciate that we are the minority parties in the House on basic arithmetic. However, the minority parties represent the opposition parties of Wales and Scotland and, as the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) has said, the governing party of Northern Ireland. I am sure that all hon. Members will agree with me that we have an important and democratic part to play in the House's proceedings, and I hope that that will be reflected in the future composition of such Committees.

7.52 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): There is a lot in what the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said on which we can find common cause. I welcome his support for our commitment to enhance and increase the opportunities for pre-legislative scrutiny. I am convinced that that will give the House a better chance to influence the shape of public Bills, and will ensure that when Bills come before us officially they will be in better order and better shape.

I also welcome the right hon. Gentleman's acceptance that that is best done through a Joint Committee. We gave an assurance some months ago that we would consider the draft Communications Bill in a Committee of both Houses, drawing on the expertise and interest in both Houses. I also welcome his acceptance that we need to make progress on this matter, and to get the Joint Committee under way soon, so that it can report in time to have a Bill ready to go when we meet for the next Session.

If the right hon. Gentleman will pardon me for saying so, I warmly welcome the support he gave in his speech for the principle of proportionality. I look forward to his commitment to proportional representation at the future debate. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that I have not entirely carried the right hon. Gentleman with me on that point.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No; I want to make progress, because I am trying to be helpful.

I believe that we can learn some lessons from the exchanges we have had over the past few days. It might be helpful if I were to say to the right hon. Gentleman and to the minority parties that we will not regard agreement to the resolution before the House tonight as a precedent for future Joint Committees. We have sought to construct a Committee of modest size, with a total of 12 members, because we wanted it to be able to carry out a thorough examination with a relatively discreet number. However, that poses problems in reflecting the balance in either House. A total of six members from this Chamber necessarily limits the extent to which the result can be fully proportional. On future occasions, we may aim for a larger Committee, conceivably one so large that minority parties will be able to claim a place on it as of right, although that would require a Committee of some 20 members.

I am happy to take those points on board for future consideration. I hope that that will enable the House to proceed with the resolution tonight, given my assurance that it will not be taken as a precedent. I will not take down and use this occasion as evidence in the future.

[Mr. Cook]

I hope that next time we will be able to provide for a Committee with a larger number of members, which will allow for greater flexibility.

I cannot promise that I will always be able to respond to the wish of every party in the House to have more members on every Committee we set up, but I hope that next time we will have learned lessons and will produce a more consensual proposal.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That the Lords Message of 29th April relating to a Joint Committee of both Houses to consider and report on any draft Communications Bill presented to both Houses by a Minister of the Crown be now considered.

That this House concurs with the Lords in their Resolution relating to the said Joint Committee.

That a Select Committee of six honourable Members be appointed to join with the Committee appointed by the Lords to consider any such draft Communications Bill.

That the Committee shall have power—

(i) to send for persons, papers and records;

(ii) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House;

(iii) to report from time to time;

(iv) to appoint specialist advisers;

(v) to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom; and

That Paul Farrelly, Mr. John Grogan, Nick Harvey, Mr. Andrew Lansley, Anne Picking and Brian White be members of the Committee.

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Ordered,

That Mr. John McFall and Mr. George Osborne be appointed members of the Public Accounts Commission under section 2(2)(c) of the National Audit Act 1983.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Ridgeway

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

7.55 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): In my maiden speech in this Chamber in 1983, I waxed lyrical about the primeval monuments that distinguish my constituency, including the white horse, dating back to 1,000 years before Christ, and the bronze age barrows dating back 2,000 years before that. I am afraid that I omitted to mention the even older feature that links all those monuments together: the Ridgeway. Tonight, I hope to make up for that omission.

The Ridgeway, stretching along 85 miles from Overton Hill in Wiltshire to Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire, is England's oldest green road. It dates back to the earliest days of agriculture and inter-regional trade in this country, 6,000 years ago. It is an historical feature of European importance, and because of its upland location it is, or rather it ought to be, a site of great natural beauty.

I say ought to be, because the Ridgeway is being subjected to such abuse and progressive degradation that, although the distant views from it may be splendid, those who walk it or ride along it are dismayed at every turn. The present unhappy state of the Ridgeway, to which I am drawing the House's attention, has come about as a result of a combination of many different factors, the most fundamental of which is the growth in the number and variety of motor vehicles. That has exposed this ancient highway to a host of new pressures. Alongside that is a failure of public regulation, which has not kept up with this automotive explosion, and has not mitigated and managed its impact.

I shall begin with the growth of motor traffic on the Ridgeway. I particularly want the Minister to realise that it is certain that growing affluence and the multiplication of automotive technologies will go on throwing up new ways of abusing the Ridgeway, and of expanding and intensifying the scale of the pressures that we have already experienced. For instance, over the past decade there has been a 400 per cent. increase nationally in the number of off-road motor bikes and 4x4 motor cars, which has brought with it a corresponding increase in the use of the Ridgeway by such vehicles.

The consequences of that problem immediately hit the eye when one walks the Ridgeway at any time of the year, as my wife and I do frequently. Those vehicles destroy the surface of the trail. In wet weather, huge sections of it become a sea of mud and deep puddles. In dry weather, the surface sets into a series of ankle-twisting, knee-wrenching ruts. The impact is not only visual: there is also the noise, especially the buzzing from the motorbikes, and the pollution that those vehicles cause. This is a matter of great concern in my constituency and in those of my colleagues who are present for this debate.

Those are not the only abuses that arise from the openness of the Ridgeway to motor traffic. Because of its easy accessibility, the Ridgeway is the scene of all-night raves, with large numbers of vehicles driving along it to party sites. It is used by so-called travellers, who set up their camps and leave behind them piles of rubbish when they are moved along by the authorities. There is also more and more fly tipping: it is easy to drive a short way

along the Ridgeway to dump waste materials. Cars stolen for joyriding are frequently taken up to the Ridgeway, driven along it and then torched, leaving behind a burned-out wreck.

A particularly unpleasant example of what is happening is the use of an iron age burial mound just off the Ridgeway at Peewit farm in my constituency as a stunt ramp by motor bikes and 4x4 vehicles, to such an extent that it will soon be totally destroyed.

The damage being done by all this is not just aesthetic, but economic. A great deal of effort and taxpayers' money is being put into encouraging the diversification of the rural economy, and the Ridgeway should be a major tourist attraction; but a survey published last April by the National Trails Office showed that some 50 per cent. of users were so dissatisfied with the condition of the trail that they were not likely to use it again. The Ridgeway is not as much used by hikers as many other national trails, and its potential as a contributor to a more diverse rural economy is not being fully realised.

Meanwhile, the flora and fauna are also suffering. Dr. John Dover of Staffordshire university has demonstrated the potential value of "green lanes" as biodiversity reservoirs in intensively managed farmland. If and as—with agriculture policy reform—farming recedes from some of the uplands along the Ridgeway, a great opportunity for expansion of those reservoirs will present itself; but that cannot be done if the Ridgeway continues to be exposed to abuse by cars and bikes.

My second point is that the Ridgeway is suffering from the failure of public regulations to keep abreast of the impact of expanding automotive technologies. Most of the western half is classified as a "road used as a public path", or RUPP, while the section in Wiltshire is classed as a "byway open to all traffic", or BOAT. It is on the basis of those regulatory classifications that the Ridgeway is open to motor traffic.

In 1992, the then Countryside Commission, together with the county councils, sought to introduce a traffic regulation order along the whole Ridgeway. That constituted a welcome recognition of the growing problem, which I supported at the time; but the inspector who presided over the public inquiry that followed, and the Minister to whom he reported, unfortunately failed to rise to the occasion. As I recall, the application for a TRO was rejected mainly on the ground that the presence of motor vehicles on the Ridgeway did not pose a safety risk to other users. I submit that the issue is not one of safety.

Over the past 10 years, the preferred device for dealing with the continuing deterioration of the Ridgeway has been a voluntary code of respect drawn up by worthy representatives of the different users and managers of the trail. I fear that there is considerable naiveté on the part of the worthy authorities involved about the motives of many motorised users. The code of respect asks them, for example, to avoid using the trail in wet conditions or when the surface is vulnerable after wet weather, but that is precisely when most of them enjoy the sport most. The code also recommends that motor vehicles stick to the well-worn parts of the track to prevent damage to the whole width, but although the Ridgeway is 30 m wide in some places its whole width is often covered with ruts. We must face the fact that the more the surface is destroyed, the more many motorised users enjoy it.

The only effective way of protecting the Ridgeway from this growing abuse is to return to the principle of traffic regulation. I ask the Minister to do two things. First, I ask him to tell the Countryside Agency and the relevant councils along the Ridgeway that he looks to them to promote traffic regulation orders to ban all non-essential motor vehicles from the Ridgeway. Secondly, I ask him to confirm that if such TROs are not in place by the time the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 is implemented, all sections of the Ridgeway currently classified as RUPPs will become restricted byways that will no longer be open to motor vehicles except as narrowly prescribed in the Act.

Let me briefly anticipate and rebut two objections to my proposals. The first is that enforcement is impossible. I do not agree. The vast majority of users of the Ridgeway are law-abiding people who will refrain from doing what it is clearly not lawful for them to do. Physical barriers—locked gates with keys available to legal users—can also be effective. Beyond that, there is the fact that the police can take action against abuse on the basis of dated and timed photographs of the abuse taking place.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): During last year's foot and mouth crisis, the Ridgeway path was closed and people—both local people and visitors—adhered to the regulations meticulously, and stayed off the Ridgeway altogether. As a result, paradoxically, by the end of the summer the surface of many parts of it was probably in better condition than it had been for many years.

Mr. Jackson: I agree, and that confirms my point about the law-abiding nature of most users of the Ridgeway. It does not, however, support the contention that the voluntary code of respect is doing the job. The fact is that it is not.

The second objection to the proposal for TROs is more philosophical. I have heard it argued that the right of motorists to use and abuse the Ridgeway is one of the immemorial liberties of the free-born Englishman. I suggest that those who advance that argument re-read John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty"—if they have read it in the first place—and ponder on his distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding actions. The motorised abuse of the Ridgeway is a good example of an other-regarding action in which the pursuit of one man's satisfaction significantly reduces the satisfactions available to many others.

As the debate is taking place on May day, let me end by drawing the Minister's attention to the way in which the honourable traditions of Britain's labour movement, which he represents, bear on the problem I have described. I do not know whether the Fabian Society still holds summer schools, but I know from the diaries and memoirs of Barbara Castle and many others that in the past a summer school walk along the Ridgeway was a common event—perhaps after a weekend with Lord Faringdon at Buscot park, and an inspection of his mural painting of Stalin and Gandhi playing tennis on his lawn. Those Fabians might have been mistakenly slow to recognise how the motor car can liberate the individual, but they would rightly have seen how easily it can also become an instrument of private selfishness with each man wrapped in his metal cocoon, driving wherever and however he chooses.

[Mr. Jackson]

The Ridgeway is a species of common land, but that does not mean that access to it must be a free-for-all. The preservation of common assets—this is a good Fabian tradition—depends just as much on self-restraint and, if necessary, the law, as does the preservation of private property. We can stand back and allow our common heritage to be appropriated in selfish ways, treating it as just another throwaway item of the modern consumer society, or—and I appeal to the Minister to do this—we can use the legitimate power of the state to restrain unwarranted and antisocial private appropriations of what should be open to reasonable use, on fair terms, by all. It is in that May day spirit that I commend my proposals to the Minister and the House.

8.8 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am delighted that the debate is taking place earlier than expected, because that gives those of us whose constituencies contain parts of the Ridgeway a chance to support the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson). I congratulate him on raising a matter that is important to us. Indeed, it has become increasingly important over the past few years—as he said—because of the degradation now being caused to the Ridgeway, and the difficulties that that creates for other users.

The Ridgeway is a particularly beautiful place. In my constituency, it runs through an area of outstanding natural beauty. It is a place where people like to walk, jog and ride their cycles and horses. None of those uses causes the damage caused by motor vehicles. Motor vehicles are incompatible with other users because of the way in which they tear the place up and leave it full of terrible ruts, making it difficult for others to use. It can therefore be argued that only those who cause the damage—mostly drivers of four-wheel-drive vehicles—should be excluded. Of course, they say, "Why should we suffer, if no one else is to be excluded?" However, the reason is that they are the only users who render the Ridgeway totally unusable by anybody else.

A number of four-wheel-drive owners say that they are careful to use the Ridgeway only on the right days and in accordance with the voluntary code of practice, and that they do much work to repair it. However, even if it is true that only a fairly small minority of four-wheel drive vehicles cause most of the damage, the fact remains that some irresponsible users have caused an enormous amount of damage, to the detriment of other users. They cannot possibly repair the damage that they do; it is far too great to be repaired by individuals. Sadly, it is necessary for the local authority to get involved. As the hon. Gentleman said, it often has to spend a great deal of money on repairing the damage done.

I am glad to have the opportunity briefly to support the hon. Gentleman, and to make it clear that, so far as the Liberal Democrat party is concerned, this is in no sense a party political issue. The same is doubtless true of the Labour party, and I hope that the Minister will back us in this regard. It is simply a question of trying to ensure that all those who have greatly enjoyed this beautiful land can continue to do so.

8.11 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) on securing this Adjournment debate, and on using it as an opportunity to rewrite his maiden speech. With that in mind, I am not sure how to describe today's speech, so perhaps I shall leave that thought there.

I also thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in making clear the issues that he wants to discuss, and I hope that I will be able to respond constructively. Like the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), I welcome the fact that the debate has occurred earlier than it might otherwise have done. That is always preferable for a debate such as this, not only to enable more Members to contribute, but so that we can conclude our discussion before dinner, rather than after.

My interest in such issues is not just academic, or confined to the fact that they form part of my portfolio. As a walker myself, I know the importance of the condition of paths. I took the trouble to visit several of our national parks, and to examine the situation in areas of outstanding national beauty, so that I might understand what is happening on the ground and the nature of the problems experienced in various places. I certainly welcome the interest in this ancient right of way, and I appreciate that there are long-standing concerns about stretches of the Ridgeway.

I am sympathetic to the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Wantage, but I must question—constructively, I hope—some of the facts that he offers. I have particular respect for the fact that he has walked the path himself and brought such personal experiences to the debate, rather than simply relying on the reports of others. The challenge is to focus clearly on the real problems and issues, and to ensure that they are targeted effectively. In other words, we must respond in a way that actually solves some of the problems. Today, I shall try to cover both the general issues and some of the specific issues that he raised.

I recognise that some regard the use of motor vehicles on this ancient right of way as totally inappropriate. It is argued that such an unsurfaced way was intended for use only by carts and carriages such as those that the philosopher whom the hon. Gentleman quoted in his support might have used. I understand such concerns, but we must ensure that any action taken is well-founded and proportionate. He may be aware that audit work is under way. It is due to be completed in June, and should provide a real focus of information and a basis for action.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the growth of motor traffic on the Ridgeway. I do not doubt the figures that he quotes concerning the number of off-road motor bikes and 4x4s. He says that the number of such vehicles has increased by 400 per cent. nationally, but that does not necessarily translate into numbers used on the Ridgeway in general or proportionally. The most recent survey—admittedly, it was conducted some six years ago—actually showed a small decrease in vehicle use on the Ridgeway. That makes it all the more important that we examine the facts emerging from the current audit, so that we can be sure whether the concern expressed by the hon. Gentleman is justified. For example, the audit might conclude that there are problems with a particular part of the Ridgeway, rather than throughout its length. That is

why we must ensure that we understand what is happening, so that we can target whatever mischief is being made.

Mr. Rendel: Does the Minister accept that it is not just a question of the number of vehicles? Even if the number of vehicles using the Ridgeway has declined in the past few years, the damage done by each one has in many cases increased. Vehicles are getting more powerful, and more 4x4s are being used. What is important is not just the numbers, but the overall damage done.

Alun Michael: Indeed, and the audit must inform us about such matters, but I was addressing the specific point made by the hon. Member for Wantage. He suggested that a 400 per cent. increase in the number of vehicles nationwide means that a similar increase has occurred on the Ridgeway, but we need to know the actual level of use and the damage done. The hon. Gentleman will doubtless agree that we cannot simply extrapolate from statistics.

Mr. Robert Jackson: The audit is not before time, and I welcome it. The Minister is welcome to come and look at the Ridgeway in person. The four Members of Parliament who represent the Ridgeway—my hon. Friends the Members for Henley (Mr. Johnson) and for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and myself—would be happy to receive him and to show him the ruts for himself.

Alun Michael: I am grateful for that invitation, and I certainly do not rule it out. An appropriate time to visit would be once the audit has been completed and the local players—including local Members—have had an opportunity to consider the findings and the discussions that will take place with bodies such as the local authorities. I am certainly happy to take an interest and for it to form part of the response, but the hon. Gentleman will agree that I should not detract from the responsibility of local parties to work the matter out. That is the right place to start.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to fly tipping and joyriding. Of course they are illegal activities, so a traffic regulation order is unlikely to deter the perpetrators, who constitute a nuisance in any case. There is a need for a co-ordinated approach. If such law breaking is causing a problem, the right way to deal with it is through the local authority and the police. They have a joint responsibility for identifying the nature of crime and disorder in the locality, and for producing a strategy to deal with any problems that are identified and agreed on.

Mr. Jackson: It is true that anybody determined to overcome traffic regulation orders and physical barriers can do so. However, although physical barriers may not solve the problem of bicycles, they could be an effective deterrent to motor cars. They could form part of a strategy to deal with the wider problems.

Alun Michael: Again, I am trying to respond to specific elements in the hon. Gentleman's speech and suggesting that the audit should consider the size of each problem that he mentioned. Something that is already illegal must be treated as an illegal activity, and it is the responsibility of the police and the local authority to co-ordinate action where necessary, proportionate to the extent of the problem. That would be the place to start that discussion.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to concern about an iron age burial mound, but my information is that it is a bronze age bell barrow. However, he is right to raise the concerns felt about the monument. I understand that efforts have been made to protect it, but it has no statutory protection as a scheduled ancient monument. It has sustained some damage, although some was caused by bicycles as well as by motor vehicles. It would be appropriate to invite English Heritage to advise on that and to take part in the discussions that will follow the audit.

Mr. Jackson: I am happy to be corrected on the point that the monument is bronze age rather than iron age, which makes it even older. However, the issue is the code of respect. What kind of respect is being shown to those monuments, even by bicyclists? The code of respect is not working.

Alun Michael: As I have said, I am trying to respond to the specific points that the hon. Gentleman raised. If we ensure that all the authorities that have an interest in the matter are participating in the discussions of what should be done to combat the problems identified by the audit, we will arrive at a soundly based methodology.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that economic considerations are important. He mentioned people being put off the Ridgeway by the conditions, but we should question whether that is the case for the whole of the Ridgeway or for specific elements. The last survey by the National Trails Office in 1996 showed that 80 per cent. of those using the Ridgeway had used it before, so they had returned to use it again; 60 per cent. would not use the Ridgeway in certain conditions; and of the 60 per cent., only a small proportion said that a poor surface or motor vehicles had spoiled their enjoyment. That is why it is so important to establish the facts and then decide on the right solution.

There are powers available to restrict vehicle use where necessary by means of traffic regulation orders. The hon. Gentleman referred to a previous effort to apply such an order to the whole length of the Ridgeway. The purposes for which such orders can be made range widely, including avoiding danger to persons or other traffic using the way; preventing damage to the way or any building on or near the way; facilitating the passage of a certain class of user; preventing use by vehicular traffic of a kind or in a manner that is unsuitable, having regard to the character of the way; preserving the character of the way in cases in which it is especially suitable for use by persons on horseback or on foot; and preserving or improving the amenities of the area through which the way runs.

The application that was made in 1992–93 would have banned vehicle use on all of the western section on Sundays and bank holidays. At public inquiry, the inspector considered the issues of surface damage, danger to other users, noise and pollution, which were presumably informed by the nature of the application. However, he concluded that insufficient evidence existed to justify the ban. He also concluded—this is an important point when considering use of traffic regulation orders—that much of the surface damage was from tractors and

[Alun Michael]

other farm vehicles, which would not be banned by such an order. That returns us to the need to identify the real mischief and to take account of issues of proportionality in the response to problems.

Mr. Rendel: I listened to the list of reasons why a traffic regulation order might be made for the Ridgeway, but I could not spot a single one that would not apply in this case. Perhaps the Minister would care to consider that.

Alun Michael: The list was considered by an inspector in relation to a large section of the Ridgeway to see whether the evidence justified an order at that time. The fact that the earlier application for an order was unsuccessful would not prevent local authorities from using traffic regulation orders in particular problem areas. That is a decision for them, based on local circumstances. It may be that the audit will pinpoint parts of the Ridgeway where an order is necessary, and the evidence of the audit would greatly strengthen the hand of the local authority making the application.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I speak as a vice-president of the Friends of the Ridgeway—as my hon. Friends probably also are—and I have just joined that body. The Minister mentioned the audit. Can he confirm my impression that if the audit finds that walkers and ramblers are being deterred from using the Ridgeway by the damage that has been done to it and by the presence of 4x4 vehicles, he will be minded to institute traffic restricting measures?

Alun Michael: If the audit brings up evidence of the sort that the hon. Gentleman clearly expects, the local authority would be able to proceed on that basis. It is for the local authorities to initiate such action. The intention is for the audit to be discussed by the partners locally and by a wider forum, which will involve organisations such as the one to which the hon. Gentleman belongs, to develop a local strategy on that basis. It should start with the facts, try to reach agreement with people and then move forward, and that would be a constructive approach. My point was that if there are parts of the Ridgeway for which a traffic regulation order would target specific circumstances that cause problems, the outcome of the audit would help to provide evidence to substantiate the need for such an order.

We certainly should not give in to a counsel of despair. Traffic regulation orders and other means should be used to try to protect the environment, but any response should be proportional to the evidence of the problem. It would be wrong to suggest that the imposition of a blanket ban on motor vehicles along the whole length of the Ridgeway would be the appropriate response, unless the evidence of the audit suggests strongly that that is the case. We should also not ignore the current initiative by the Ridgeway Management Group.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I welcome the Minister's comments about the audit, and possible proposals that might emerge from its conclusions. However, I remind him of the conclusions of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who was the Minister in 1992. He said in his decision letter that he expected proposals for parts of the Ridgeway, but nothing was done. That is why we are in this situation 10 years later. I am very concerned that the message should be sent that we expect action to deal with the problems.

Alun Michael: I am not sure that I can comment on the situation between 1992 and the present, because—as I have indicated—the local authority had the power to apply for a traffic regulation order on a specific length of the Ridgeway, as opposed to one on the whole length or the western length. The current initiative was brought forward by the Ridgeway Management Group, composed of countryside service and rights of way managers from areas through which the Ridgeway passes. That work is being supported by the Countryside Agency, which has specific responsibility on behalf of my Department for engaging with such issues.

The current initiative involves the setting of standards for surface condition, which addresses some of the specific concerns raised by all four hon. Gentlemen who have contributed to the debate. The full audit of the condition is crucial and is due to be reported in June. The set of facts coming out of that audit will be discussed by the forum, with a view to the implementation of a management plan.

It is not for me to say whether that plan should include the making of orders. It is sensible that it should build on the evidence, especially as it is only a matter of weeks before the outcome of the audit will be available. I am sure that the report will be inspected, as soon it is available, with great interest by hon. Members representing constituencies along the Ridgeway.

When the audit is complete, we will have the facts before us. We will then have an opportunity for open debate and action that will be initiated at local level by those with direct responsibility and concern for the Ridgeway.

Mr. Boris Johnson: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way a second time. I accept what he says about the importance of keeping decisions at a local level. However, is he saying that he will take no view at all about the outcome of the audit report?

Alun Michael: Not at all. I am saying that it would be premature to impose solutions before the audit's full results are known, and the options that it presents considered—especially given that those results are so shortly expected. If we were being told that the audit would be undertaken in five years, with results available in 10, the concerns rightly raised by the hon. Member for Wantage, which clearly are shared by other hon. Members, would perhaps demand earlier action. In fact, the process is already nearing a conclusion. It is right that we await the outcome of the audit, and of the local debate that will be informed by its results.

Certainly I recognise that the activities of the irresponsible few can interfere with the rights of the many. However, we should consider the rights of responsible drivers, and especially the rights of people with mobility problems. Many places in this country offer only limited

access to people with such problems. I am sure that all hon. Members would agree that access should be made available for them.

Access by farmers and farm vehicles is another matter for local discussion with regard to responsible use and the avoidance of problems of degradation. All such matters will emerge from the audit and the subsequent debate. That is imminent and being planned, and I commend the organisations that have put the process in hand. Clearly, they have been required to do so by the same concerns that the hon. Member for Wantage set out so eloquently when he opened the debate.

I join the hon. Gentleman in his wish to stimulate philosophical debate on some of these issues. I welcome the fact that that is happening in the age of computers and cars—neither of which were available to John Stuart Mill when he was reflecting on liberty. I certainly share the hon. Gentleman's view that the immemorial liberties of a freeborn Englishman are referred to in a variety of inappropriate places. The liberty to drive a 4x4 or a motorcycle in inappropriate places, or in a way that causes misery to others, is one such, and I recall that similar arguments were raised when I had some responsibility for introducing legislation to control handguns. I always felt it odd that the liberty to carry a handgun should be considered as inalienable as one or two other countries seem to believe. The issue occasionally appears in the hunting debate, and I wonder whether it is always appropriate there.

Finally, I assure the hon. Member for Wantage that the Fabian Society is alive and well. I declare an interest, as I am a member. It continues creatively to inform this Government's thinking, and I hope that it will inform the thinking of people in other parties as well.

Essentially, my message to the hon. Gentleman is that we are willing to take appropriate action, but that it must be proportional and based on evidence. It must also start from a strong consensus at a local level. The processes that are in place give some reason to hope that sensible proposals will come forward, and it would be entirely appropriate for the local partnership or local authorities to act on those proposals. If issues are raised that it is appropriate for the Government to consider, I look forward to walking with the hon. Gentleman and some of his colleagues—as part of a curious mixture of people—along the Ridgeway at some point in the future.

I thank the hon. Member for Wantage for initiating this debate, and those hon. Members who have joined in. They have adopted a constructive approach to what is clearly a matter of great local concern. I hope that I have responded in an appropriate way. I accept that problems exist, but I have also tried to use the information supplied by the hon. Gentleman to tease out some of the ways in which it would be appropriate to respond. I am sure that all of us will look forward to the information emerging in June, and to the local level discussion that will follow.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 2 May 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 9 May.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Aerospace Industry

1. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What discussions she has had with representatives of the aerospace industry in respect of retraining of employees facing redundancy. [51995]

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): There are meetings from time to time with representatives of the aerospace industry to discuss the state of the industry and the role of Government. These discussions have, on occasion, touched on the retraining of employees facing redundancy, although this has not been the main subject of any of the meetings.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. May I draw his attention to the problems faced by the employees of British Aerospace in Manchester and elsewhere, and by those of the smaller companies based at Manchester airport, many of whom are my constituents? Will he pay particular attention to the need for liaison between the three Departments with an interest in this matter—his own, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions—to ensure that the skills of aerospace workers are not lost to the economy of the north-west during this period of downturn?

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend raises an important point. There have been severe job losses, particularly in the north-west. We work very closely with the DWP and the DFES, and we have provided funds through the new Jobcentre Plus rapid response fund to assist in those areas, as has the North West Development Agency. Our objective in such circumstances is always to assist those who have been made redundant to remain in high-skilled, highly paid employment and to keep their skills in the region so that when the upturn comes—as we are sure it will—they will be available to a very important sector of our manufacturing industry.

Beer (Full Pints)

2. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): What steps she is taking to ensure that consumers receive a full pint in public houses. [51997]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): One in five pints currently contain less than 95 per cent. of capacity. That is clearly unacceptable. On 18 March, we issued a consultation document to tackle this. We are committed to giving short shrift to short measures, and our proposals should guarantee beer and cider drinkers 60 million extra pints a year.

Mr. Winterton: I am most grateful to the Minister for that positive, if not frothy, response. I would like to declare an interest from the past. I was, for 10 years, non-executive chairman of CAMRA Real Ale Investments, which then became Midsummer Inns before it was bought out and we were all made redundant by the new company. Is the Minister sure that what the Government are doing will ensure that beer drinkers receive a full liquid pint without having to ask for a top-up? The Campaign for Real Ale feels very strongly about this, as do those who support traditional pubs and brewers. I make no criticism of the smaller brewer, but it is, unfortunately, not untypical that too many people have to ask for a top-up in the beer outlets run by the bigger companies. Will the Government look at this again, perhaps a little more seriously?

Nigel Griffiths: CAMRA's loss is Parliament's gain. We have listened to representations from all the interested parties in this matter, including the hon. Gentleman's constituents. I spoke this morning to Hugh Thompson of Storm Brewing in Macclesfield, who welcomed the proposals in the consultation document. He is also full of praise for the 14p a pint reduction announced in the Budget, which will help nine out of 10 brewers—350 in total. Let me add to the hon. Gentleman's comments by saying that anyone who seeks to short-change Britain's drinkers will be left with a bitter taste in their mouth, because, with fines under our proposals of up to £1,000 per short measure and, in the case of repeat offenders, the loss of their licence and their livelihood, I think that we shall see effective action taken for the first time to tackle the short-measure culture.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Does my hon. Friend agree that there are dangers in half-baked consumerism? If the glasses are to be bigger, we shall have to pay for those bigger glasses, and if the amount of liquid in them is to be greater, the brewers and the publicans will find ways of charging us for it. It will be of little consolation to beer drinkers if we end up drinking slightly more beer out of bigger glasses at far greater expense. Those are the dangers of half-baked consumerism, and many of us who

like a pint of beer are very wary of them because we know that consumerism has rarely been recognised by brewers and publicans in the past.

Nigel Griffiths: My hon. Friend is perfectly correct. That is why there is nothing half-baked about these proposals. They are for consumers who are drinkers in Britain, and they will ensure that there are stiffer penalties than ever and that the equivalent of about 60 million extra pints a year will go to the drinkers and not back to the breweries.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I hope that that promise will be delivered. Will the Minister enlighten us about when he will deliver the promised licensing law reform rather than just the half-baked attempt on licensing for new year's day?

Nigel Griffiths: That is out for consultation and clearly there are diverse interests in the House and in the country on licensing laws. I hope that it is possible to reach a compromise that is agreeable to local communities up and down the country, which differ as to how much those laws should be expanded to allow round-the-clock drinking. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, in cities such as Edinburgh, it is acceptable but in other parts of the country it is not. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Energy Review Report

3. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What the Government's response is to the performance and innovation unit energy review report; and if she will make a statement. [51998]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government will consult shortly on the issues raised in the report and will set out their detailed response in an energy White Paper around the end of the year.

Miss McIntosh: The Secretary of State will recall that her Department has authorised the building of a long string of power lines, which has led to little Eiffel towers appearing across the Vale of York recently. Is she aware that the existing electricity-carrying pylons are operating at only 20 per cent. capacity, which means that the existing line is 80 per cent. surplus to requirements? Following the PIU energy review report, will she introduce legislation to ensure that the electricity generated is as close as possible to demand so that we no longer need those hideous power lines?

Ms Hewitt: I am aware of the concern in the hon. Lady's constituency and elsewhere in Yorkshire about the north Yorkshire power line. Indeed, the energy Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), recently met her and some of her constituents to discuss the matter. We shall consider the broader point that she raises as part of the wider review, but the issues relating to the new north Yorkshire power line, including the possibility of running the cable underground, were examined enormously carefully during six and a half years of consideration and two public inquiries. Unfortunately, the costs proved insuperable.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I welcome the fact that the Government are to publish an energy policy White Paper, which I hope will make it clear that the future of the North sea oil and gas industry remains very important to the supply of the UK's energy needs. Has the Department made an assessment of the fiscal changes proposed in the Budget and their impact on the North sea oil and gas industry?

Ms Hewitt: I agree with my hon. Friend about the oil and gas industry's importance to the future of our energy supplies, and of course that will be reflected in the White Paper, as it was in the PIU report. She will be aware that the changes to the taxation of North sea oil have been under Treasury consideration for some years. Although the increase in the special rate of taxation is unwelcome to the industry, I hope that it welcomes the inclusion of 100 per cent. capital allowances for investment, which is hugely important, particularly for the fallow fields, and the ending of the extremely unpopular royalty payments regime.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): It is good news that the Government have decided that fusion should be part of this country's long-term energy programme. As the Secretary of State is aware, much fusion research takes place at the Culham Laboratories in my constituency. Given the importance of the fusion programme and the potential that it offers for long-term, limitless greenhouse gas-free energy, will she take steps to protect the Culham programme from the cuts that I understand are envisaged by the European Commission? Is it guaranteed that the fusion programme will continue?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is obviously used to writing articles rather longer than speeches to the House of Commons, but he raises the hugely important possibility of generating power from fusion. The Minister for Science and Innovation has been pursuing it, and I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have increased funding for basic scientific research in our country by upwards of £1 billion to start to make up for the cuts made under the Conservative Government. Of course, we shall consider sustaining fusion power research as part of the future of our science research programmes.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): In any response to the PIU report, will the Secretary of State ensure that the country does not depend on a single source of energy, such as imported gas? Will she consider the need for an EU replacement state subsidy scheme for coal, and consider in particular the important issue of burning coal in an environmentally friendly way?

Ms Hewitt: Diversity and security of supply is one of the central objectives in the report, and we shall of course pay close attention to it when preparing our White Paper. Diversity and security involves not simply different energy sources—different fuels—but different parts of the world, including of course the United Kingdom.

We are working with our European partners to establish a new framework for state aid to the coal industry. We have already committed about £120 million by way of operating aid. We are also considering what more we can do to support the development and use of clean coal technologies, which are a hugely important part of environmentally sustainable energy production.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I was concerned to hear from the Secretary of State that the publication of the promised White Paper had already slipped from October to the end of the year. When the energy Minister, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), returns, will she draw his attention to the fact that Greenpeace, Shell, the British Wind Energy Association, British Nuclear Fuels plc, the Coal Authority, the Carbon Trust, Friends of the Earth, the Energy Saving Trust, the Association of European Transmission System Operators, the European fusion development agreement, Slough Heat and Power, TXU—and myself, sir—are all waiting for a full debate in the Chamber on the PIU energy review?

We know that the White Paper is being drafted, and we know which officials are leading the drafting. If the Government are serious, they must consult the House now rather than waiting until all the decisions have been made.

Ms Hewitt: I am glad to be able to reassure the hon. Gentleman, and all the organisations that he listed at such length, that before the end of the month we will publish a consultation document specifying the issues on which we invite views following the PIU report, so that full consultation and debate take place before we draft the White Paper.

Broadband Telecommunications

4. **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): What action she is taking to ensure that broadband telecommunications are rolled out more rapidly in rural areas. [51999]

10. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What steps she is taking to assist the roll-out of broadband infrastructure in Britain. [52007]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): We set out our strategy for making the broadband market more extensive and competitive in December. Since then the market has continued to develop. Broadband services are available to over 60 per cent. of the population, and coverage is increasing. There are now more than 500,000 broadband subscribers in the UK. The increased take-up strengthens the case for a further roll-out of services.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is the Minister aware that, according to information that I received recently, in certain parts of the Cotswolds it will take between seven and 10 years for broadband services to become available? Will that not create a technological apartheid? People in businesses dependent on broadband will have to move away from those areas, because they will not be able to receive it.

I am aware that BT is enabling 500 exchanges to start operating by the end of May, and I am aware of the pilot schemes in Cornwall and Wales. Does the Minister agree, however, that the country's future growth depends on the rapid roll-out of broadband services in every area? May I also ask him to look into the fact that add-on services in relation to both broadband and IDSN are not covered by the regulator? Given BT's monopoly in this respect, should the position not be examined?

Mr. Alexander: I am intrigued by the terms of the question. The advice available to me suggests that both ADSL and cable services are available in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Nevertheless, he has made an important point about how we can ensure that the services are rolled out.

Only last month, I challenged BT to provide more exchanges. I am delighted to say that there will be a further 100 throughout the United Kingdom, but we face a challenge—that of not just extending coverage, but driving up usage. That is why the price reductions of recent months will be so critical in altering the risk-reward balance in infrastructure decisions affecting rural areas that will be made in months to come.

Kevin Brennan: Does my hon. Friend recognise that the roll-out of broadband is a big issue in urban as well as in rural areas, particularly in places such as the valleys of south Wales, where cabling is not widely available? What steps will he take to ensure that there is joined-up public sector commissioning of broadband to ensure that we can spread availability, drive down costs and bridge the technology deficit in more deprived communities?

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend makes an important point. One of the first challenges that we faced was to ensure that we got an appropriate return for the public sector investment in this area. The Government spend, at all levels, approximately £1.7 billion a year on information and communications technology. One of the challenges that has been set for the Office of Government Commerce is to use that spend effectively to deal with exactly the questions identified by my hon. Friend.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The Minister may be aware of the helpful exchange that I had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport on this issue. Does he now accept that, left to the private market, remote rural areas in the highlands such as my constituency will never get broadband? While I welcome the £30 million fund that the Government have set up, should we not do more to encourage it into those areas?

Mr. Alexander: I welcome the initiatives that have been taken over recent months by British Telecom. A further two initiatives would be of importance in the hon. Gentleman's constituency: first, the actions of the Scottish Executive in taking forward their digital highlands project; secondly, and most significantly for long-term roll-out across rural areas, there is the interesting work that BT is doing with satellite provision of broadband services, which can achieve a footprint, not

least in the highlands and islands of Scotland, that can guarantee a service for small and medium-sized enterprises, which is very important.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): The Government's objective is to achieve not only universal affordable access to broadband—I emphasise affordable because the Minister has just mentioned satellite, which is not affordable—but a choice of diverse services to provide that access. With the failure of the broadband fixed wireless access auction, and the Secretary of State's acknowledgment to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry that there probably is not a commercial case for fixed wireless access, does the Minister accept that even if ADSL roll-out is achieved in rural areas, no competitive access arrangements will be available for the foreseeable future in many rural areas?

Mr. Alexander: No, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's point. I recently visited Northern Ireland and saw there the development of competition in satellite services. While I accept that satellite is at the moment very expensive for SMEs, in the months and years to come, we will see the price reductions that we are already seeing in ADSL services. However, his point about platforms is important. It makes the case that the Government have been advancing that their appropriate response is to maintain platform neutrality in the area of broadband. We have set broad objectives, but it is for the market to determine, working in an effective relationship with the Government, what the most appropriate technology is for those particular areas.

Steel (US Tariffs)

5. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): What progress has been made to secure exemptions for UK steel companies from US tariffs. [52000]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Minister for Trade and Investment and I and our embassy in Washington are in regular contact with senior members of the American Administration to support our companies' requests for exclusions from the American import tariffs on steel. I am glad to say that the Administration have now agreed to consider new applications that are received by 20 May. We expect decisions on those exclusion requests to be made by 3 July.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and for the way in which the Government have tried to pursue all these issues within a strictly legal framework, unlike the American Government. That is much appreciated at the steelworks at Port Talbot, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis), but which I can see from my living room window. Over the past 20 years, there have been huge reductions in jobs at that steelworks to keep it competitive. I urge my right hon. Friend to do whatever else she may have in mind to make certain that production of high-quality, competitive steel can continue in Aberavon.

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. Throughout this whole business, we have stressed to the American Administration that we believe that their action is completely unjustified and unlawful under World Trade Organisation rules. We are making absolutely certain that the action that we take with our European partners is within the WTO rules. I am grateful for his and others' support for that strategy, but the most important thing that we can do to support our steelworkers, apart from fighting the American action, is to maintain economic stability and support our manufacturing industry, which I believe is now on the verge of an upturn. That in turn will produce the demand that workers at Corus in his constituency and elsewhere so desperately need. We will continue to support our steelworkers and to make the case for our highly productive and competitive steel plants against this unjustified American action.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Will the Secretary of State confirm that Commissioner Lamy is meeting his opposite number in Washington today? Does this not confirm the benefit of Britain's membership of the European Union? If each of us were seeking independently to take on the United States, we would not have the benefit of operating as a European Union. Does that not show the good sense of the British people when they said yes to Europe in the 1975 referendum?

Ms Hewitt: I agree with every word that the hon. Gentleman has said, although I am not sure that his hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench or indeed the Leader of the Opposition would agree with him. If he feels like crossing the Floor today, let me say how much we would welcome him.

Phil Hope (Corby): My right hon. Friend will know that in Corby we have a very efficient, highly productive rolling mill producing some of the finest tube in the country. Indeed, it was used to construct the London Eye, one of the major icons of the millennium. In Corby we are proud of our steel and our steelworkers and feel that the action by the United States is unacceptable, unlawful and unjustified. I thank the Government for the work that they are already doing, but if the negotiations on compensation break down, will they consider the option of European Union retaliation against the United States to force it to drop these unacceptable tariffs and allow our manufacturing industry, which is beginning to move into an upturn, to make the very most of the stable economy that we have created for businesses in this country?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right about the competitive excellence of the company in his constituency. The anger that his constituents feel about the American action was reflected among the steelworkers whom I recently met in Yorkshire. At this stage, our first priority is to get exclusions from the US tariffs for particular products and for the companies that have requested them. Only yesterday, I spoke again to Don Evans, the American Commerce Secretary. My hon. Friend and others will welcome the fact that Secretary Evans was able to tell me that, if products on which additional import duty has already been paid since 20 March are now granted an exclusion, the extra duty will be refunded.

We are pursuing the exclusions as effectively as we can. Along with our European colleagues, we are pursuing compensation and putting pressure on the American Administration to agree countervailing measures to compensate our economy for the impact of their tariff action and we are keeping open the possibility of retaliatory action. No decision has yet been made on that. I must tell my hon. Friend that we are all alive to the dangers of a tit-for-tat war, but we are acting under the WTO rules to keep that option open by working with the European Commission to ensure that a list of products for possible retaliation is filed under the WTO rules by 17 May.

Dr. Hywel Francis (Aberavon): My right hon. Friend will be well aware of the work of the all-party parliamentary group on steel in supporting the steel industry in Britain and on the representations that it has made on behalf of steel communities. Can she reassure the House that every effort is being made to make representations to the American Government to make sure that the protectionism and economic nationalism that their action represents will not spread to other industries?

Ms Hewitt: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. We are working hard and putting all the pressure that we can on the American Administration to persuade them to minimise the damage that has been caused not only to our steel industry, but to the cause of fair and free world trade by their unjustified and unlawful action. I am very grateful to the members of the all-party parliamentary group on steel for taking action on this issue, especially the recent representations that they made in person to the American embassy in London.

Enterprise Projects

6. **Mr. Tom Harris** (Glasgow, Cathcart): What action her Department is taking to target enterprise projects at disadvantaged areas and groups. [52003]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): We are spending £170 million developing businesses in disadvantaged areas and among under-represented groups. The latest round of phoenix funding benefits a further 11 areas, including those in and around Bolton, Bristol, Dorset, Hertfordshire, Isle of Wight, Liverpool, London, Norfolk and Sheffield. It includes the city growth strategies to help inner cities, and the development fund for rural renewal. Similar schemes operate in Scotland.

Mr. Harris: Is my hon. Friend aware that 9 per cent. of the total land area in Glasgow has been designated an undeveloped brownfield site? Does he agree that Government action to prepare such sites for commercial use would have a significant positive impact on employment not only in Glasgow but in cities throughout the United Kingdom?

Nigel Griffiths: I wholeheartedly endorse that. On Tuesday, I visited one such site in Deeside, where this sort of development money is now greatly benefiting the local community and local enterprise. It is particularly important that funds such as those under the community development funding initiative in Glasgow go towards developing businesses. I know that such corporate venturing is very important.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Is the Minister aware that my constituency has the highest unemployment in Scotland? Will he clarify what is being done to ensure that people from my area can get jobs in enterprises that are supported by his Department over a wider travel-to-work area? What has he done in particular to help Pollok and Glasgow recently?

Nigel Griffiths: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the issues that concern his constituents. I know that he will want to join me in congratulating the Government on their tremendous efforts in cutting unemployment in his constituency, although I would be the first to acknowledge that more must be done and that there are no grounds for complacency. I shall ensure that he is written to with details of all the help that has been available in his constituency from both my Department and the Scottish Executive equivalent.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): Will the Minister clarify the bid scheme that the Government are proposing to develop areas? On the face of it, it seems to be very good, but will it effectively deliver for businesses that do not have a lot of resources? There is concern that the application of extra business rates and taxes will be all right for larger concerns but not for smaller businesses, which could be overcome by bigger firms that want to spend more money and pay more business rates to revitalise an area. Will the bid scheme overcome that problem?

Nigel Griffiths: Looking at the mass of the company is an important point. It is obviously much easier to give 10 grants to 10 large bids than to do all the work that might be needed to sub-divide them into 100 bids. I know that officials at the DTI are well aware of that and of the need to help SMEs. I applaud the efforts that have already been made in that direction. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's words to their attention; we take them to heart.

Coal Industry

7. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If she will make a statement on the future of the coal industry. [52004]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Coal continues to play an important part in the UK's energy mix. Since December 2000, the Government have spent £141 million on the coal operating aid scheme to help the UK coal industry deal with depressed world prices and compete successfully with imports in meeting demand.

Mr. Grogan: On the day that my right hon. Friend meets the chief executive of UK Coal and two weeks before coalfield Members meet the Prime Minister to discuss the future of the coal industry, will she assure me that the British Government will support in discussions in the European Union the concept of investment aid for the

coal industry, which would for the first time allow aid to be used to access reserves or new faces, rather than largely being restricted to funding losses?

Ms Hewitt: As my hon. Friend implied, it is not possible at the moment, either under the coal subsidy scheme or under regional selective assistance, for the Government to support investment in the coal industry. We are currently in negotiations in Brussels, as part of the discussion about the new coal state aid framework, to see whether it will be possible to provide investment aid for those mines for which it would be appropriate. We do not know what the outcome of those discussions will be, but we are pressing that case.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): As the right hon. Lady knows, the European Coal and Steel Community treaty is due to expire in July. She also knows that Spain, France and Germany have said that they will continue with the aid, pending the new treaty in January. I urge on her the need to extend the aid until the new treaty is in place. The colliery manager at Bettws Ammanford rang my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) to say that he had regrettably been forced to open redundancy negotiations with his work force, so I urge the Secretary of State to rethink the issue and make an early announcement. The energy Minister visited Longannet recently, but he could do nothing to save that pit. Will she please intervene and save Bettws Ammanford while it is possible to do so?

Ms Hewitt: Of course all of us bitterly regretted what happened at Longannet. We are just thankful that nobody was in the pit at the time and that we avoided the casualties that would otherwise have occurred. I will draw the situation at Bettws to the attention of my hon. Friend the energy Minister and I am sure that he will wish to talk to managers and workers there. When the current scheme runs out, we would prefer to see an immediate transition to a new operating framework, but I stress to the hon. Gentleman that conditions that justified the establishment of an operating aid scheme in 2000—in particular, the very depressed world price for coal—do not really apply now. The substantial amounts of aid that have been given to the industry under the existing operating aid scheme were given on the understanding that the various mines would be economically viable by July this year. We are considering the matter carefully, but it will not be easy to solve.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The Secretary of State referred to the importance of coal in the energy mix. Can she confirm that her energy policies are destroying other Government policies? In particular, the workings of the new electricity trading arrangements are destroying the possibility of reaching targets for combined heat and power and renewable energy by 2010. Is she aware that the NETA have led to a 60 per cent. reduction in CHP production and to some wind farms being closed down because they are no longer productive?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is out of order. It is beyond the scope of the original question and the Minister will not answer it.

Urban Post Offices

8. **Adam Price** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): If it is her policy to support Consignia's proposed network reinvention programme for urban post offices. [52005]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Government are committed to maintaining a nationwide network of post offices. Following the announcement in January agreeing in principle to a compensation package for the urban network restructuring programme to be undertaken by Post Office Ltd., I can confirm that support of up to £210 million will be available for the compensation and investment package for urban offices, subject to state aid and parliamentary approval.

Adam Price: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply, but the Government's policy on the issue is a touch Orwellian. The Conservatives are often roundly—and rightly—condemned for the 3,500 post offices that closed under their Government, but we are told that the 3,000 proposed closures under this Government are an issue of network reinvention and are the operational responsibility of Consignia, even though the Government are the only shareholder. Is not the real underlying agenda the Government's continuing intention to part-privatise, by the back door? As we discovered this morning in *Hansard*, the Government were involved in the discussions to privatise part of Consignia by selling a share to the privately owned Dutch company, TPG. Our experience in Wales with Dutch mergers is unfortunate—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister will do his best to answer the question.

Mr. Alexander: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Gentleman raised the question of closure. The latest figures available indicate that for the year to the end of March 2002 the total number of closures across the country was 262, compared with 547 in the previous year.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I welcome the funding that the Government are making available to the reinvention programme, which I know will help the post office service in the future. However, I draw to my hon. Friend's attention the situation regarding the Stockbridge post office in my constituency. That area has been without sub-post office facilities for several months. We now have a commitment from Consignia about reopening a post office, but we do not have a date. Will my hon. Friend get in touch with Consignia and ask it to get a move on so that we can have a definite date for the reopening of a post office in the Stockbridge area of my constituency?

Mr. Alexander: Such matters are operational matters for Consignia, but in my dim and distant past as a student I used to use that post office, so I shall certainly be happy to make those representations on my hon. Friend's behalf.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the Minister accept that the policies of successive Governments have made it difficult for small post offices to serve, in both urban and rural areas? Will better links be established with

the reinvented Consignia to make sure that the people of our country as a whole are served by a Post Office that serves the nation rather than private enterprise?

Mr. Alexander: I certainly endorse that sentiment. From my own constituency, I know of the vital work undertaken not only in rural but in urban areas by Post Office Counters Ltd. That is why we are determined to get the Post Office's finances on to a sustainable basis, and remain committed to a national network of sub-post offices.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Will the Minister confirm that there is a link between the Government's decision to approve the closure of a third of urban post offices and their adoption of an extremely pessimistic target of 3 million for the take-up of post office card accounts? That is only half the number of people that the Government's own social exclusion unit has estimated to be without bank accounts. Do not the Government's assumptions inevitably imply a large-scale migration of custom from post offices to the banking system?

Mr. Alexander: First, I emphasise that the figure of 3 million is an operational assumption, and it is being considered. The Government's determination to move many who are unbanked into the banking system is consistent with our determination to tackle social exclusion in this country. However, we of course want to ensure that post offices are located where they are best able to serve customers, both those who wish to collect benefits and those who have wider retailing needs.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I thank the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) for raising the matter of urban post offices. We hear a lot about the problems with rural post offices. What is the Minister's relationship with Postwatch, the organisation that looks after the interests of post office consumers? What is his approach to urban post offices such as those in my constituency, of which well over a third are likely to be closed in the next 12 months?

Mr. Alexander: Of course, we maintain a dialogue with Postwatch. The programme will be subject to scrutiny in this House and in Europe. As we move forward with it, it is vital that there is consultation, at a national level with Postwatch, and at the local level of individual sub-post offices. That is exactly the Government's intention.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Two years ago, the Government said that by keeping the Post Office in the public sector, it could become a "world-class player" providing a service fit "for the 21st century." Today, it is losing £1.5 million a day, it is about to announce thousands of redundancies, and the Government have been forced to admit that they have been engaged in secret talks to the sell the Post Office to the Dutch. Who does the Minister blame for that fiasco, given that just two years ago the Post Office had a golden future? Is it management, the unions, or his own Government?

Mr. Alexander: The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point about the challenges that we face with the Post Office. However, the point would have more credibility if a single Conservative Member had attended yesterday's Westminster Hall debate on the Post Office, to which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), responded. However, I accept that we face challenges with regard to the Post Office. That is why we have taken decisions to strengthen management that are consistent with a commitment to commercial freedom. It is vital to move the programme forward to achieve the goals that we have set—the delivery of the universal service obligation, and the maintenance of a national network of post offices.

Manufacturing

9. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): What steps she is taking to help manufacturing industry. [52006]

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): Fundamental to the success of our manufacturing industry is the establishment of a stable macro-economic framework, which this Government have successfully put in place since 1997. In addition, we have set in hand a range of specific measures that will improve industry's productivity and competitiveness. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to set out the Government's strategy for manufacturing in a publication later this month.

Mr. Chapman: I welcome and look forward to that publication. However, what are the Government doing now to help manufacturing firms in my constituency? No matter what they do in terms of productivity or efficiency gains, ground-breaking agreements between management and unions, and investment, they still cannot compete because of the barrier of the pound-euro exchange rate.

Alan Johnson: From visiting the Wirral international business park with my hon. Friend in February, I know of the concern of local manufacturing businesses, particularly about the slowdown in the world economy and the weakness of the euro. We believe that artificial measures to reduce the level of sterling would risk a return to the economic instability that so damaged manufacturing in the past.

In this morning's newspaper, the chief executive of Siemens, Alan Wood, says:

"it is clear that the UK can only sustain a successful manufacturing base if we all increase our productivity levels by investing in high-tech manufacturing. We also need to establish good supply chain management, create cutting edge research and make more innovative products."

We need to concentrate on skills, innovation and research and development so that we can add value to manufacturing products in this country and ensure the success of manufacturing in Wirral and throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I begin by congratulating the Minister on what we are told is his new appointment. If the Government are so keen to show their support for manufacturing industry, will he explain why neither he nor any of the other seven Department of Trade and Industry Ministers could find time in their diary to attend MACH 2002, the No.1 exhibition of manufacturing

technology which is taking place in Birmingham for the whole of this week? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the equivalent event in Germany was attended by the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder? Does not the Government's failure even to turn up speak far more loudly about the priority that they attach to manufacturing than a change in the title at the top of the Minister's notepaper?

Alan Johnson: The suggestion is nonsense. The Machine Tool Technologies Association is a very important organisation which understands the importance that we attach to manufacturing industry. I understand that the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) attended the exhibition. In my new role, I will ensure that the MTTA never has to accept second best again.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): I welcome the many initiatives in the Budget to sustain manufacturing, help stimulate small and medium-sized manufacturing concerns and, importantly, assist in the start-up of new, smaller manufacturing concerns. Will the Minister give an undertaking to work closely with the Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise and local companies in Scotland to ensure that the new telephone helpline is widely advertised and that the new starter packs are widely available so that new manufacturing concerns can start up throughout the country?

Alan Johnson: I will certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. It is important that we work closely with the Scottish Executive and with Scottish Enterprise to ensure that in the early days of what seems to be a better future for manufacturing—after a dreadful time—we all work together. In that way, the opportunities for business support are well understood and well known to companies and manufacturing.

Regional Development Agencies

12. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): What actions she is taking to enable regional development agencies to best suit their activities to regional needs. [52009]

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): From 1 April this year, the regional development agencies are getting their funding from the Government as a single budget. This will give them the flexibility to address the regional needs and opportunities that they have identified as key to developing their regional economies.

In return, we have agreed a set of targets with the RDAs. These sit within a common framework, but reflect each region's particular needs and priorities.

Mr. Borrow: My hon. Friend will be aware that the north-west of England is the leading aerospace region in the United Kingdom and, indeed, the world. The North West Development Agency is working with the North West Aerospace Alliance, the universities in the area, BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce and the Airbus consortium to develop an aerospace innovation centre in the north-west. I have spoken to colleagues in the region, and it is clear that there is frustration at the delay in getting this project off the ground. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would look into the matter and see what support his Department can give to the project in the months ahead.

Alan Johnson: I am certainly aware of the enormous efforts made by the North West Development Agency to improve aerospace facilities and, indeed, by linking with the universities, to ensure that there is a constant supply of skills for that industry. I was not aware of the point that my hon. Friend makes, and I will undertake to intervene and to find out what is happening.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

The Minister was asked—

Pre-eclampsia

28. **Dr. Andrew Murrison** (Westbury): If she will make a statement on the recent report into pre-eclampsia. [52031]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I understand that the study to which the hon. Gentleman refers suggests an association, but it does not find any direct link between working and pre-eclampsia, and that the lead researcher has commented that it would not be right to draw firm conclusions from this study. The Health and Safety Executive will undertake a detailed assessment of the report and will consider whether there is a need to provide additional guidance for employers, employees and health care providers.

Dr. Murrison: I thank the Minister for that response. In light of the fact that this is just one report, I wonder what discussions she is having with her colleagues in the Department of Health and the maternity working group to establish the need for further research to clarify the possibility of a link between working and pre-eclampsia. More generally, will she tell us a little about what she is doing to publicise this condition, which is poorly understood among women and health care workers?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman raises an enormously important point. Eclampsia and pre-eclampsia are leading causes of maternal death and, as he says, the causes are not at all well understood. I understand that my colleagues in the Department of Health are already talking to the Health and Safety Executive, as I suggest. I am sure that they are considering the need for further research, although I will draw that point specifically to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I would also stress to the hon. Gentleman that the Department of Health is already funding the voluntary group, Action on Pre-eclampsia, and that part of that funding is used to make information directly available to pregnant women. I believe that that information is found to be reassuring and practically very helpful.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Yesterday's report that fewer than half the babies born in England have a completely natural delivery is shocking. The increasing medicalisation of maternity care is causing midwives to vote with their feet and the policy of creating ever-larger units undermines the kind of personal care that can guard

against pre-eclampsia. Will the Minister for Women tell the House what will happen to the maternity units that, according to the birth-rate plus survey, cannot find enough midwives?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Lady raises a very important point about ensuring that women can get the kind of care that they want in pregnancy and childbirth. For many women—I had a great experience with a midwife-assisted delivery—it is very desirable to have a midwife engaged in care throughout the pregnancy, as well as at the delivery itself. I will certainly draw the hon. Lady's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, and I will write to her further on this subject.

Parents (Employment)

29. **Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside): What she is doing to encourage the employment of parents. [52032]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): We are doing a great deal to enable parents to balance work and family. I stress the improvements that we are making to maternity pay and leave, the creation of paternity and adoption leave and the new duty for employers seriously to consider requests for flexible working from the parents of young children—all of which come on top of the other measures that we have taken, particularly the increased investment in child care and the introduction of the highly successful working families tax credit and the child care tax credit.

Mark Tami: Does the Minister for Women agree that what parents want is the ability to work flexibly? Will she do all that she can to encourage employers down that road? Will she encourage them even more during the World cup so that they can enjoy the benefits of the goal-scoring talents of my constituent, Michael Owen?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Many fathers, mothers and others will want to make sure that they watch the games, and will be cheering on his constituent. I welcome the fact that many employers have already indicated that they will be flexible on this matter, and will ensure that employees can watch the key matches rather than perhaps taking unauthorised sick leave. We know from awards such as the 100 Best Companies to Work For—which is sponsored by my Department—that employers who offer flexible working, particularly to parents, are not only more popular with their employees but are more profitable than other companies, too.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the right hon. Lady agree that the single most damaging thing that this Government have done to prevent the increase in part-time women—particularly mothers of young families—is to announce the increase in national insurance contributions?

Ms Hewitt: I am not sure whether the hon. Lady wants to increase part-time women or part-time working. Let me say that the increase in the number of women in employment, particularly women with young children, has been faster in the last few years than in previous decades. I do not agree that the very modest increase in national insurance contributions that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in the Budget will damage that. I have no doubt that, by next year, when the increase in national insurance contributions comes into effect, and when we expect the economy to grow at well over 3 per cent. a year, the issue for job creation and for businesses will not be the national insurance contributions but whether they can get enough good skilled workers. Of course, we will continue to support the extension of part-time working so that women and men can have a greater choice of working hours, which we know that they want.

Second World War

30. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): What steps are being taken to recognise the contribution made by women to the British war effort in the second world war. [52034]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government recognise and value the enormous contribution made by the women of this country during the second world war. I understand that the noble Baroness Boothroyd is patron of a committee that is looking to erect a memorial to the women of world war two. I wish the committee every success with this excellent proposal.

Mr. Grogan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in golden jubilee year, it would be particularly appropriate to bring the campaign for a memorial to the women of world war two—another of whose patrons, incidentally, is the Princess Royal—to a successful conclusion? Will she agree to keep a close watching brief on the efforts of the trustees to secure a central site in the heart of our capital for this memorial? The latest possible site is the Victoria embankment, close to the Ministry of Defence.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I have already wished that committee and its patrons every success, and I shall continue to take a close personal interest in it. It occurs to me that, coming so soon after the death of the Queen Mother—who first found her place in the affections of our country during the second world war, particularly in the east end—it would be highly appropriate to commemorate her, along with other women who made such a heroic contribution to the war effort in the first and second world wars, in a single statue. It also occurs to me that an appropriate and central place for that would be the vacant plinth in Trafalgar square.

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I, too, would like to add my support for a memorial to the effort made by women during the second world war in all sorts of fields. In particular, I hope that we will recognise the contribution made by young women who stayed at home to care for families when everybody else went away, and who may have lost the chance of marriage and bringing up their own family when people came home with injuries, which meant that they slipped from being a teenager to a carer, perhaps for many years. They lost the opportunity to marry and to earn, and they are sometimes now among the poorest old people. We should remember the service provided by that group of women.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Lady makes a very important point, and I entirely agree with her about the importance

of recognising and valuing the contribution that was made by those forgotten women of the war as well as that of the women who served in the Land Army, in the services and in many other ways, including in the workplace as well as in the home.

Female Entrepreneurs

31. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): When she next expects to meet representatives of small firms organisations to discuss female entrepreneurs. [52035]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): My hon Friend the Minister with responsibility for small business meets regularly the small business representative organisations to discuss how we can improve the environment for UK small business, including women entrepreneurs. Indeed, he most recently raised this issue at the end of last month at a meeting of entrepreneurs in Stoke-on-Trent and, just last week, I helped to launch the new north-west women's business network, which is doing excellent work to support women already in business or wanting to set up their own business in that region.

Mr. Bellingham: Female entrepreneurs in my constituency will be very pleased to hear that, but is the Minister aware that what they do not want is patronising advice from the Government? They want determined effort to lift burdens on business and to improve the business climate. What plans does she have to do that? Does she agree with the British Chambers of Commerce, which said in a recent report that this Government had imposed more burdens on business than any other Government in history?

Ms Hewitt: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the record and the comparison with other countries, he will find that, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, we have a much lower level of product market regulation than most other advanced countries. We have much more favourable employment regulations than most of the rest of the European Union and, according to all benchmarks, we are one of the best places in which to start and to grow a small business. We are determined to keep it that way, which is why we are making such an effort to improve and further simplify regulations.

However, we also know that women constitute about one in three of the owner-managers of small businesses and that the proportion is much higher in the United States. There is a great deal more that we shall do to support women to start their own businesses, because there is untapped potential that can contribute to the growth of the economy in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and right across the country.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business of the House for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 6 MAY The House will not be sitting on the bank holiday. *[Interruption.]* Another step forward for modernisation

TUESDAY 7 MAY—Second Reading of the Police Reform Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 8 MAY—Progress on consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

THURSDAY 9 MAY—Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

FRIDAY 10 MAY—Private Members Bills.

The provisional business for the week after will be:

MONDAY 13 MAY—Second Reading of the National Insurance Contributions Bill.

TUESDAY 14 MAY—Motion to approve the First Report from the Modernisation of the House of Commons Committee on Select Committees.

Motions relating to the Ninth Report from the Standards and Privileges Committee on a new code of conduct and guide to the rules.

WEDNESDAY 15 MAY—Opposition Day [13th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 16 MAY—Progress on a Bill. Details to be confirmed next week.

FRIDAY 17 MAY—The House will not be sitting.

The House will wish to know that on Wednesday 15 May 2002, there will be a debate relating to packaging and packaging waste in European Standing Committee C.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[*Wednesday 15 May 2002:*

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union documents: 15194/01; Packaging and packaging waste. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-xiv, (2001–02).]

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for that statement.

I wish to ask, in particular, about the business for 14 May, when the House will consider the Modernisation Committee's report. Can the right hon. Gentleman give any indication of when he expects to table the many amendments to Standing Orders that will no doubt be required to give effect to the Committee's recommendations? Is he having any regrets about what he is proposing to do on Select Committees?

For example, the suggestion of an increase in the size of Select Committees is agitating many Members. I understand that the Leader of the House might want to give a sense of purpose to the lost souls on his Back Benches who have nothing else to do and that he might therefore want to find them a place on a Select Committee. However, given that just the other day four Labour Back Benchers bunked off from a Select Committee, does he not find it difficult to justify increasing representation on such Committees when their existing members cannot even be bothered to attend?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the remarks made by one of those Committee members, the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer)? He said:

"There is a long tradition that Select Committees operate by consensus. That tradition is normally to the benefit of Opposition Members, as, otherwise"—

here, Mr. Speaker, is the key phrase—

"Government Members on Select Committees would routinely pass motions praising the Government to the skies and approving every detail in every Bill."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 831.]

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that that is a remarkable insight into the attitude of Labour Members to Select Committees? Indeed, it is a shocking revelation of their role on Select Committees, which are supposed to be impartial and to operate on a non-political basis.

Is the Leader of the House also aware of early-day motion 1214, signed, I think, by virtually all Select Committee Chairmen, who are members of the august Liaison Committee?

[That this House endorses the Liaison Committee's welcome for the Modernisation Committee's belief in the central role of select committees in parliamentary scrutiny; also endorses the Liaison Committee's support for most of the proposals in the Modernisation Committee's report on Select Committees; regrets, however, that the Liaison Committee's strong concerns that the standard size of departmental select committees should remain as 11 have been overlooked; notes that the collective objections of chairmen are related to their experience in maintaining the cohesion of committees in carrying out the crucial task of scrutiny; points out that an increase of over one-third in the size of most committees would substantially alter their effectiveness and method of working; and urges the Leader of the House to reconsider this important issue.]

The early-day motion challenges the proposal to increase the size of Select Committees, and I suspect I know why. If the membership of Select Committees is increased and if, as I would hope, their budget for travel is not increased correspondingly, those signatories have rumbled the fact that more Committee members would go on fewer trips. That is probably the killer fact in the consideration of that ill-fated suggestion. I hope that the Leader of the House will reconsider what he is proposing, even at this late stage.

I want to ask the right hon. Gentleman about his understanding of the guidelines issued by the Prime Minister on pre-election Government publicity. I have no doubt that he is intimately aware of those, but perhaps it will help right hon. and hon. Members if I give a few choice quotations. The guidelines are headed, "Elections to local councils: guidance for civil servants on conduct". Has the right hon. Gentleman discussed those with the Cabinet Secretary? If not, can we have brief debate on them in the near future?

The guidelines state:

"The period of sensitivity preceding Local Elections is not fixed in relation to any particular date, but the general convention is that particular care should be taken in the three weeks preceding the elections; in this case, from 11 April 2002."

[Mr. Forth]

They go on to say:

"there should be even-handedness in meeting information requests from different political parties . . . particular care should be taken over official support, and the use of public resources, including publicity, for Ministerial announcements which have a bearing on matters relevant to the local elections".

The guidelines go on to give the further helpful advice that

"it may be better to defer an announcement until after the elections".

Some Departments have taken that suggestion to heart. *The Daily Telegraph* told us on 30 April that

"the Department of Culture, Media and Sport said: 'We want to publish the draft Bill next week, after the local elections. We cannot publish before then as there are purdah rules in place to cover the election.'"

So that Department was trying to stick to the rules. Then, *The Guardian* told us on 1 May:

"the department for culture media and sport said it was unable to make any announcement until after May 2 because of the local government elections in England. Any announcement would be made to parliament first."

So the House can congratulate the Secretary of State and the Ministers at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on trying hard to stick to the rules.

That is the good news. Unfortunately, not all Departments took that admirable attitude. Is the Leader of the House intending to have discussions with the Cabinet Secretary, and perhaps even with the Prime Minister, about other colleagues who were more cavalier with the rules? I do not want to pick out anyone in particular—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Well, as my colleagues urge me, what about the Home Secretary? He has been parading up and down, talking about more of this and more of that, and of better this and better that, in flagrant violation of the very rules that have just been issued.

Can we have a debate on that matter and, before we do, can the Leader of the House tell us what on earth is going on? Does anyone in the Government take any rules seriously any more? Is the Prime Minister going to do anything about that? Is the Cabinet Secretary a complete busted flush, or are we going to get some action on this rather than just pieces of paper that are completely ignored by almost every Department except the good old Department for Culture, Media and Sport?

Mr. Cook: First, in answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question about the Standing Orders debate on 14 May, I can tell him that I will be discussing the draft of the Standing Orders with the Modernisation Committee next Wednesday, and I hope to table them immediately afterwards. I hope therefore that they will be on the Order Paper in the week before the debate so that the whole House can see them.

Do I regret the Modernisation Committee's proposals? No, I do not. Nor for one moment do I imagine that the other members of the Committee from all parties who are with us in the Chamber regret what we are proposing. It represents a major strengthening of the Select Committee system in the House. It will provide a form of independent and transparent nomination to Select Committees; it will provide for greater resources, especially staff, for Select Committees; and it will provide a clear statement of the core tasks, functions and focus of Select Committees. All that is a very important step towards increasing the powers of scrutiny in the House, and all of it has been welcomed by members of the Liaison Committee, whose report on the Modernisation Committee's report is very positive, describing it as "excellent".

I fully understand the sensitivity of the right hon. Gentleman's party on increasing the size of Select Committees. The Conservatives have so few Back Benchers that they are now obliged to fill up Select Committee places with Front Benchers, so I do not anticipate that they will vote for a significant increase in the size of Select Committees.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): At least our members turn up.

Mr. Cook: On the question of those who missed Monday's meeting, I point out to the House that one of them has been absent from the House for some time because of long-term illness, and we must respect that. Another was attending a funeral—there are times when all Members must carry out such personal tasks—and I understand that another was attending to a family illness. We must approach these demands with appropriate respect because we are all human and we all have such demands made of us.

What the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is acknowledging is that the full membership of the Treasury Committee would not have signed up to the preposterous report that finally emerged from an unbalanced, badly attended meeting. However, I should have thought that if he were seriously concerned that occasionally an hon. Member will have a family duty to perform and would therefore be unable to attend a meeting, he would support our proposal for a larger membership, to make sure that when one or two Members went missing it did not result in such a disproportionate outcome. [HON. MEMBERS: "Four."] Opposition Members shout "Four", but I have explained that three of those four had perfectly compelling and understandable reasons for their absence. Had those three attended, we would not have had the result that we did. Nevertheless, I welcome the Conservatives' enthusiastic interest in Select Committees, and I hope that they will support the proposals that we will make on 14 May to strengthen Select Committees and to give hon. Members more opportunity to take part in the work of scrutiny.

I shall convey the right hon. Gentleman's congratulations to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with an appropriate health warning instructing her to "handle with care", as I am sure she will. I point out to the right hon. Gentleman, however, that if he studies with care the guidelines on what can be announced during local authority elections, he will find that they clearly and specifically state that the business of government must go on. It would be preposterous if central Government ground to a halt for a three-week period. Indeed, I personally warmly support what the Home Secretary announced this week, and if the right hon. Gentleman will permit me I will convey to my right hon. Friend my own congratulations on what he said.

The Conservative party may not like it, but let me tell the right hon. Gentleman that the nation will welcome the announcement of £67 million to tackle street crime, £194 million to create more prison places and £36 million

more for police operations. We will be very proud today to stand on our record of having created a record number of police throughout England and Wales, and that is one reason why we look forward with confidence to what happens at the polls.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I understand that this morning GMTV again highlighted the insidious pyramid gifting scheme, women empowering women, which results in women being tricked into parting with up to £3,000 of cash in the hope that they will get back £24,000. Like all pyramid schemes, it works on the gullibility of people who believe that they cannot lose. In fact, only those who get into the scheme at the beginning get back any money, and the vast majority—usually those who can afford it least—lose out.

This scheme has been spreading throughout the UK for almost two years, and it was rife in Aberdeen last summer, when I secured an Adjournment debate on the subject. I was therefore dismayed to hear that women are still being suckered into parting with their money. As it would appear that the trading schemes regulations that came into effect in 1997 cannot be used to stop gifting schemes such as women empowering women, will my right hon. Friend find time to legislate to outlaw this pernicious scheme?

Mr. Cook: I fully endorse what my hon. Friend said. I welcome the fact that she has taken the opportunity of exchanges in the House to warn of those dangers and I hope that her remarks will be reported in her local area. When I was Foreign Secretary, I saw the enormous damage done in foreign countries, particularly in the Balkans, by pyramid schemes, and we do not want to allow them through the door here. Frankly, I would be surprised if the blatant fraud involved were within the law, but I shall happily draw the problem to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and consider whether fresh legislation is required.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the House to have an early opportunity to consider the deplorable and depressing situation that has arisen as a result of the collapse of the United Nations' initiative on an investigation in Jenin? It would be preferable to have such an opportunity early next week if the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs can come to the House, as that would be of benefit to all of us.

Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for the House to have an early opportunity to consider the relative merits of different voting systems? Does he accept that the system that allowed the French nation to be put in its present dilemma is not one of proportional representation, but is effectively identical to the system that the Government introduced today for the election of mayors in seven cities in this country? I understand that last night the Leader of the House and his Conservative shadow agreed on the issue of proportional representation, so can the House have an opportunity to discuss that, too?

The debate that we have long been promised on the report published on 14 February by the Select Committee on Public Administration on House of Lords reform must surely take place soon as we have now had the Government response. A number of the right hon. Gentleman's Cabinet colleagues keep going on about the need for the House of Commons to have a predominant voice in the way in which our Parliament operates, so why cannot Members of the Commons be allowed to express a view before consultation is complete? Will he comment on the fact that last night a senior Law Lord was reported as saying that it was extremely important to separate the Law Lords' function from the function of a supreme court?

Finally, we are surprised that there is to be a debate on the report just out on the new code of conduct and guidance on rules. Apparently, it announces a relaxation of disclosure, even though the Wicks committee is still looking at standards of conduct. Is it not premature of the House to take a view on those matters when that important committee has yet to report?

Mr. Cook: On the last point, I have arranged for a debate to be held on the report of the Standards and Privileges Committee at an early opportunity which, to be honest, I believe will be welcomed by the Committee and Members of Parliament. It is important that we should express a view on those matters. I do not readily accept the hon. Gentleman's characterisation of the report as relaxing the rules; on the contrary, it is trying to make sure that we have rules that are easily understood and applied, and therefore more difficult to duck. It is for the House itself to decide, but I can see that there is a case to be made that that will result in more, rather than less, effective regulation.

On the other matters raised by the hon. Gentleman, the Israeli Government's refusal to admit the UN inspection is a grave matter. The investigation was originally suggested by the Israeli Government, who said at the time that they would welcome it. I very much regret that they have changed their mind. I believe that that will rebound badly on them in the world and in international opinion and that it is a mistake according to the test of their own interests. We will of course continue to work through the United Nations to find ways of ensuring a proper audit and account of what happened in Jenin, but ultimately we will require the co-operation of members of the Israeli Government who recognise that it would be better if the investigation went ahead.

On voting systems, I agree with the hon. Gentleman; the system for electing the French President proceeded on the basis of the first two past the post and has run into spectacular difficulty as a result. However, I am encouraged by the dramatic rise in turnout in parts of England conducting a postal ballot for local authority elections—as high as 57 per cent. in Chorley and typically over 50 per cent. in many other areas. It is very encouraging that that change in the system has produced a much higher turnout, and I hope that the other experiments that we are carrying out—for example, electronic voting—will show a similar revival of interest from voters who have found it easier to cast their votes.

I have repeatedly answered questions on the House of Lords. Only this week, I told hon. Members that we anticipate being able to make a statement on the matter before the House rises for the summer recess, and I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that the sooner that happens, the better. When we have that discussion, plainly Lord Bingham's observations will be relevant.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Leader of the House will no doubt have seen my early-day motion 1223 on attacks on places of worship.

[That this House is appalled that a North London synagogue has been daubed with racist graffiti; expresses its sympathy to the members; condemns any attacks on places of worship of any religion; and calls for respect and tolerance of all faiths.]

I am sure that my right hon. Friend would join me in condemning the disgraceful attack on and daubing of a synagogue in north London last weekend, as well as the other attacks that have taken place on mosques and other places of worship over the past few months. Will he do his best to ensure that the Home Office makes it clear to every police authority that it should give priority to protecting such buildings and trying to track down those who perpetrate such attacks?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it might be useful if all hon. Members visited mosques, temples and synagogues in their constituencies to show that we as a community are not prepared to tolerate such attacks, and that we recognise that allowing people to get away with them makes race relations considerably worse and is seen as a victory for the forces of intolerance?

Mr. Cook: I readily agree with my hon. Friend. I condemn attacks on places of worship of any religion, and I am sure that the police and appropriate authorities will respond vigorously.

I should add that the incidence of hatred, intimidation, violence and desecration to which my hon. Friend draws attention is another solid reason why today the British people, wherever they are voting, should vote together to reject the fascists who are standing for election.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Does the Leader of the House agree with the recommendation of the Select Committee on Education and Skills that its report on individual learning accounts, which was published yesterday, should be debated, and will he make time—preferably Government time—for such a debate? Such a debate is necessary in the light of the report's conclusion that no evidence was presented to the Committee

"to suggest that Ministers sought advice from other Government Departments, or even heeded warnings from within their own Department, on how to protect the scheme from unscrupulous opportunists"—

and of the admission to the Committee by the Minister with responsibility for adult skills that

"the design of the scheme did not allow us to stamp out abuse"—

in other words, that it was fundamentally flawed. Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise the seriousness of the report's comments about the waste of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money, and will he allow time for a debate?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the report was presented only two days ago. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, we will examine it carefully, but cannot give a considered response at this point. I fully understand that the Committee and the House will wish to pursue the points raised, and the Government will respond fully.

In the meantime, I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Department acted speedily and vigorously when evidence of fraud emerged, and consequently the system was shut down very quickly.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on the relationship between Her Majesty's Government and India, so that the House may discuss the rising tide of violence in Gujarat, which has been somewhat under-reported? Hundreds of people are dying week after week, many of them relatives of British residents, and there are disturbing reports of state involvement in massacres of Muslims. Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate on that very serious human rights situation?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend returns to a matter that has been raised in business questions on several occasions, especially by hon. Members representing communities with friends and relatives in Gujarat, who are understandably distressed by what has happened to those communities. It appears that worrying loss of life and serious cases of violence and conflict have occurred in the region.

Foreign Office Ministers have been in repeated contact with the Indian Government to convey the concerns of people in Britain about what has been happening. We shall continue to do so, and I am sure that hon. Members will look for ways in which they can, rightly and properly, express their constituents' concerns.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the Leader of the House join me in welcoming the launch in Belfast of the new multi-agency initiative to assess and manage the risk posed by sex offenders in Northern Ireland? I welcome that and, on behalf of my party, congratulate those involved.

Does the right hon. Gentleman consider that a debate on protecting the public against sex offenders would promote more openness on this most serious and sensitive issue, and hopefully encourage greater public co-operation in the campaign to remove this evil from society?

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to join the hon. Gentleman in congratulating all those involved in the multi-agency initiative in Northern Ireland. I hope that they will succeed in achieving more openness about sex offending.

If we are to tackle the problem of making the victims of sex offences feel able to come forward and talk to others about their experiences, we must ensure that they have confidence in the system and understand that we are willing to respond vigorously and give the matter priority. I believe that the initiative in Northern Ireland will go a long way towards achieving that.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): My right hon. Friend knows that the events of 11 September had a dramatic effect on aviation and aerospace industries throughout the world. As the medium to long-term consequences are now becoming clear, does he agree that we are approaching the time when it would be appropriate to debate the matter in the Chamber? Will he do his best to find parliamentary time for such a debate?

Mr. Cook: I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate on the subject given the pressure on business as we

approach the end of the Session. However, I shall draw his observations to the attention of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government have closely followed the difficulties of the aviation industry and we are willing to assist in any way that is appropriate.

I am pleased to say that the evidence from the tourist boards shows a revival in visits to all parts of Britain. I hope that that increase in traffic will help the aviation industry out of the crisis into which it fell after 11 September.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The interim report of the Select Committee on the Treasury has already been mentioned today. Perhaps its most worrying finding was the inadequate consultation on national insurance increases with small and medium-sized businesses, like many in my constituency, which are currently suffering from the shock announcement. Will consultation form part of the Government's annual report, which we expect daily?

When the Government launched the annual report, hon. Members, not unreasonably, expected it to be published annually. We have not received one for some time. Will it be published? Will consultation be part of it? Will the Prime Minister, who has condescended to come before the Liaison Committee regularly, be questioned on the annual report when he performs in that capacity?

Mr. Cook: My impression from the newspapers in the past few days is that the Government have been through a quinquennial report. I believe that we emerged from that assessment with much credit. The Prime Minister is entitled to be given credit for his decision, to which the hon. Gentleman alluded, to give evidence twice a year before the Liaison Committee, which represents all the Select Committees in the House. That is a courageous and proper step, which will increase the power of Select Committees to scrutinise. No previous Prime Minister has taken such a step, including during the 18 years when the Conservative party had Prime Ministers.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): My right hon. Friend knows that in the past six to seven months, Argentina has suffered an economic and political crisis that is probably unparalleled even in the history of Latin American democracies. It is affecting many British nationals and companies based in Argentina. Yet, so far as I can ascertain, not a single sentence has been uttered in the House about Argentina in the past six months, despite five opportunities to discuss Gibraltar, which probably affects fewer British citizens. Will the Leader of the House allow an early debate so that we can discuss ways in which to protect British nationals from the problems in Argentina?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate my hon. Friend on setting right the neglect of Argentina in the record of the House. Thanks to his intervention, sentences referring to it will appear. I shall reflect on his comments and there will be opportunities to discuss Argentina in general debates when it is relevant to raise anxieties about Latin America and specifically Argentina. I do not believe that I would be thanked next time there was demand for a statement on Gibraltar if I said that there would be a statement on Argentina instead.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Perhaps it is understandable for one Labour Member to be missing for compassionate reasons from a vital meeting of the Select Committee on the Treasury, but it is surely careless and cavalier for four to be missing. I shall therefore ask the Leader of the House two questions. First, will he deny press reports that he, on behalf of the Government, will in the near future produce a motion to remove some, or all four, of those Members from that Select Committee? Will he tell the House that he has absolutely no intention of doing so? Secondly, will he explain—having failed to do so to the shadow Leader of the House—why he completely disagrees with every member of the Liaison Committee, which comprises, after all, the Chairmen of all the Select Committees, in wanting extra members on Select Committees? It is clear from the experience of the Treasury Committee that that would not work.

Mr. Cook: On the contrary, I think that the evidence to which the right hon. Gentleman refers suggests that perhaps we do need more members on some of the major Committees that handle business. I would like to say two further things in response to the right hon. Gentleman. First, I have had no motion suggested to me in relation to changing the membership of the Treasury Committee. Indeed, the only reference to that that I have seen in the press has been in the gossip columns, and I would strongly advise him not to take the gossip columns that seriously.

Secondly, I would suggest that the right hon. Gentleman should turn up on 14 May and vote for the recommendations of the Modernisation Committee, which provide for an independent Committee of Nomination, representing the House rather than any party, to decide on the nominations to the Select Committees. If he does so, it will not then be a matter for me to decide who should or should not be on a Committee.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Given that the questions of democratic participation and voter turnout are very much in the minds of those of us with elections in our constituencies today, and given the many innovative experiments in voting methods to which my right hon. Friend has referred, will the Government make a statement analysing the effect of those experiments on the levels of voter turnout? Will he provide time for a debate in which the House could consider the effects of the experiments, so that we can inform the development of Government policy in respect of changes to voting methods?

Mr. Cook: I can certainly say to my hon. Friend that the Government will make a full analysis of the pilot schemes. After all—

Mr. Forth: Look, it's a doughnut!

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to be a free-standing speaker at the Dispatch Box, without any requirement for a doughnut.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): It's not for you. It's a Welsh doughnut for the next debate.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that guidance. It is often difficult to know exactly how many Members are sitting behind me when I have to look over at the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst—a sacrifice that I make every Thursday.

[Mr. Cook]

Perhaps I can return to my hon. Friend's question. I am pleased to say that we shall make a full analysis of the pilot schemes. We did, after all, encourage these pilots schemes to come forward and I believe that we funded most of them. It is already evident that the postal ballots have been taken up with enthusiasm; that might be one early conclusion that we can reach. A whole range of other experiments is being carried out, and I hope to spend tonight in Newham observing the use of electronic voting, which has already enabled people in hospitals and old folks homes, who could not otherwise have voted, to vote. I hope that that will result in more people having a right to exercise their democratic choice.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I, like the Leader of the House and several other hon. Members, am pleased that the Prime Minister has agreed to turn up to the Liaison Committee and accept questions from the Chairs of the Select Committees. The Leader of the House will be aware, however, that we in the SNP-Plaid Cymru do not have even a member on a non-regional departmental Select Committee, far less a Chair, hence our interest in the debate on 14 May, as we all support the Modernisation Committee report. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell me when we will have the opportunity to question the Prime Minister, beyond the opportunity available to us at Prime Minister's questions?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman welcomes the Prime Minister's decision to appear before the Liaison Committee, and I am grateful for that welcome. The decision represents a major step forward and strengthens the accountability of Government to the Select Committee system. I also welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman will support the increase in the size of the Select Committees. One of the problems with a membership of 11 is that it is difficult to secure a precise, representative balance on each Committee, and, if we can secure the increase that I am proposing, it will be easier to ensure that the minority parties have better representation.

Dr. Julian Lewis: It is tempting to follow the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and call for a debate on proportional representation, as that would give hon. Members the opportunity to remind him and his fellow Liberal Democrats of the role of PR in putting the National Front on the electoral map in France in the first place. I shall resist that temptation, however, and ask instead for a statement or debate on Zimbabwe. Has the Leader of the House seen in today's press the simultaneous announcements of the declaration of a disaster in Zimbabwe—largely due to the maladministration of the Mugabe regime—and of the arrest of *The Guardian*'s correspondent there? I know that the relationship between *The Guardian* and the Labour party is not as close as it used to be, but I am sure that we all agree that what is happening to journalists in Zimbabwe is totally unacceptable. Is not it important that we do not let the crisis in the middle east divert our attention from what is happening in Zimbabwe now that the election has been stolen, as everybody predicted?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that I recall the golden era of a close relationship between the Labour party and *The Guardian* to which the hon. Gentleman refers, although I have great sympathy with everything else he says. The economic situation in Zimbabwe is appalling and there is a real threat of hunger and suffering in a country that, traditionally, was fertile and which exported food, never mind had difficulty feeding its own people. That is overwhelmingly down not to any failing by the people of Zimbabwe, but to the grotesque mismanagement and brutality of the Mugabe regime. I entirely support the hon. Gentleman in that we should not forget what is happening in that country or stop applying pressure to the regime simply because the elections are over and some television cameras have moved on.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): May we have an early statement on the worrying delay in the European Commission's response on common fisheries policy reform, which is causing considerable concern in the fishing industry, especially in Shetland? Will the Leader of the House emphasise to his colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the fishing industry thinks that the European Union and the CFP are drinking in the last chance saloon and that reform as outlined in the Green Paper is welcome, but that anything else will be resisted?

Mr. Cook: I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, who speaks with authority, representing the constituency that he does. Of course, the Government are keenly aware of the interest in the Commission proposals and are keen to discuss them with the Commission. However, I must tell the House that, when we receive those proposals, it is important that a long-term perspective on fish conservation is part of the package. Unfortunately, some fish stocks are themselves drinking in the last chance saloon.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): May I again ask the Leader of the House about PowderJect and the smallpox vaccine contract? Last week, I mentioned a Danish company, Bavarian Nordic. Is it true that a German company—Impfstoffwerke Dessau Tornau, or IDT for short—is now involved? We know that PowderJect was paid £32 million on a contract by Her Majesty's Government. Do we know how much PowderJect paid Bavarian Nordic? Is it true that Acambis—another UK company, which has successfully completed two smallpox vaccine contracts for the US Government—was not allowed to bid for the UK contract? Why is that? Can the right hon. Gentleman answer those questions? Is not it time for a debate on the issue?

Mr. Cook: As I have said to the hon. Gentleman—three times now, I think—the contract was awarded following five separate tenders. Although I do not have, off by heart, the names of the other four companies, and although I cannot say whether the company to which he refers is among them, there was a competitive bid involving five different companies and PowderJect won the tender on the basis of providing the best value for money. How PowderJect supplies the contract that it has obtained is primarily a matter for PowderJect. I certainly have no insight into its private accounts.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Now that those whom Damilola Taylor's father believes murdered his son

have forgone the opportunity to defend themselves in court, but have had a series of soft lobs on the "Today" programme, will the Government introduce proposals to reduce the number of dodges, loopholes and procedural technicalities that make it so difficult for those genuinely pursuing justice to bring cases effectively to trial?

Mr. Cook: The Government have been vigilant and vigorous in pursuing steps to ensure that we can bring to justice those who have committed crime. Indeed, the House will have many opportunities to debate that in the forthcoming Session, when there will be a number of Bills relating to court proceedings and criminal justice.

In this country we are very clear about the separation between politicians and the judiciary. I would deprecate anything said in the Chamber that cast doubt on the outcome of the court proceedings.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Perhaps the Leader of the House will find an opportunity to read early-day motion 1228, which concerns effective local councils.

[That this House notes with concern the large number of resignations by town and parish councillors in protest at the implementation of the 'Model Code of Conduct for Parish and Town Councils'; believes that this is undermining local democracy and will severely weaken the representative character of these immensely valuable watchdogs; considers that the code is too Draconian for most small councils and that its implementation should have been delayed for one year to coincide with the local elections in 2003; and calls upon the Government urgently to reconsider both the terms and the application of these constraints.] May we have a debate on the effect of the new model code of conduct?

Is the Leader of the House aware that there have been a large number of resignations from parish and town councils, and that in one instance the entire council resigned? Such councils control very small budgets, and councillors receive no payment for the hard work they do for the community, but they are being asked to declare very small interests. That is a far more onerous requirement than the one placed on us.

Mr. Cook: I shall be happy to consider the point and write to the hon. Gentleman. In the meantime, let me say that I think the country and, too often, the media undervalue the voluntary contribution made by tens of thousands of people throughout the country who make local government work, and neither receive nor expect any financial reward. It is of course important for them to be open and declare what financial interests they may have, because we do not want anyone to be able to profit from his or her position, but most people in local government are driven not by a financial incentive but by a will to serve the local community, and to further their own genuine political convictions on behalf of the community.

Wales in the World

[Relevant documents: First Report from the Welsh Affairs Committee, Session 2000–01, on Wales in the World: the role of the UK Government in promoting Wales abroad, HC 38, and the Government's Response thereto, HC 270, Session 2001–02; Second Special Report from the Welsh Affairs Committee of Session 2001–02, HC 311—Response of the National Assembly for Wales to the First Report from the Welsh Affairs Committee, Session 2000–01, on Wales in the World: the role of the UK Government in promoting Wales abroad, HC 311, Session 2001–02.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

1.11 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): Welsh Members are rarely given the opportunity to engage in a day-long Adjournment debate, on a Thursday, about a matter affecting Wales. There is, of course, our annual St. David's day debate, which takes place around the time of that saint's day, but apart from that we have few such opportunities.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I wonder why.

Mr. Murphy: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Welsh Grand Committee was due to debate the matter later in the year. For various reasons, however, this slot has become available, and I think it beneficial for Welsh Members to be able to rise to the challenge as I know only Welsh Members can.

I pay special tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), who, as Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, initiated the inquiry into Wales's position in the world and what has happened to its profile since devolution. The Committee is extremely important. Over the years, it has more than once highlighted issues of great significance to the people of Wales and, indeed, to the whole United Kingdom. We currently await its report on objective 1 structural funding for Wales. Uniquely, it took evidence on that important issue from me and also from the First Minister of the National Assembly in Cardiff. We also await its reports on farming and food prices, and on broadband cabling. A report on transport in Wales is still under way.

That last example highlights the way in which the Committee is adapting to a post-devolution world. It now meets its counterparts in the National Assembly, where issues such as transport that are divided between the Assembly and the Government can be dealt with jointly. Today, however, we shall deal with an even broader subject—the position of Wales in the wider world. The responses of the Assembly and the Government to the Committee's report on the subject also indicate that government in Wales is a joint affair—that the people of Wales are represented jointly by Members of the House of Commons here and by Members of the National Assembly in Cardiff. Clearly, in this and other instances, co-operation and partnership between the Assembly and the Government can work.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): My right hon. Friend is right to point out the advantages of partnership

[Donald Anderson]

between this House and the National Assembly. When he and the First Minister talk about modernisation and adapting the procedures of the House, will they consider the possibility of having a joint Committee of the Assembly and Parliament, particularly in matters such as this, in which both the Assembly and Parliament clearly have an interest? Rather than making recommendations to the Assembly, the joint Committee could make representations that draw on the strengths of Members from both the Assembly and Parliament, which could be of real value to Wales.

Mr. Murphy: I shall certainly mention that to the First Minister. My right hon. Friend the President of the Council has now left, but I know that he will read what my right hon. Friend has said in *Hansard* and take those points into account. We need to be innovative in the way in which we deal with issues constitutionally following the advent of devolution. I take my right hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I hope that the innovations will have a bearing on all our constituents, whether they live on the borders of Wales or are Welsh themselves. One of the difficulties that I face is that I cannot ask the Secretary of State questions about issues that are devolved: because they are devolved, it is impossible for hon. Members even to ask about them. Perhaps one of the innovations that the right hon. Gentleman will seek to bring in will permit some sort of dialogue or exchange in this Chamber to allow the concerns of our constituents on the borders outside Wales to be voiced to him.

Mr. Murphy: I have no problems with that. At most Welsh questions, there is no shortage of hon. Members on both sides of the House asking me questions that impinge on matters that are devolved, as opposed to those that are reserved.

Devolution has highlighted the international position of Wales in a special way. This coming Saturday, in just over 48 hours' time, the 2002 FA cup final will kick off at the Millennium stadium in Cardiff. It will be watched by hundreds of millions of people in more than 100 countries, so the profile of Wales will be raised still more and in a special way this weekend.

As the Select Committee's investigation showed, the problem has been that, internationally, Scotland and Ireland have had a higher profile than Wales for a variety of reasons. Perhaps it is a question of size and of the extent to which the Scottish and Irish diaspora stay together in the United States, Australia and other countries. Although Welsh people did emigrate to America and elsewhere, because of the size of Welsh communities abroad, and for reasons of assimilation, Wales's profile was not as high as that of Scotland and Ireland. The Select Committee report did a great service in trying to find out why that was and, more significantly, how that profile could be raised to make Wales better known and more frequently visited by people from elsewhere.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Members on both sides of the House who went on the visit to America discovered that several Welsh expatriates were keen to assist in raising the profile of Wales. We had quite a lengthy telephone conference with them. To our disgust and dismay—I think I speak for hon. Members throughout the House in this—their offers of help to the Welsh Development Agency and Wales Tourist Board were rejected out of hand. Surely there is something wrong there.

Mr. Murphy: I do not know the details of the matter that the hon. Gentleman has raised, but I agree with him in principle. If any help comes from expat Welsh men or women living anywhere in the world, it is important that we take advantage of that. The Scottish and Irish do, and we should too. The hon. Gentleman refers to the United States, and I am sure that other hon. Members, like me, have talked to politicians in the United States.

There is hardly a family in Wales that does not have some American connection: my great grandparents went to Philadelphia, stayed a year and came back again, but there were others who remained in America. More people in Wales work for American companies than for any other foreign companies. That connection with the United States could be used in a positive way for the people of Wales.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Murphy: I give way to my hon. Friend, who no doubt has an American anecdote.

Mr. Bryant: I feel almost ashamed to bring in my American anecdote now. My right hon. Friend may be amused to know that when the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport visited the United States recently, the British consul turned out to be from Penygraig and the venture capitalist who led the discussion at Stanford university on the Tuesday morning was from Treorchy. Clearly, the Rhondda has so much get up and go that some people have got up and gone.

Mr. Murphy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. Everyone except me seems to have visited America recently.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): To make a slightly more serious point, it is worth drawing attention to the success of the south of Ireland in the United States. Ireland has been immensely successful at creating a brand identity in the United States that has clearly brought economic benefits. Does the Minister agree that if we were proactive in this regard, although we might not achieve the same success as Ireland, we could certainly go a long way towards creating a trend of Welsh pride in the United States which could produce not only tourism benefits, but economic benefits which are currently going elsewhere?

Mr. Murphy: Yes. I shall make some specific points about that later in my speech. I visited America several times when I was Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office. The hon. Gentleman will know that 40 million people in the United States claim Irish ancestry. Any comparison should take account of the huge difference in

scale, although that does not mean that post-devolution Wales, or indeed the United Kingdom, cannot take advantage of the factors that he mentioned.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): If my right hon. Friend gets an opportunity to visit the United States in the near future, will he follow the example of my constituent Charlotte Church, who took the opportunity to explain to President George W. Bush where Wales is. Perhaps if my right hon. Friend's ancestors had stayed over there and he had become President of the United States, there might be more awareness of where Wales is. Will he take the opportunity of reminding US politicians where Wales is?

Mr. Murphy: I shall certainly do that, although I have no intention of singing the rest of my speech. My hon. Friend makes a valid point. People like Charlotte Church raise the profile of Wales and Welsh people in a very special way.

To return to Europe, which is geographically closer to home, it is important that we tell the rest of the United Kingdom that, on balance, Wales is more pro-Europe than any other part of the United Kingdom. There are various reasons for that, not the least of which is the fact that Wales has a substantial structural funding regime. Two thirds of the land mass of Wales will now get objective 1 funding. That is crucial to the future prosperity of the Welsh economy, although it is not the only reason why people in Wales feel that they understand Europe and relate to it.

Recently, Welsh politicians have been talking to their counterparts in regional government in the European Union. The Committee of the Regions plays an important role in regional activities and regional government in Europe. I pay tribute to two members of that committee: Rosemary Butler, who is a member of the Welsh Assembly, and Brian Smith, who is a member of the Welsh Local Government Association. They and their alternates play an important role in raising the profile of Wales.

I visited Spain a couple of weeks ago. I went to the Asturias region which, Members will know, is very similar to Wales in that it was traditionally a coal and steel region and has now had to change. After that, I spoke at a conference in Segovia, where there were people from all over Europe who are now looking at the way in which regional government is operating in the European Union context.

Wales is of course playing its part in that context. My Department plays that role; my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary recently led a trade mission to the Czech Republic. Welsh Members of Parliament have a role to play, too. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) recently took a number of Members to Brussels to talk to people in the EU. The Welsh Affairs Committee has of course visited Brussels, where its members have talked to EU politicians and officials.

In addition, something has occurred that is peculiar to the development of devolution. In establishing the devolution settlements, liaison was important not only between the Government and the Assembly, but with the other devolved Administrations in the UK—the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament and its Executive. To that end, on 30 October in Cardiff, the Prime Minister chaired a joint ministerial council, which looked in principle at how we deal with international affairs from a devolution point of view, and at our relationship with Europe.

In addition to that, the Foreign Secretary chairs meetings of the joint ministerial council on Europe, of which there have been three in recent months. They discussed, among other things, the convention on the future of Europe and the 2004 intergovernmental conference. As well as that, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe organises with the Assembly a series of what are called Minecor meetings, which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary also attends.

What is so new is the way in which the Assembly is participating in Europe. There is specific Assembly representation in Brussels as part of the UK representation. Assembly Ministers go to EU Council meetings. An interesting and important development since devolution is that between April 2001 and March 2002, there have been seven Council meetings, attended by Ministers from Cardiff who deal with culture, the environment, agriculture and education. Indeed, the Assembly Minister responsible has led on youth issues at such meetings. That compares interestingly with four meetings in previous years. I remind Members that, even though Assembly Ministers represent a devolved Administration, they have become part of the UK delegation at such meetings. The same of course applies to Scotland and to Northern Ireland.

Assembly Ministers have visited countries such as Ireland, Finland and Spain, and the Assembly is a member of various EU networks. Those include links with the motor regions of Catalonia, Baden-Württemberg, Lombardy and Rhône-Alpes.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The Secretary of State is right when he says that Wales is broadly pro-European. Europe is also very pro-Wales. If one introduces oneself as Welsh and living in Wales when one is travelling, one receives a much better reception than if one leaves it to people to assume that one is of some other origin. The benefits that flow from that relationship are often impeded by the exchange rate between the pound and the euro, which disadvantages our manufacturing and agricultural exports, and above all our tourism operators, who have in the past depended on European visitors for much of their trade. Sadly, that is not so to the same extent at present.

Mr. Murphy: Yes, that is particularly important for us in Wales. The hon. Gentleman rather neatly takes me to the next subject on which I propose to touch: tourism. He, perhaps more than any other Member in the Chamber, will know the impact of the foot and mouth disaster and, of course, of the events of 11 September on the tourism industry.

In Brecon and Radnorshire, as well as in other constituencies throughout Wales—especially in Snowdonia—tourism has been badly hit by those events. The Welsh Affairs Committee in its evidence mentioned the need for an improved working relationship between the British Tourist Authority and the Wales Tourist Board, so that they could work together to promote tourism in Wales. For obvious reasons, a British tourist authority exists to promote Wales as much as it does to promote England, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

[Mr. Murphy]

We want to maximise Wales's share of overseas visitors and of visitors from other parts of the UK. There are signs, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, that things are getting better for the tourist industry. It will take time, especially given the huge loss of resources suffered by small businesses in Wales as a result of what hit them. However, if good can come from the disaster that has occurred, it is that people in Wales have managed to focus on ensuring that we attract visitors from other parts of the world to come to Wales.

Everyone knows that the core attractions for visitors to the United Kingdom are London, Stratford-on-Avon and, perhaps, Edinburgh. It is often difficult to get visitors to go elsewhere, but it is the job of the WTB and the BTA, working together, to ensure that overseas visitors look at their brochures and understand that Wales has much to offer. We have a great diversity of opportunity for tourists and it is up to us—in the Government and in the Assembly—to ensure that that is promoted.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): It concerned me greatly that, 12 months after the foot and mouth outbreak occurred, our television programmes were recently showing pictures of burning animals. If my right hon. Friend shares my concern about that, will he use his good offices to persuade the powers-that-be at the BBC and the other channels to refrain from using such images in their news bulletins? As a Member for a constituency that relies heavily on tourism, I was also concerned—as I said in the Welsh Grand Committee—by the incident that took place over the Easter weekend in which activists from the Cymuned group stood on the cob in Porthmadog. It did not affect my constituency directly, but it affected the constituencies of the hon. Members for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams). I would hope that they would join me in condemning such actions, which will affect the livelihood of their constituents. [Hon. Members: "Oh!"] Does that mean that the hon. Gentlemen do not agree with me? Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning such actions, because foot and mouth last year brought the tourism industry to its knees?

Mr. Murphy: Of course I condemn such actions, and every right-thinking person would do so. Anybody in their right mind who wishes to increase the tourism potential of north Wales would not partake in those activities, because it is important to give the right impression to people from abroad that when they visit Wales they will receive a proper Welsh welcome.

Mr. Bryant: There is a serious point to be made about the way in which broadcasters portray Wales to the rest of the world. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend has seen the film "Solomon and Gaenor", which is mentioned in the Committee's report. It is a fine movie, but it is unremittingly sad and gives a destructive vision of Welsh society—admittedly some 50 or 60 years ago. What can we do to ensure that broadcasters portray Wales in a positive way that will encourage people to come to Wales?

Mr. Murphy: I do not think that we can abandon sadness altogether. Even we in Wales are sad from time to time, about different things. However, I understand my hon. Friend's point: if a gloomy picture is being painted of the way in which we in Wales work and live our lives, that is something that must be considered.

My hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams) mentioned her constituency. I was there yesterday, in Llandudno. It was a very nice, sunny, early spring day—

Mrs. Betty Williams: It always is.

Mr. Murphy: I must say that I thought that there was an enormous opportunity there to capture the overseas visitor. The area has mountains and a beach, and hotels in Wales are improving all the time. Indeed, the only five-star hotel in the country is in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Television is important. The British Tourist Authority is advertising on the television, and its overseas campaign will feature Carreg Cennen castle in south Wales. Other advertising ventures will be undertaken by the BTA and the Wales Tourist Board. They are vital to getting people to understand what Wales has to offer.

The House will recall that the WTB is organising a campaign called "Wales—The Big Country", which is aimed especially at getting people from other parts of the UK to visit Wales. All hon. Members representing Welsh constituencies are conscious of the importance of tourism to our economy, especially to small and medium-sized enterprises. That importance arises from the fact that Wales is such a beautiful country.

I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are a Welsh woman and that you are familiar with some of the points being made in the debate. You will know that, in addition to tourism, inward investment has been singularly important in ensuring the strengthening of the Welsh economy over the years. The Welsh Development Agency and Invest UK are working together much more effectively than in the past. They have sponsored events abroad, one of which took place in Hanover and involved Cardiff university.

Companies that have been responsible for inward investment in Wales in the past year include International Rectifier, the Great Lakes Chemical Corporation, Continental Teves, Borg Warner, and ICM Pharmaceuticals. In addition, the Welsh Assembly has made more money available for Wales Trade International.

However, the figures on the business done abroad by Welsh companies are staggering; exports from Wales total about £6 billion, of which more than £4 billion goes to countries within the EU.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Inward investment is important, but does the Secretary of State agree that there is a danger in focusing on that as the sole answer to all problems? Long-term structural changes are needed in the Welsh economy to encourage a sense of entrepreneurship in many communities, but they will not necessarily be stimulated by inward investment. Do not indigenous businesses need support and promotion as much as any form of inward investment?

Mr. Murphy: I could not agree more. The hon. Gentleman is right: we cannot afford to rely solely on companies from other countries to stimulate industrial development in Wales. Such companies, not least those

from Japan, have been significant for us but, as I said earlier, so have companies from the US. Increasingly, however, we live and work in a global economic environment, and many companies that originated in Wales and the UK have been taken over, often by American companies. For example, in my constituency, more people now work for American companies than work for companies owned by any other investor. That is because local firms have been taken over by American, global companies. An example of that is Girlings, the brake manufacturer, which was originally a British firm, and similar examples can be found in both north and south Wales.

However, the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) mentioned indigenous small and medium-sized businesses. I know that the Assembly is working hard to ensure that such companies are enabled to fulfil their potential.

Mr. Prisk: The Secretary of State is very generous in giving way again. Many in the Chamber will be concerned, as I am, about steel imports and the American position. What contribution has the right hon. Gentleman made to ensuring that Welsh steel businesses have been properly represented? Perhaps there is an opportunity here to square the deal and respond to the American changes in import controls.

Mr. Murphy: Yes, not least of which was the recent meeting that I had with the First Minister and the Deputy Trade Secretary of the United States Government when he visited Cardiff. We spent a great deal of time discussing those issues. Moreover, I represent a steel constituency; some hundreds of people in my constituency work in the Panteg steelworks and also in Llanwern.

The hon. Gentleman's general point is about the importance of indigenous firms. What they export, from the European point of view, is extremely important. The significance of the exchange rate has been mentioned; it is important not only to the tourism industry but to the steel and manufacturing industries, and is one reason why Europe is of such huge significance to the people of Wales and Welsh industry in general.

The other aspect referred to in the Select Committee report was the importance of the British Council in raising the profile of Wales. Since devolution, it has made an enormous contribution to ensuring that that profile is higher than it used to be. It contributes to festivals, such as that in Hay-on-Wye; it ensures that the catalogues of Welsh literature go to all overseas British Council offices and it promotes the exports of Welsh creative industries, which are increasingly important to us.

It is a staggering fact that more people are employed in the creative industries—in the media, films and music—than were employed in the steel and coal industry combined. When I was a boy, all those years ago, between 250,000 and 500,000 people in Wales, including my father, were employed in those two big industries.

Huge changes have taken place, but the most exciting developments of the past five to 10 years have been in film, media and music. The British Council is helping to ensure that Catatonia and the Stereophonics, to name but two, are known the world over, not just in Europe or the United Kingdom.

Wales Arts International has been strengthened, with four full-time staff in the Cardiff office of the British Council dealing specifically with Wales Arts International. The British Council also organised a conference on lesser used languages in Europe, helped by the Welsh Language Board. It trains and gives seminars on devolution to its own staff so that people throughout the world working for the British Council are aware of what Wales is like since devolution.

I am also glad to say that the First Minister has set up Wales International centres around the world. These are not embassies or consulates; instead, they complement the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which supports what the Assembly is doing. The centres raise our profile, helping trade, industry and tourism. The first will be in New York next year, while others will be sited in San Francisco, Tokyo, Hong Kong and mainland Europe. As well as dealing with trade and industry, they work with universities, local authorities, museums, libraries, sporting organisations and, of course, with the diaspora—the expats who were referred to earlier. I pay special tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) who, along with other Members, has dealt with issues surrounding the Welsh diaspora, which are very important to people in Wales.

In addition, there is significant consular representation in Cardiff with honorary consuls from countries in Europe, Africa, south and central America, the far east and Canada. The Irish Consul General in Cardiff does an extremely good job, and a diplomat from the United States embassy is dedicated to dealing with Welsh issues.

Staff in our embassies and consulates around the world are trained, when ambassadors and high commissioners are appointed, to be aware of the United Kingdom's new constitutional arrangements. People in our posts around the world are conscious of devolution.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Wales's standing in the world is also enhanced by the numerous voluntary groups and solidarity groups that have links with other countries and promote Wales as a devolved country throughout the world? I am thinking of one group in particular—the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign—which has for many years forged links with the autonomous coast of Nicaragua, which has had a long-standing relationship with us because of similarities in our respective language and cultural traditions. Does he agree that those groups, at the grassroots, also portray Wales to the world?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, and I also remind the House that there is nothing particularly new in that. Wales was involved in such activities throughout the 20th century. In fact, it has always been a country that has looked outwards, not inwards. It has been international in many respects of that word. As hon. Members who represent valley constituencies will recall from their histories of their constituencies, many Welsh miners went to fight in the Spanish civil war to oppose fascism.

The essence of Welsh politics has not just been confined to domestic issues, but has extended to international ones as well, and that will be even more so in a devolved Wales. Far from being introspective, devolution has meant that—in the context of being not only part of the United Kingdom, but very special and different, too—we can exercise all the talents of Welsh men and women internationally as well as domestically.

For that reason, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South and the other members of the Welsh Affairs Committee for doing an excellent job in highlighting the

[Mr. Murphy]

profile of Wales and in ensuring that the Assembly and the Government have had to react positively to the points that the Select Committee has made. The Assembly and the Government have made enormous strides in raising the profile of Wales. Devolution has added a huge new dimension to our relationship with the rest of the world. It recognises the fact that, yes, we are part of the United Kingdom, but that we are a very special part of it, and I commend the Select Committee's report to the House.

1.47 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Today's subject is very important—"Wales in the World: the role of the UK Government in promoting Wales abroad". I am not sure whether to blow the cobwebs off that report—it is more than a year old. I suspect that we have the great people of England to thank for today's debate because, as everyone knows, local government elections are being held in England.

I am afraid that we will have to wait a couple of years for similar elections in Wales because, as the hon. Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams) said, the Welsh Assembly, in its great wisdom, decided to defer the Welsh elections by 12 months, so that they would not take place on the same day as the Welsh Assembly elections. None the less, I dusted down my copy of the report and had a good read. It is important that we do not look a gift horse in the mouth; we should take the opportunities that exist. I suspect that we had to battle hard against all the other competing bids for today's subject.

We should build on the report. In parts, it is a fairly miserable report, given that, of all the United Kingdom's constituent parts, Wales comes fourth out of four in terms of recognition. We are mostly known for things such as the Princess of Wales and the Prince of Wales. News bulletins in the United States of America used to refer to them as the Waleses. *[Interruption.]* That is absolutely true, so it is indeed a case of God bless the Prince of Wales.

We are also known for our rugby skills, although I suspect that people are nostalgic about them these days. So there are the usual stereotypes, and I remember that the Minister for Europe, the right hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain), was very keen on the phrase "Cool Cymru", but I suspect that his campaign has foundered.

I heard what the Secretary of State said about groups such as Catatonia, the Stereophonics and the Super Furry Animals. I suspect, however, that Wales does well out of their great success and talent in music rather than from anything that we can do. Charlotte Church was also mentioned, and Tom Jones was one of the great leaders in all of that.

The stereotypes are predictable, but the amount of ignorance about Wales worries me. When Charlotte Church met the President of the United States, he said to her, "What state is Wales in?" I do not know whether he was referring to the geography of Wales or the state of Wales. President Bush has a good sense of humour, and I suspect that he now knows exactly what state Wales is in.

Ignorance about Wales is perhaps not confined only to great world leaders. I received a reply yesterday to a question that I asked the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness. I asked him what effect Post Office redundancies would have on communities in Lancashire. He replied:

> "The Consignia board decided that the company's costs needed to be reduced to stem its losses and improve its performance. At the moment it is not immediately clear what the effect in Wales will be."

I know that Wales is a large country, but it is interesting to note that even Ministers cannot work out its boundaries.

I decided to enter the word "Wales" into the Google internet search engine to see what came up. The No. 1 area of interest was the Welsh Assembly; the Wales Tourist Board only featured second. Perhaps the Welsh Assembly has now become the great tourist centre for the whole of Wales, and people are queueing up to visit it to see where everything is happening. After all, there is wall-to-wall coverage of the Assembly on S4C2.

Donald Anderson: The hon. Gentleman is not being helpful in the sense that anyone who has visited the Welsh Assembly's information centre must be impressed by what is there. It is, perhaps, a model that the House should follow.

Mr. Evans: My concern is getting people into Wales in the first place, not thinking about people queueing for and flocking to the Welsh Assembly's information centre and where they will go afterwards. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will share my concern that we need to get more tourists into Wales. I think that he will agree with some remarks that I shall make later about Swansea.

I wonder whether people were flocking to the Welsh Assembly to look at the £8 million hole where the new Welsh Assembly building should stand. Rarely has so much taxpayers' money been spent on achieving absolutely nothing. A fence has been erected around the hole to stop the tourists flocking there to look into it. That is a great shame; the fence should be taken down. Normally, when money is being misspent, people say that it is money being chucked down the hole. At least the Welsh Assembly has created the hole down which all the money can be thrown later. This is the new bold Wales, where our politicians can turn their backs on a children's hospital for Wales while spending millions on building a palace to glorify their own presence—and they cannot even get that right.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): Will the hon. Gentleman inform the House whether he voted for or against the £250 million for Portcullis House?

Mr. Evans: With my hand on my heart, I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman, because I suspect that the vote went through at 11 or 12 o'clock at night, without a huge debate on the issue.

Lembit Öpik: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: I shall do so in a moment. I know that the hon. Gentleman probably wants to welcome the defection yesterday of a Liberal Democrat on Cardiff council to the Conservatives. I shall give him every opportunity to praise that.

We all know about the transport problems in Wales. Sue Essex's and Rhodri Morgan's fun ride—the pods that are supposed to go between the Welsh Assembly and City

hall—will cost £20 million. It is a case of Richard Rogers meets Buck Rogers in the 21st century, and it seems as though it will be a Disneyworld invention.

Thank goodness, the £20 million for the pods could not be better spent. We are grateful that all the roads in Wales are in good nick. There is no street crime, no waiting lists for the national health service and all our schools are in tip-top condition. There is nothing on which the money could have been better spent. Sadly, however, that is not the case. I know that the money could have been spent in a better way.

Lembit Öpik: I considered welcoming the defection of a Tory councillor to the Liberal Democrats—I refer to Mary Megarry in Pembroke—but I wish to make a plea for consistency. In the interests of consistency and not talking Wales down, will the hon. Gentleman seriously answer the question and tell us whether he opposes the kind of construction projects that led to Portcullis House and to the millennium dome, which I believe he supported at the time? If he says that he did not oppose those projects, how can he criticise the reasonable proposals in Wales that are designed to create a long-standing home for the Assembly? Members of the Conservative party in Wales, at least, seem to support the proposals.

Mr. Evans: Conservative Members of the Welsh Assembly totally opposed the erection of a new building on that site. They believed that the money should have been spent on a children's hospital for Wales. I hope that Liberal Democrats in Wales would want the money to be spent in that way.

I have said enough on the record to show that I thought that the £250 million for Portcullis House was extravagant expenditure. I also thought that the dome should never have been built. Indeed, I refused to go there throughout the entire time that it was open—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Let us get back to debating to Wales in the world.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, to get off the subject of the dome; the sooner we move on, the better.

Mr. Llwyd: I do not want to intrude on private grief, so will the hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating Ian Botham on his superb effort to raise nearly £1 million for a hospital for children in Wales? Will he, and Labour Members, consider signing early-day motion 1224, which is on that subject?

Mr. Evans: I welcome the early-day motion. I was delighted by the enormous effort and commitment that Ian Botham put into the walk. I believe that Catherine Zeta Jones met him at one stage of the tour. We should recognise the enormous efforts that he made to raise such sums, but I have just spoken about £40 million for a new building for the Welsh Assembly and £20 million for the project involving the pods. We should consider using those vast sums in other ways.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): During the period of neo-colonial Tory rule, the popular perception was that Wales was out on the fringe. The then Secretary of State sent back £100 million to the Government, who told him what a good boy he had been.

Mr. Evans: Successive Secretaries of State for Wales showed an enormous commitment to Wales over the 18 years that we were in power. I bet that people in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and elsewhere now feel that, five years after the promise was made that "Things can only get better"—not just in Wales, but the whole UK—things have not got better: in fact, they have got a great deal worse.

Let us take the opportunity provided by this debate to tick some boxes. The Secretary of State for Wales might care to put in a bid to hold a debate on Wales in the world every year so that we can consider the issues raised by the report and the Government's response and examine suggestions made by the Welsh Assembly and by councils throughout Wales. That would enable us to see how we could do a lot a better for Wales. We should create tick boxes to set targets by which we can be judged in 12 months' time.

Mr. Roger Williams: Going back to the hon. Gentleman's opposition to Portcullis House and the dome, will he explain why he accepted an office in Portcullis House when he refused to visit the dome?

Mr. Evans *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already ruled on that matter.

Mr. Evans: Thank you for your protection, Madam Deputy Speaker. As a riposte, however, may I ask why the hon. Gentleman accepted a seat in Westminster on the basis of first past the post when his party opposes that system? I assume that he did that because it is the system and the Liberal Democrats use it. For the same reason, I have an office in Portcullis House.

I want to consider those things on which we can make a difference. The Secretary of State mentioned tourism, which is vital to Wales. It accounts for 7 per cent. of our gross domestic product and one in 10 Welsh jobs. Some 100,000 jobs in 10,000 businesses, many of them small businesses, are in that industry. I do not declare an interest because my retail business in Swansea is not on the tourist trail. If any tourists are wandering around Town hill, I suspect that they are lost or visiting relatives. However, the industry is important. It contributes about £5 million a day to the Welsh economy and 50 per cent. of tourism revenue comes from rural Wales. An increase in tourism benefits all such businesses.

The Secretary of State mentioned foot and mouth, which was a dire disease. It hit agriculture hard. We now know, if we did not know it before, how important agriculture and the natural environment are to tourism. We need to reconsider what support we can give to Welsh farming and we must have a public inquiry into foot and mouth to ensure that it never happens again.

Overseas tourism is worth about £12 billion to the United Kingdom. Wales has only a small share of that—about £176 million, or just under 1.4 per cent, which is a tiny percentage. The report clearly highlights the fact that many visitors do not know about Wales even when they

[Mr. Evans]

are in the UK. Sometimes, people visit Wales because of congestion on the M6. When they turn off the motorway to avoid that, they discover that Wales is a jewel within the UK and a superb place to visit.

I heard what the hon. Member for Conwy said and think that the vast majority of people in Wales open their arms to tourists and give a big welcome to visitors from any part of the world, including England. English tourists are important to Wales. They spend money at bed and breakfasts and hotels and in restaurants and cafés. It is important that we make certain that everyone in England knows they will get a good royal welcome when they come to Wales.

We know what Wales has to offer historically. The Secretary of State spoke about the beauty of Wales. Its coastline is superb, from the Gower peninsula right up to Aberystwyth—*[Interruption.]* Yes, the coast goes right round to Llandudno, which will shortly host the Conservative conference in Wales.

Chris Ruane: What about Rhyl?

Mr. Evans: I also mean Rhyl and a number of other areas.

Wales is also known for the international music festival in Llangollen and the Eisteddfod, which alternates between north and south Wales. Cardiff hosts the international singer of the world contest, and there are other international music festivals. We have much of which we can be proud.

I was born in Swansea and lived there for 33 years. Some of my family still lives there. I think we have learned a great deal in that time. Swansea used to have the oldest passenger railway in the world which ran along the Mumbles road. In the 1960s, in a gross act of wanton vandalism, the railway was done away with. We now know that it would have helped with congestion on the Mumbles road, and thousands of tourists would have come to see it.

Donald Anderson: The railway would have involved public expenditure and might have made the children's hospital less attainable.

Mr. Evans: The number of tourists who would have come to Swansea to see the oldest passenger railway in the world would have earned Wales enough tax pounds and produced sufficient money through a growing economy for that not to be a problem.

We know that Swansea has a lot to offer. We know too that Cardiff is a buzzing city with great growth and development, and not only because of the millennium stadium. We wish both cup final teams and their supporters well. We hope that the weather is fine for them and that they have a peaceful and enjoyable Saturday in Cardiff. May the best team win.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I welcome the direction that the hon. Gentleman is taking in his speech, which has a very positive outlook. He mentioned that significant tourist attractions can draw in people from abroad, and we have seen that happen with the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao. Does that mean that the hon. Gentleman welcomes such architecturally magnificent palaces because they lead to worldwide recognition of an area?

Mr. Evans: It depends on what is done in those buildings. I think that architecture is important in certain circumstances. The old City hall in Cardiff, for example, is a wonderful and impressive building, and people would come to look at it because of its architecture, both inside and outside.

We have talked about all the great things in Wales, but we know that we have a problem in getting tourists into Wales. One difficulty is competition from cheap airlines. One only has to look on the internet to see that there are several, including BMI, easyJet, Ryanair, Go and Buzz, which can fly people to an amazing array of places for small sums. They can go to Barcelona, Portugal, Ibiza or Nice for £25, to Dublin for £19, and to Venice for £15. They go to those places for sunshine, among other things, and we have to compete in that market and do better.

I heard what the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) said about southern Ireland. The Irish Tourist Board has a very large budget—four times that of Wales—so perhaps we ought to look at ours. We should find out how it is spent, how effective it is and what the return is. We can then see whether we can do better with our resources.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): The hon. Gentleman mentioned a number of cheap airlines. Will he be using them when he goes round Europe to study the national health service in various countries?

Mr. Evans: I do not know which airline the shadow Secretary of State for Health has been using, but when it comes to returns, the hon. Gentleman will soon be learning of our policies to improve the NHS in this country, including Wales, where of course it is in a poor state.

Those who have travelled to the United States of America and other places recently will have seen the Welsh Development Agency advertisement, which comes on after the news and before the main movie or entertainment section. It is a very good advertisement, and it will achieve enormous returns for Wales. One of the greatest growth areas in the economy is tourism, and within that the greatest growth is in short stays—people stay somewhere on Friday and Saturday night and return home on Sunday. We have to be in that market.

Cardiff airport is successful, and I am sure that we were all disappointed by the announcement that British Airways was withdrawing a number of routes. That cannot be good news. In 1999, 1.3 million passengers used the airport, and in 2001 the figure was more than 1.5 million. That is a good growth record, and although 11 September may have affected it somewhat, we can only hope that use of the airport continues to grow. We need a proper roads infrastructure leading from the airport to the M4, and the road between the airport and Cardiff needs dualling. The airport should be seen as a gateway to south Wales, and we need to ensure that it has the proper infrastructure.

I turn now to regional airports. In the USA, states do very well out of regional airports. We need to look at what we can do to ensure that our regional airports are

given every support. The right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) mentioned Swansea airport, which serves one of the growth areas in Wales. It is absolutely superb. Oxford Economic Forecasting states:

"Good air transport links are one of the key considerations affecting where companies choose to invest."

Swansea is the 22nd largest city in the United Kingdom. We know that there is a problem with the three-hour journey to Swansea—the extra hour between Cardiff and Swansea seems to take longer than 60 minutes, and does on many occasions—and we need to see what we can possibly do with the airport. Within a radius of approximately 25 miles of the airport there are 730,000 people. That catchment area is bigger than those for Norwich or Exeter, and 1,000 passengers a day could use Swansea as a regional airport, thus cutting commuter traffic. As we know, there is congestion in parts of the city.

I commend Martin and Louisa Morgan, who took over Swansea airport from the local authority. The airport was always seen as a dead weight around Swansea council's neck but we hope that, with the Morgans' investment and entrepreneurship, it will become a magnet not only for people in Swansea, but for the whole of west Wales. We all recognise that the announcement about ITV Digital will have an appalling effect in Pembrokeshire, where more than 1,000 jobs will be lost—a tragedy for the area, which already has the second highest unemployment in Wales. We need to look at boosting business opportunities in Swansea and west Wales. Martin and Louisa have already invested a considerable amount in Swansea airport. When I was a lad, its glory was fading and the airfield was used more for car boot sales on bank holiday Mondays than for air traffic.

Thanks to the Morgans' investment, they now employ 50 people, although there were only three employees when they took the airport over. The airport has full fire facilities and restaurants, and I hope that the Secretary of State can visit as soon as possible to see what sort of help he can give the airport and Air Wales, which has been responsible for the boost in air traffic at Swansea. If the runway was extended, it could take charter aircraft and 737s, which could mean that direct links with other European capitals would be on the cards. Air Wales already flies to Dublin, a hub for the rest of the world, and we must see what we can do to assist with an expansion of flight destinations. I was staggered to learn that none of the airports in Wales is eligible for objective 1 funding, which is a great shame, as it might have given them the extra boost that they need. Will the Secretary of State examine that matter as Welsh airports need investment? Will he meet the Welsh Development Agency, local authorities and any representatives of the Welsh Assembly to put in place a strategy for Swansea airport and, following that, other regional airports?

I pay tribute to Roy Thomas, who started Air Wales only a couple of years ago. The airline now employs 30 people and flies from Cardiff to Cork and Dublin, which is welcome following British Airways' announcement of the withdrawal of its Cardiff-Dublin service. Last October, Air Wales started to fly from Swansea to Dublin and, a month later, to Cork as well. It is now looking to buy two larger, 42-seater planes to add to its existing 19-seater Dornier aircraft. Air Wales is doing a terrific job; we should see how we can help it and Swansea airport.

A Swansea-London route would be a great link. It would be great for tourists travelling to London and for business people in London who wish to expand their enterprises in Wales. If we had an airport that could provide such a service, the London route would pay for itself. I urge the Secretary of State to have discussions with Air Wales and Swansea airport to see if we can do anything to facilitate that. Expansion would help bed and breakfasts, hotels, restaurants and conference facilities, not only in Swansea but in a much wider area, and would help us to develop opportunities in west Wales.

On a recent visit to New York, I saw a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* placed jointly by British Airways and the British Tourist Authority. It said:

"It's time you followed in your father's, father's, father's footsteps."

I do not know how much that advertisement cost, but would it not be great if we saw a full-page advertisement trying to get people to come to Wales? I urge the Secretary of State to have discussions to see how we can advertise Wales more directly as a first stop for people who want to come to Britain. I make no apology for having devoted the majority of my speech to tourism, because it is an enormous growth industry that is vital to Wales, and we must see what we can do to improve and increase it.

I want briefly to cover two other aspects of Wales in the world, the first being Atlantic college, which the Secretary of State has visited on at least two occasions. When I went there recently, I spoke to the principal about how the college is expanding. Anyone who goes there cannot but be impressed by what it has to offer. It runs a two-year baccalaureate and has 330 students from 70 countries—although, sadly, only 20 are from Wales. I know that the Secretary of State was impressed by what he saw, so will he consider how to enable more students—many of whom are on bursaries—to go to the college, which has a superb reputation not only in Wales, but throughout the world?

Three weeks ago, I met a senior Chinese politician touring the House of Commons, who said that he went to Atlantic college. There are enormous potential spin-offs from all the links that that gentleman will develop back in China as his career progresses. The college has been open since 1962, and thousands of youngsters have passed through it, mostly from other parts of the world. That will pay dividends for Wales in future as those young people remember—with great affection, I suspect—their experiences in Wales.

When I spoke to the college principal, he talked about a young girl from a valley seat who had recently come for interview, and whom he described as dynamite. The college offered her a three-quarters bursary, but her parents are unable to meet the cost of the other quarter. It is a crying shame that a Welsh youngster with the necessary ability, skill and talent is unable to benefit from going to Atlantic college. At one time, local authorities provided bursaries to send young people from all parts of Wales to the college, but no longer. If there is still an opportunity to get that young girl into the college, will the Secretary of State consider what can be done to assist in that, whether through local authorities or business sponsorship? Let us open the doors of that Welsh college to more Welsh people and, indeed, more people from the United Kingdom.

[Mr. Evans]

I mentioned the collapse of ITV Digital and the enormous impact that that will have on an area that is already an unemployment black spot. That comes on top of job losses in other companies, including Consignia, throughout the whole of Wales: British Airways, in Cardiff; Pirelli Cables; RD Precision, which makes aircraft parts; Alcoa; GE Aircraft Engines; Corning Optical; and Sony. The Secretary of State knows first-hand about the enormous impact of the closure of Corus, which led to redundancies in south and north Wales.

The WDA is playing its role in trying to sell Wales, but its job has become tougher since it has had to compete against other development agencies throughout the whole of the UK. The Secretary of State spoke about our representatives going to New York, San Francisco, Tokyo and other parts of the world. I mentioned China, which is of course one of the great growth areas of the world. It would be useful to try to secure more trade between China and Wales. He said that the representatives will be properly trained. Will he ensure that they are fully aware of the extent of the abilities of manufacturing and service companies in Wales, so that they can be proactive about looking for the opportunities abroad that will enable our exporters to build on the £6 billion that he mentioned, as well as finding new opportunities to help some of our smaller businesses?

The report is important. This debate has come about by a fluke, but let us use the opportunity well by being constructive in our suggestions about how to help businesses in Wales. We should not walk away thinking, "Oh well, that's another day filled; there's no vote, so we can just forget about it", because that would be a complete waste of the debate. Let us revisit what we said today because I am sure that hon. Members from all parties will make constructive suggestions about ways to support Welsh businesses and get people more interested in Wales. Let us reconsider the debate in 12 months and ascertain what has been achieved and how we can build on the opportunity that today provides.

2.19 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the report of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs on "Wales in the World". As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we originally asked for a debate in the Welsh Grand Committee because the subject is primarily, although not exclusively, of interest to Welsh Members. However, most hon. Members who represent English constituencies are otherwise occupied today and I am therefore pleased that we can debate the subject on the Floor of the House, which is even better than a Welsh Grand Committee.

It is good to debate the report after a sufficient length of time to test the Government's responsibility. Although the report is entitled "Wales in the World", the Welsh Affairs Committee surprisingly did not travel abroad. I offer my sincere apologies to our friends in the Press Gallery, if any are present, for so cruelly denying them their junketing headlines. We stayed in the United Kingdom for the inquiry.

The inquiry arose from a visit to the United States when we were considering social exclusion.

Mr. Llwyd: Ah.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman will remember Chicago.

We saw some amazing projects in relation to the social exclusion report. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) said earlier that we held an interesting telephone conference—we failed to get a video conference—with business men throughout the United States while we were there. One of the tenets of our report on economic investment in Wales was that Members of Parliament and Assembly Members should contact business men and women of Welsh descent when they travel abroad to encourage contacts.

We were disappointed at the lack of liaison between some aspects of the UK Government's promotion abroad and business men and women who have links with Wales. That prompted us to hold the inquiry, which involved inviting various authorities to see us here rather than junketing around the world. We also invited famous Welsh people to give evidence, including Bryn Terfel Jones, Tom Jones and Catherine Zeta Jones. None was able to attend in person, and many members of the Committee were devastated that Miss Jones—perhaps I should say Mrs. Douglas—could not be present.

There was no conspiracy to ensure that only Joneses gave evidence. None of the three celebrities whom I mentioned are directly related to me.

Chris Ruane: They must be somewhere along the line.

Mr. Jones: They may well be distantly related, as all Joneses probably are. There is a serious point. Jones should be synonymous with Wales, as Roberts, Williams, Evans—

Lembit Öpik: Öpik.

Mr. Jones: I am not sure about that.

Chris Ruane: Murphy.

Mr. Jones: The Secretary of State's name represents one of our competitors, Ireland.

Jones is as important to Wales as are O'Reilly, O'Brien, O'Malley or, indeed, Murphy to Ireland or MacGregor, MacDonald or MacAllister to Scotland.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Or Smith to England.

Mr. Jones: Indeed. However, American Smiths do not necessarily believe that they are English, whereas an O'Malley in Chicago, who may be fifth or sixth generation, still thinks of himself or herself as Irish. Welsh people come across the problem when trying to promote Wales abroad. The most obvious reason relates to the patterns of emigration from Britain to the US in the 19th or 20th centuries.

The Irish emigrated to the US in much greater numbers than the Welsh and formed distinct Irish-American communities. Their Welsh counterparts were more likely to be integrated and assimilated in the melting pot of American society, possibly because of names.

Donald Anderson: To add a historical note, the great boom in emigration to the United States occurred at a time of relative prosperity in Wales, when there was inward migration to areas such as the valleys from rural areas. We therefore lost out in the period of emigration to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Jones: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is correct.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that much of the migration in Wales was from north to south and from west to east? We should be proud of that, and not worry too much about the lack of Welsh diaspora in the United States. North-south and west-east migration saved many communities throughout Wales from economic decline and ensured the preservation of the Welsh language.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman is partly correct. Nevertheless, many people left Wales to go to America. For example, many coal miners in Michigan were of Welsh descent. They were called Jones and Williams, and it was therefore not obvious that they were Welsh. I do not completely accept the hon. Gentleman's point, but to extend it, many Welsh people emigrated to England. There was also immigration from England.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) was right to say that we did not emigrate at that time because we did not have to. We were not in the same sad position as the Irish. Nevertheless, those who went to America from Wales tended not to be perceived as a distinct group, unlike Irish-Americans. It is therefore rare to meet a native-born American who describes himself as Welsh. A notable exception is Glyn Davies, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the US embassy. He is No. 2 to his excellency William Farish, the ambassador, and is proud to display his Welsh ancestry.

The position has begun to change since the advent of the internet. Myriad genealogy websites hosted in the United States on the world wide web are dedicated to helping Americans trace their Welsh ancestry. As the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said, a survey by the British Council of young professionals and post-graduate students in 28 countries showed that, despite the world wide web, a problem remains: people with Welsh ancestry do not relate to Wales; they simply do not know about Wales.

The survey, which was undertaken in October 2000, showed that only 67 per cent. of respondents mentioned Wales when they were asked to name the constituent countries of the United Kingdom. By contrast, 85 per cent. mentioned England, 80 per cent. mentioned Scotland and 72 per cent. mentioned Northern Ireland. When they were asked to name something that they associated with Wales, the most common responses were the late Princess of Wales and the Prince of Wales. Rugby, sheep, castles, the valleys and coal mining were among the other predictable answers. Probably none gives a true picture of Wales nowadays. There is nothing wrong with tradition, but those responses do not project an accurate image of modern Wales.

Many of the people we spoke to in America thought that Wales's lack of recognition in the wider world was a problem. Obviously, we did not expect the Government to be able to tackle the underlying demographic reasons for Wales's low international profile, but we decided that the issue was worth looking at to see what more could be done to boost Wales's image overseas.

The UK Government and their associated public bodies, and the National Assembly and its sponsored public bodies, have responsibility for promoting Wales abroad. Although the responsibilities of the Government relate primarily to the promotion of the UK as a whole—or of Great Britain, in some cases—those of the Assembly relate specifically to the promotion of Wales. That is not the whole story, however. Economic policy, transport links, housing, environmental protection, broadcasting and telecommunications all have an impact on investment and trade, including invisible exports such as income from overseas visitors.

The promotion of Wales needs to be seen as a thread running through numerous Government policy areas, rather than as a distinct policy in its own right. It is also important to recognise that promoting Britain or the UK as a whole is not enough. Wales, as the least-recognised country in the UK, is bound to lose out in an all-UK approach to overseas promotion. We believe that there must be a distinct promotion of Wales as a tourist destination, a location for inward investment and an exporter, alongside the more general promotion of the UK as a whole.

I am sure that other hon. Members will want to speak on trade and investment, but I shall make just a few points on those matters. Two bodies are responsible for promoting trade and investment in Wales.

Chris Ruane: Before my hon. Friend moves on to trade and investment, may I make a point about foreign tourists coming to Wales? The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) mentioned that only 1.4 per cent. of the foreign tourists who visit the UK come to Wales. How far does my hon. Friend think that the Welsh Affairs Committee's recommendation that the British Tourist Authority should set specific targets for each region of the UK will go towards redressing the imbalance?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I shall come in a moment to tourism and the dichotomy between our population as a proportion of that of the UK as a whole and the amount of investment and/or tourists that we get. We are not pulling our weight in terms of the proportion of our population, and setting targets might well be a way forward. I do not think that that was a conclusion of our report, but perhaps the Government will look at the matter.

As I was saying, two bodies have responsibility for promoting trade and investment in Wales: British Trade International—an agency of the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry—which was created in 2000 to bring together the various components of trade and investment promotion for the UK; and WalesTrade International, which was established by the Assembly at about the same time to bring together the overseas trade

[Mr. Jones]

work previously carried out by the Welsh Development Agency and the Assembly itself. WalesTrade International has two members of staff based overseas, and the WDA has 25. British Trade International has a network of 1,400 overseas staff, based in more than 200 posts and covering roughly 140 overseas markets.

Although they are still relatively new organisations, the evidence suggests that Trade Partners UK—the branch of BTI that handles trade—and WalesTrade International are working well together. Assembly officials went so far as to describe their working relationship with Trade Partners UK as "excellent". The chief executive of BTI told us that it had had a good deal of success with a number of products from Wales, including contracts in Brazil and South Africa for a Merthyr Tydfil firm that makes heavy lifting equipment, the export of camera equipment for use in large stadiums and the export of self-adhesive film used in the aircraft industry to the middle east and Latin America. One reason for the good relations between Trade Partners UK and WalesTrade International might be that Trade Partners UK was first established at about the time that devolution was taking place, and efforts were made to involve the devolved Administrations right from the start.

Over the past 20 years, Wales has been markedly more successful than other parts of the UK in terms of inward investment. Although its share of inward investment into the UK has fallen over the past 10 years or so from 19 per cent. to 11 per cent., it is still far higher in proportion to its share of the population. That is one plus factor. Inward investment was effective in creating large numbers of jobs to replace those lost in the coal and steel industries in the 1970s and 1980s. Unfortunately, the need for inward investment in steel-making areas is becoming just as pressing now as it was then, as Corus implements its closure programme.

Unfortunately, witnesses' confidence in Trade Partners UK was not entirely matched when it came to Invest UK, British Trade International's inward investment wing. The WDA works closely with Invest UK and believes that it has a successful track record, but it is concerned that Wales has, on occasion, been poorly represented by Invest UK. It alleges that a number of high-profile investment missions from Japan and Korea have not included Wales on their itinerary, despite the fact that both countries have strong business links with Wales and despite lobbying from the WDA.

To some extent, this is reflected in Invest UK's outcomes. Of 757 inward investment decisions recorded by the WDA in 1999–2000, only 45 went to Wales. At just under 6 per cent. of the total, this is considerably smaller than Wales's overall share of UK inward investment, suggesting that investors who approach the UK through Invest UK are less likely to invest in Wales than those who approach it via some other route. My hon. Friend's suggestion about targets might have some relevance to Invest UK's policies.

The First Minister told us that relations between the WDA and the Invest in Britain Bureau, Invest UK's predecessor body, had been "pretty unhealthy" for a long time, but that, since the creation of BTI, relations with Invest UK had begun to improve. Invest UK's main argument about the level of support it provides to the WDA is that it is not for Invest UK to direct potential investors to any particular part of the UK. Investors must make their own decisions, based on their business needs and on what each region has to offer. Invest UK's job is to maximise the total size of the investment cake. I would suggest that it is not doing that if it does not get the same proportion of investment into Wales as it is getting in general terms.

I shall move on to tourism. Wales's share of inward investment may be greater than our share of the population, but our share of overseas tourists is much smaller. We get about 1.4 per cent. of Britain's £12.7 billion overseas tourism revenue. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley mentioned that point, and it is relevant. Tourism is important to the Welsh economy as a whole, and particularly important in those parts of the country where it is the main source of income for local businesses. On the positive side, we get about 8 per cent. of domestic tourism revenues.

I am sure that hon. Members need no reminder of the many reasons why Wales is such an outstanding tourist destination, but for those who are interested, we set some of them out in paragraphs 22 to 25 of the report. Even that rather lengthy list only skims the surface.

Mr. Wiggin: I would like to take this opportunity to ask the hon. Gentleman about the effects on tourism of foot and mouth disease, and whether he shares my concern that we could see a similar crisis if more is not done to tackle bovine tuberculosis? No tourism business could take that kind of knock again, and I hope that he will persuade Labour Members that more needs to be done.

Mr. Jones: I shall come to the effects of foot and mouth in a moment; I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about its tangential effects on the tourist industry. It behoves hon. Members not to make too much of bovine tuberculosis. Like foot and mouth, it is not a disease that presents a problem to the general public because of the way in which it is controlled, although it is a problem for animals. We would hope, however, that any control measures would not impinge on tourism. I think that that is the point that the hon. Gentleman was making.

The best quote that I heard about Wale's tourism potential was given to me recently by a hotelier from Llangollen, in my constituency—a gem, I might say, for any tourist wishing to come to Wales—who told the tale of an American tourist who happened to visit his bed-and-breakfast place. The tourist was driving southwards from Scotland, but got lost somewhere around Manchester, just before he reached the M6. He ended up in north Wales, having strayed, by accident, from the tourist rut that runs from Edinburgh to London via Stratford. He described the beauty of the landscape he witnessed as "knocking the socks off" anywhere he had previously visited. Such is the potential that we are privileged to have in our small nation.

One matter of concern that we discovered during the inquiry was the nature of the British Tourist Authority's targets. Although the BTA's general aim is to promote a regional spread of visitors, its main target is achieving a certain return on investment. We were concerned that that would militate against promoting cheaper areas of the country such as Wales, which offer the tourist much better value for money, and work in favour of London and the

south-east of England, where tourists may rely on paying multiples of the prices that they would pay in Wales for transport, accommodation, food and entry to attractions.

Essentially, tourists could be ripped off in the south-east whereas they could get much better value for their dollar or mark—or their euro, now—in north Wales. I am sorry, in Wales generally; that was a Freudian slip. *[Interruption.]*

Chris Ruane: I hear a "north-east Wales".

Mr. Jones: I am trying to change the emphasis, as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley talked about south Wales all the time.

Chris Ruane: He was Swansea-centric.

Mr. Jones: I have never heard that term before, but it is probably a misnomer, as Swansea is not centric to anywhere. Nevertheless, the area is wonderful, particularly the Gower. I am sure that tourists would not be ripped off in Swansea, were they to go there.

The Committee was pleased to learn from the Government's response that the most recent funding agreement between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the BTA, covering 2001–02 to 2003–04, sets a measurable target for the authority to increase year on year the proportion of additional spend that it delivers through visits outside London. I would be interested to hear an update from the Minister, if he could provide one.

Tourism is more important to the economy of Wales than to the economy of much of the rest of the UK, and it is estimated that one Welsh job in 10 depend on tourism. At the end of our inquiry, just over a year ago, we made a two-day visit to north Wales, where we met representatives of the local tourism industry. Our intention was to discuss the inquiry's subject matter, but the conversations inevitably turned to the foot and mouth crisis. The news that we received was deeply worrying.

Tourism operators were not unsympathetic to the dreadful situation faced by farmers at that time—indeed, many were themselves farmers or from farming families—but there was a great deal of concern about the impact on tourism of measures being taken to halt the spread of what is essentially an animal disease.

We found that almost all tourism operators experienced a significant drop in trade, and some attractions had not reopened since the outbreak began. Many youth hostels and national park visitor centres were closed, as were 17 of the 18 National Trust sites. Those businesses that remained open reported falls in business ranging from 20 to 100 per cent. Even the conference trade was affected, with hotels in Conwy and Llandudno having bookings cancelled at short notice.

We were extremely worried by what we heard and, at our next meeting, the Committee directed me to write to the Secretary of State for Wales to set out our concerns. That was over a year ago. I would very much welcome a statement from the Minister on the steps that the Government are taking to reverse the damage done to the tourism industry at that time.

The third broad area that we examined was culture, the arts and sport. I do not propose to say a great deal on the subject because, towards the end of our inquiry, the Assembly established Cymru'n Creu, which is a cultural consortium that includes bodies such as the Wales Tourist Board, the WDA, the Arts Council, the Sports Council, broadcasters and several others, and covers the interests of the voluntary sector and the creative industries more broadly.

Many concerns related to poor co-ordination of different organisations and events. We believe that the creation of Cymru'n Creu was an effective response, but we recommended that the relevant UK bodies should forge strong links with the consortium. In particular, we recommended that the Government should consider ways to promote Welsh film and television programmes—one of the success stories so far in the promotion of Wales abroad—to a wider audience.

I have touched on a number of recommendations that relate to specific policy areas. However, as our inquiry progressed, we became more and more convinced that the solutions were not specific to a particular sector of international promotion—sport, inward investment, broadcasting and so on—but were general, affecting the work of the Government and the Assembly as a whole. That chimes with the Assembly's desire to adopt an all-Wales approach to overseas tourism.

A key recommendation was that the Government should adopt ambitious targets for secondment between the National Assembly and UK Government bodies. As it stands, the memorandum of understanding between the Government and the Assembly allows such secondments, but they have been slow to get off the ground, at least in part because the Assembly attaches more significance to secondment to EU bodies. That is understandable, especially given the importance of European structural funds in Wales.

However, it is also important to ensure that those who work for the UK Government overseas are fully conversant with the devolution settlement and are aware of and sensitive to Welsh issues. We suggested a target—every UK Government post overseas should have at least one member of staff with experience of working for the Assembly or another public body in Wales—and we were pleased that the Government responded positively, although they stopped short of committing themselves to our proposed target.

Assembly-sponsored public bodies such as the WTB and the WDA have staff based overseas and the Assembly has its own office in Brussels, but those staff are spread thinly on the ground. We suggested that one way to expand the coverage of each ASPB would be to establish a single brand—a common name and logo—to enable ASPB overseas offices effectively to act as Welsh embassies by providing a first stop for access to the full range of services provided by the Assembly and the relevant services provided by the UK Government.

In the majority of cases, that might involve little more than fielding and forwarding queries or distributing other organisations' literature, but a single, easily identifiable brand identity would help to promote a clear, strong image abroad. We do not have that at present, although it became clear that establishing such a brand is one of the most important steps that we could take. The WDA has a good logo—half a dragon—and Wales is identified with the dragon. So, although we might not use the WDA version, such a logo would be useful.

[Mr. Jones]

Two main institutions represent Wales in Brussels—the Wales European Centre and the Assembly's Brussels office. We saw their shared premises during a recent visit made in connection with our current inquiry into objective 1. The WEC has had a presence in Brussels since 1992. It was set up by the WDA and Welsh local government, and the partnership that contributes to the centre has grown to more than 70 public bodies.

Although the Assembly is a partner in the WEC, it opened its own Brussels office in 2000. Assembly office staff have diplomatic credentials, which give them access to UK diplomats, Foreign Office papers and so on—an inside track on the UK's relations with the EU. Clearly, however, the current arrangements could generate confusion over the respective roles of the two offices.

I am sure that the Assembly would not have set up two offices in Brussels with similar and, to some extent, overlapping remits had it been starting from scratch, but the WEC had been running for seven years when the Assembly was established, so it was decided to build on the existing arrangements.

The First Minister announced two weeks ago that the Assembly will relinquish its WEC membership to enhance its own representation in Brussels. That is correct, I believe, but the bodies involved should work together to ensure that there is no duplication of effort in promoting Wales in Europe.

As the Secretary of State said, Wales has only one full diplomatic post—the Irish consulate general in Cardiff. The Committee wrote to the embassies of those countries with full diplomatic representation in Scotland or Northern Ireland to ask why they had not established a consulate in Wales. Many thought honorary consuls sufficient to meet their needs and some said that, although they would like to establish a full consulate in Wales, their budgets would not permit it. The Italian ambassador told us that he would personally recommend upgrading the consulate in Wales.

More important than overseas diplomatic representation in Wales is the quality of British representation overseas. Our main recommendation is on secondments, but we felt that more could be done on specific Welsh representation in some of our embassies. The Irish have made extremely good use of St. Patrick's day as an opportunity to promote Ireland. Indeed, it has become an international celebration that is perhaps marked more enthusiastically in some countries than in Ireland itself.

Each Irish Cabinet Minister is required to spend the day at an Irish embassy somewhere in the world, leading the celebrations there. We did not go so far as to suggest that Assembly Ministers should be despatched around the world on 1 March every year—or, indeed, that Members of Parliament representing Welsh seats should travel to all parts of the world on that day, although I would volunteer for that—but we recommended that every UK embassy should hold a specific St. David's day event to promote Wales every year.

The Government told us in their response that posts are encouraged to celebrate St. David's day "where appropriate" and that 20 did so in 2001. That is slightly disappointing, and I would be pleased to learn in due course that the number of posts celebrating St. David's day this year was somewhat higher.

I have not covered all the ground in the report, because my Committee colleagues will want to mention it and I do not want to steal their thunder.

2.49 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I am impressed by, and grateful for, the efforts of the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones). Despite my disappointment at not being able to pound the streets of Southwark and Bermondsey, I am greatly consoled by finding myself in such auspicious company, surrounded by Welsh Members and by the would-be Welsh Members on the Conservative Benches.

Wales's role in the world has been a subject for debate ever since the Romans were given a fright by the axe-wielding Queen Boadicea. It seems that the centurions considered the Celtic fringe too much trouble to bother with, so they built the A5 and used it to drive home. We had to wait nearly 2,000 years for the completion of the harbour development in Holyhead—and, for that matter, for any real improvements to the A5.

Apart from some castle building in the early middle ages, there has not been much macro-political investment in Wales by London's political classes, so it is hardly surprising that Wales still seeks to define its role not just in the United Kingdom and Europe, but in the world. That has given us political opportunities to argue among ourselves about the Welsh national identity, but it also gives us a significant opportunity to sell Wales as the great undiscovered territory, the "big country" in the United Kingdom, in terms of both tourism and economic development.

There is a problem with the Welsh identity. Wales is not yet entirely confident about its own nationality: it is not sure how it wants to project itself. The strengths are well known to us—gentleness, depth of character, a traditional commitment to communities and, very important, a willingness to look out for each other that has, I think, been lost in other parts of the United Kingdom. Those strengths, however, constitute a weakness in a sense. The clarity of identity that we must have if we want a confident international image has yet to be fully developed.

Along the eastern border of Wales, for instance, many people do not even regard themselves as being part of the nation. They tune their televisions into Central Television. I do not criticise them for doing that, but we should acknowledge that we have not yet made the Welsh identity so attractive that people feel comfortable, even proud, in associating themselves with it.

Hywel Williams: I am relieved to hear the hon. Gentleman refer to some of the structural difficulties that have arisen in the construction of Welsh identities in the past. Perhaps he would like to explore those, rather than ascribing problems with the Welsh identity to individual Welshmen and Welshwomen.

Lembit Öpik: That is what I was trying to do. I was not suggesting that any individual, or indeed Plaid Cymru, was responsible for either abusing or failing to define the Welsh identity. Indeed, I accept that Plaid Cymru has had a healthy and diverse internal debate in seeking to define itself.

As the hon. Gentleman implies, in some respects the issues are structural, and are underlined by interesting debates engaged in by the Welsh nationalists. The lesson is not that we should condemn Plaid Cymru for grappling with those issues, but that if the nationalists are grappling with them, it is hardly surprising that Wales as a nation is doing the same. All parties here, and in the National Assembly, have an opportunity to try to identify the essence of Welshness that can sell the nation in the United Kingdom, Europe and the world.

Other countries have managed successfully in that regard, and we can learn from them. Members have mentioned Ireland's success in defining itself very clearly. I know the Irish experience well, because I was brought up in Northern Ireland, but I can give an even more interesting example, that of Estonia. Some claim that Wales is too small to sell itself viably on the international circuit, but Estonia has had many more serious problems of the same nature and has nevertheless succeeded in doing so. Its population is less than half that of Wales, and until recently it was not well known; but in the last 10 years particularly, it has been singularly successful in achieving the kind of profile that Wales, too, has an opportunity to achieve.

Public recognition of a nation's achievement is not always necessary. Members who have bought products from Ikea may be surprised to learn that those products are likely to have been built and designed in Estonia. For a time, there was an item of furniture that shared its name with my brother Endel. There are close family ties with Ikea's product lines. Estonia has also done what Wales could do in terms of music. I am sure that many Members have heard the music of Arvo Pärt, a very successful classical composer. That shows what can be done with a clearly defined identity.

Talking of music, Estonia is host to the Eurovision song contest. My only slight regret is that, had things been different, I could have won the contest last year. As things are, I must content myself with my harmonica.

My final example from Estonia relates to its football team, which made a very successful visit to Wrexham—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May we return to the subject of the debate, which is "Wales in the World"—interesting though the hon. Gentleman's comments are?

Lembit Öpik: I apologise if I was digressing too much with reminiscences of my genetic past. I was about to mention Wrexham, the venue for the last international game in which the Estonian football team took part.

Mr. David: Has the hon. Gentleman any plans to move back to Estonia?

Lembit Öpik: That is always an insurance policy in my back pocket lest things turn bad in Wales, although I am sure that I shall not need to avail myself of it.

Let me now deal specifically with Wales, and explain my brief digression into the Baltic states. My point was that if a small nation such as Estonia can achieve this kind of international profile, there is no justification for suggesting that there is a barrier to Wales's achieving it. The report is very clear about the opportunities available to us in, for instance, tourism, culture, language, sport and, of course, trade and industry and investment.

According to the report,

"Wales's poor share of the overseas tourist market is largely due to the country's poor recognition overseas".

Members who have spoken have made that clear as well. The argument is almost circular, but it highlights the fact that we have a great opportunity to sell Wales to other countries and potential visitors. It is not that those visitors have positively decided not to visit Wales; they are simply not aware of the opportunities. I pay tribute to the Wales Tourist Board for its "big country" campaign, which is an innovative way of trying to advertise—certainly in the United Kingdom market—for more internal tourism. It may provide some pointers on what can be done internationally as well.

Earlier, I suggested to the Minister that we had an opportunity in the United States. Ireland has clearly taken full advantage of its opportunity there. Our opportunity is less than that of the south of Ireland, but we could bring about a manifold increase in our links with the United States. I have often thought that there could be a Celtic tour involving Scotland, Ireland and Wales, with an historical package that would be very attractive to tourists from the United States. If we can pool our resources with those of Scotland and the south of Ireland, we shall be working with successful groups that would themselves stand to benefit.

The report suggests that we promote Wales as a first-choice destination, and it is in that context that we would be most successful. As the hon. Member for Clwyd, South implied, tourism is a tremendously important part of our economy, producing £2 billion per annum—£5 million a day—and employing about 95,000 people. We must recognise tourism as a serious economic opportunity. Even a small percentage increase in turnover will lead to benefits. In addition, tourism tends to be important in areas that are perhaps less successful economically than Cardiff and other large areas. The money can be disproportionately effective in stimulating local economic development.

Jenny Randerson, one of the Liberal Democrat Assembly Members, has worked hard on this issue, and is a member of the Britain abroad taskforce. I am pleased that we are working in partnership with other parts of the United Kingdom to stimulate such development.

On culture, language and sport, we need to choose our branding. We need to decide how to identify ourselves clearly with the products that we most want to push. The list in the report shows that, left to their own devices, would-be visitors to Wales are not necessarily latching on as clearly as we would like to key selling points.

Again, there are lessons to be learned from Ireland, which has chosen some key products that are now internationally identified as brand names not just of the companies that produce them but of Ireland. An obvious one is Guinness. Who can deny the success that Guinness has had in branding Ireland as well as its product?

Chris Ruane: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there are Welsh products with international recognition, including Ty Nant water?

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. We have started on that path. We are beginning to be quite successful with various cheeses: Caerphilly cheese stands to be an internationally recognised brand.

[Lembit Öpik]

Everything is there, which is why achieving the kind of success that Ireland has had will not be such a big leap. Ty Nant water could be the Welsh equivalent of Guinness, but I am sure that there will be even more successful brands.

From a cultural perspective, we could start to brand Wales as a centre for performing arts. The international Eisteddfod has not yet been mentioned.

Mr. Llwyd: Yes it has.

Lembit Öpik: I am sorry; apparently, it has been mentioned, but I would like to mention it too. The Eisteddfod has been tremendously successful in building relations between the countries that send representatives and the Welsh nation. By coincidence, no fewer than two Estonian choirs attended last year's Eisteddfod—but I shall leave further discussion on that to a time outside the Chamber.

We need to recognise that, when other countries send representatives to our international Eisteddfod, a lot of publicity about Wales is generated in those countries. Effectively, we open a cultural shop window, which will, I hope, attract tourists. I suspect that if we took a strategic approach and encouraged the Wales Tourist Board to think clearly about the opportunities that that opens up, the international Eisteddfods could pay back into the Welsh economy much more than they already do.

On sport, rugby has already been mentioned, sadly, but there is a great undiscovered opportunity, and that is Welsh soccer. A large number of people in Wales, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, celebrate the sport of soccer every weekend, but we have not yet made a breakthrough in selling Welsh soccer, as the Scottish have with Scottish football.

One reason for that—I raise this unabashedly—is the BBC's resistance to giving Welsh football a level playing field. I am tremendously disappointed that, despite having run a campaign for over a year, the BBC refuses to include the Welsh football scores on the Saturday announcement. Two minutes is about all it would take to do a reasonable job—100 minutes a year. The BBC has yet to respond. I warn it that an angry mob of Welsh football supporters will eventually inundate Broadcasting house with letters and petitions until justice is done. I hope that the BBC will take note of that respectful plea for parity.

One successful example of sporting achievement is that we have for the time being managed to secure the Millennium stadium as the greatest venue in the UK for many sporting activities. According to the report, it was curiously described by one commentator as

"Wales's own Sydney Opera House".

I imagine it would be difficult to play football between seats, but the implication is that the Millennium stadium is an entity in its own right, a celebration of Welshness, not least because of its distinctive external appearance. The stadium is well marketed and well used. The Wales Tourist Board and indeed the Welsh Assembly may seek creative ways in which to use the stadium to promote Cardiff as a destination for sport lovers from outside the UK as well.

On trade and industry, sheep and farming are important in areas such as that represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) and me, but we must recognise that they do not make up a very large proportion of the overall turnover of the economy. While we must be careful not to run down the land area of Wales, a majority of which is farmed, we must recognise that the true economic breakthroughs for driving the Welsh economy need to be found elsewhere.

We should specialise again. There are some centres of excellence in Wales, which we have yet to bring together strategically so that international investors regard them as significant. The two I want to mention are film, media and music, and aerospace.

With regard to film, media and music, there is a particular talent in Wales, above and beyond what one would expect on a pro rata basis. It has provided some great performers. Many regard Tom Jones as one of the true ambassadors of Welsh entertainment—"it's not unusual" to hear that even in Estonia.

There is a great chance for us to drive the Welsh film industry. The film industry generally in the UK is reviving. It looks with great interest at what is going on in Wales. Aside from the economic turnover, it puts Wales generally in a positive light. Some great actors have come out of Wales. Catherine Zeta Jones has been mentioned repeatedly, but there are others.

Mr. Prisk: In terms of the hon. Gentleman's tour of the cultural aspects of Wales—I entirely endorse his comments, although I was not quite clear what an unlevel playing field was in relation to football—will he join me, and, I am sure, all hon. Members present in supporting the bid by Cardiff to become the city of culture for Europe? It is an extremely important bid.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman is right to mention that. I was going to come to it but I will cover it now. I imagine that not one individual in the Chamber would refuse to add their enthusiastic support to Cardiff's bid. Cardiff is almost there already. When we see the success, indeed the transformation, that was achieved in Glasgow, we can speculate about the long-term benefits that it could bring to Cardiff and to Wales. Cardiff would then be a showpiece of culture; the performing arts of the nation in particular would be a showpiece.

Kevin Brennan: I warmly welcome the intervention by the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) and the response by the hon. Gentleman, who has signed early-day motion 1177 on the subject. I invite the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford to add his name to it and to encourage his English colleagues from the Conservative party to sign it, too.

Lembit Öpik: This is exactly the new, positive approach to inclusive politics that I referred to in my speech on St. David's day. Having had sharp words only a few weeks ago, the hon. Gentleman and I are now speaking and marching as one to the resonant sound of the performing arts in Cardiff—*[Interruption.]* I see even more back-patting breaking out among Labour Members.

Huw Irranca-Davies: It certainly is a matter for back-patting. I too congratulate Cardiff and I have signed the early-day motion. It is a golden opportunity not only for Cardiff but for Wales.

Lembit Öpik: Indeed it is. As hon. Members who may be looking for an opportunity to put those fine words into action will know, the May festival in Newtown is coming up soon. Hon. Members are most welcome to attend and they will receive a warm invitation from me to come along and have fun. Although Cardiff is not the be all and end all in investment terms, it is a useful showpiece for Wales. One justification for significant investment in major arts projects in Cardiff is the knock-on effect on the rest of Wales. For example, performers who may not otherwise have come to Wales may be attracted to come to Cardiff and perhaps go on to tour Wales.

The performing arts offer many other benefits and I am sure that we will hear about them from other hon. Members. Strategically, rather than trying to do great things in all the arts, those who have influence over these matters should seriously consider specialising in the performing arts that are the historical basis of the Eisteddfod tradition.

In the context of trade and industry, my other suggestion on specialisation for Wales is the aerospace industry and regional airports. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who is not here to hear my compliments, put his finger on the button when he referred to airports and the large number of jobs connected with aerospace in Wales. The industry has a high turnover and provides some 20,000 jobs.

Hon. Members may be surprised to learn that Wales has the oldest space port in the world. Aberporth was founded in 1939 when the secret rocket propulsion group was evacuated from Fort Halsted near London. It operated throughout the war and has been operating ever since. It represents an enormous international opportunity for Wales to play a meaningful role in the developing environment of space technology. *[Interruption.]* I hear hon. Members muttering the word "asteroid". I am not suggesting that Aberporth become the home of the Spaceguard UK project to prevent near earth objects hitting the earth because that is already based in Knighton.

Chris Ruane: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the fine tradition of Wales's association with space continues in my constituency as 50 per cent. of the glass used in reflectors in satellites is made by Pilkington which is based there?

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman is right. The Welsh aerospace industry has a turnover of £2 billion. Space shuttle windows are produced by Pilkington and its control valves by Ellisons. Bangor university developed the Zero-Gee experimental chamber for the international space station and the engineering department at University College Cardiff is doing some important work on the Herschel space telescope which will be orbited as the successor to the Hubble space telescope.

Hon. Members are aware of my passion and interest in aerospace and for once my hobby accords well with the economic opportunities for Wales to specialise as a true centre of global excellence in an industry that is guaranteed to grow exponentially in terms of the amount of money devoted to it.

Wales is due about 5 per cent. of the British national research budget from the research councils, amounting to about £60 million per year, but it does not get more than a fraction of that. Most of the cash goes to organisations in the Thames valley, the access corridor to Oxbridge. In order to shine internationally in this sector, we should lobby those who have the power to distribute that money more equitably and make sure that it is diverted to places where it can be of most use to the United Kingdom. Needless to say, I believe that that means that Wales would get a fairer share.

You will be delighted to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I am having a meeting in Cardiff to discuss that very issue; I can see that you can hardly contain your excitement. As the potential is so huge, I hope that hon. Members whose constituencies are directly affected by the aerospace industry—the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Mr. Ruane) has made his commitment clear—will be able to work together to create for Wales a truly forward looking, cutting-edge, high-technology industry capable of competing with the best in international space development.

Finally, let me make a few suggestions about how we can convert our vision of a positive international role for Wales into a reality. First, we need to look outwards. We must not waste our energy on pointless internal debates. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley is not here as I wanted to chide him for his criticisms of the proposed investment in a permanent home for the Welsh Assembly. The reason why that has international significance is exactly the same as the reason why there are often long queues of people waiting to watch our proceedings. Although this is our primary workplace for discussing matters such as the subject of today's debate, investment in the Assembly also makes a statement to the world about the United Kingdom and our democracy. It was a trifle churlish of him to criticise such an investment because he was being a little hypocritical. He was damning of the millennium dome and Portcullis House and said that he had not visited the dome on principle, yet he has an office in Portcullis House.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): That is not the point.

Lembit Öpik: It is precisely the point. If we want Wales to be seen in a positive light, we must be willing to make courageous investments in the short term which pay off in the long term. Part of that is an investment in the public image of the democratic process that we hope will play an increasingly significant role in decisions for the Welsh people. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley is a tremendously nice man—at least from time to time—but Conservative Members must view difficult long-term decisions for Wales in a less opportunistic way.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman has found his way from Estonia through Ireland and into Wales. Will he state clearly that he agrees that taxpayers' money would be far better spent on a children's hospital, for instance, than on a palace for the politicians of the Welsh Assembly? Indeed, as he knows, the result of the referendum was

[Mr. Evans]

very tight. If the people of Wales had known that £40 million was going on a building, they probably would have voted no.

Lembit Öpik: We are straying off the subject, but I hope that I will be permitted one sentence in response if I promise not to mention Estonia.

Chris Ruane: The hon. Gentleman just has.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman has seen through my clever plan.

The argument deployed by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley is cheeky, because the matter is not one of either/or. Indeed, he might argue similarly that had we not built Portcullis House, we could have built 10 children's hospitals around the United Kingdom. I simply counsel him to value the benefit of consistency or to move out of his office in Portcullis House.

Chris Ruane: And preferably out of the country.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman should not be naughty.

I shall finish with a few thoughts about the benefits of us all becoming international ambassadors for Wales. I know that the hon. Member for Clwyd, South always carries his passport, but we can all make an effort in other ways. We can fulfil one implicit recommendation in the report by asking prominent people in the diaspora of Wales to play their part in selling Wales. There are many examples of successful ambassadors for Ireland and for Scotland, and we probably undersell ourselves by simply not asking questions of such people, who would probably be willing to celebrate their Welsh connections.

In addition, we should exploit the potential of unexpected heroes who have high credibility around the world. Robert Owen, who coincidentally was born in Newtown in Montgomeryshire, was the architect of the co-operative movement—and who would deny that? He has a tremendous standing in certain parts of the world, way beyond that which he enjoys in the UK. His work is admired and he is well known among many people—not just academics—in Japan, which is mentioned in the report. There may be opportunities for us to create cultural tourism and an economic respect for some of the traditions in Wales, and to use that as one way to increase our standing on the international circuit. The Robert Owen Society has done great work in promoting that case, and I do what I can as well.

Robert Owen is just one example that I know of; I am sure that hon. Members could think of similar ambassadors from the past who could be used to illustrate the extent to which Wales has influenced international thinking. I have little doubt that such an approach could provide an important and meaningful lever in places such as Japan and elsewhere.

In addition, we need to make greater ambassadors of our national celebrations. Let us consider what St. Patrick's day has done for the south of Ireland. It prompts a global celebration. To Rhodri Morgan's great credit, he has seen such potential. Indeed, he went to the United States of America on St. David's day to make some important statements about the expansion of our public image. We could make money and a great deal of international capital by ensuring that we do the same assertively and creatively.

Mr. Evans: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there was a tartan parade in New York on St. Andrew's day, just as there is a parade for St. Patrick's day? Because the United States is such an important market, it might not be a bad idea to concentrate a little effort in New York and do something similar for St. David's day.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman is right; we could all add our creative thoughts on how that could best be done. Few countries in the world fail to take such opportunities. For example, there are tremendous celebrations, with which hon. Members will be familiar, on independence day in Estonia every year—I assure hon. Members that that will be the last time that I mention that country in this debate.

It is good that we have had, for whatever reason, an opportunity to debate on the Floor of the House the role of Wales. I am confident that, blessed as we are with some of the best journalists anywhere in the world, we shall get a fair wind in tomorrow's press, as they act as ambassadors for a new spirit in the media, providing the inspiration that will flow from this Chamber like wild fire, first through the Welsh nation and then across the wider world.

It would be worth reviewing how we are doing on this subject. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley suggested that we revisit it in 12 months' time, but that will of course be the day of the Assembly elections. I think that we need a little longer to allow such a strategic approach to take root.

Nevertheless, if Wales has the courage to develop the kind of visions that we are discussing—I have added my views—and we have the soul to reach out across the world to potential friends, allies and investors in Wales, we can not only make more frequent travellers to Wales spend a little longer in our fair nation more often, but we can make Wales the final destination for international investment. It is up to us to make that happen in partnership with the Welsh Assembly. If we do so, I am sure that a larger proportion of economically active individuals and the Welsh public will feel that we are serving them well in a practical sense.

3.26 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): This has been a very interesting debate. I now know quite a lot about Estonia. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) for filling me in on those details.

I also want to talk about other countries and Wales's link with them. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said at the beginning of the debate, Wales has always been internationalist in its approach to the rest of the world. I think of Keir Hardie, or of Henry Richard, the apostle of peace, and of the many people who have contributed to the success of the United Nations. Wales has always played an honourable role in key posts in the United Nations, yet we sometimes forget the contributions that we have made to the development of that institution.

My international interest began at Urdd UNESCO summer schools at Pantyfedwen. I would like them to return to the Welsh scene because they made an important

contribution to the education of so many Welsh schoolchildren. I attended them at the ages of 14 and 15. Children from all over the world went to Pantyfedwen near Aberystwyth for those summer schools. We used to watch films about other countries, famine and poverty, and we had lecturers such as Lord Richard Calder, who is a very famous name in the United Nations. Somehow, those summer schools engendered in us, children brought up in Wales, the ideas for which I am very grateful. In my case, they have meant a lifelong interest in international affairs and international development. I therefore hope that that opportunity will be offered again to the children of Wales some time in the very near future.

Hywel Williams: Will the hon. Lady therefore applaud and welcome the recent initiative taken by Urdd Gobaith Cymru and Cymorth Cristnogol—Christian Aid—to establish Croeso Calcutta, which will link young people in Wales with that great city on the Indian sub-continent?

Ann Clwyd: I welcome all such links; they are very important. The twinning arrangements of so many Welsh towns bring together two communities whose people might not otherwise have an opportunity to visit people in other countries. That has been important in Cynon Valley, for example, which is twinned with many other parts of the world. I certainly welcome that.

I also pay tribute to the National Union of Mineworkers, which always maintained its international links. The father of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis), Dai Francis, was one of those who ensured that such international links were solid and continuous. Indeed, the mining community that is still left in my constituency has considerable links with miners from other countries.

Other hon. Members have mentioned Welsh film making, and we hope that soon a film about Tower colliery will be made for international distribution. I hope that that will bring opportunities for people in Cynon Valley. Filming has already started, and I am sure that mining communities in many other parts of the world will be able to identify with the film. Many people were interested in the struggle to keep Tower going, especially in France and Belgium, and that was important to us at the time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) mentioned the Wales Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, and similar organisations exist for Cuba, Lesotho and other countries. The group Christians against Torture is mainly made up of church and chapel people in Wales and it is extremely active. One issue that it has focused on is the Turkish Kurdish Members of Parliament who were imprisoned eight years ago. People in Wales have kept up links with those Members of Parliament, and last Easter when I visited Leyla Zana in prison in Ankara she showed me a letter from some of the members of that group in Cardiff. Throughout the time she has been in prison she has corresponded with them and they played a role in getting her husband out of prison. Indeed, he visited Cardiff a few years ago to thank people for their efforts on his behalf.

I mention that issue because, as Members of Parliament, we should be concerned about Members of Parliament in other countries who cannot fulfil their mandates, perhaps because they have been sent to prison unfairly.

Mr. Llwyd: I know of the hon. Lady's great interest in the problems of the Kurds and similar situations worldwide. She may be interested to learn that last year a rally was held in Bala against the Ilisu dam, and it was well attended by Kurdish people. I am pleased to say that the proposal for the dam has now been shelved.

Ann Clwyd: I played a role in getting that project shelved, so I have taken an interest in it. The Kurdish-Welsh link is an interesting one. Many Kurds were trained in Cardiff, Bangor or Swansea, or at the North Wales institute, and they have built up links with the Welsh. I mention the four Turkish Kurdish MPs because the European Court of Human Rights ruled last year that the legal proceedings against them—Leyla Zana, Hatip Dicle, Selim Sadak and Orhan Dogan—were unfair and called for compensation and damages to be paid to them. Despite all our efforts, they remain in prison. That is an absolute scandal, and we should put more pressure on the Turkish authorities to release them.

The four MPs were imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their beliefs. Leyla Zana was imprisoned because, as she took the oath in the Turkish Parliament, she wore the traditional Kurdish colours of red, yellow and green in her headband. Her colleagues wore handkerchiefs in their pockets in the same colours. As she took her oath, there were cries of "Separatist", "Traitor", "Arrest her" and even "Hang her".

The Turks have much to learn from us in Wales on how two linguistic communities can live side by side in harmony, using both languages and with television channels and radio stations for both. Welsh language broadcasting no longer causes much trouble, in the days of satellite television which gives people a choice. We are an example of how to achieve the harmony that could also be achieved in Turkey. That country is an applicant for membership of the EU, but a Turkish truck driver has recently been sentenced to three years in prison for listening to a cassette of Kurdish music. Such persecution should not be tolerated without protest by those of us in the EU, especially in Wales, where we know that it is possible to co-exist and use both languages.

I know that many people in Wales take a great interest in the fate of Leyla Zana. When I visited her last year, I was told that I could not take her any letters, but I took her a birthday card in Welsh which the prison authorities allowed through. She was pleased to receive the card because it was her birthday on the day that I visited her. She should not be in prison and the Turks should either give her a fresh trial or release her.

Some two weeks ago I visited Jenin, where I met a member of the International Committee of the Red Cross. He was based in Geneva, but he came from Bangor. For three days, he had been waiting at the entrance of the refugee camp in Jenin, hoping to be allowed in to use his skills. He was not able to do so, because the Israelis prevented international organisations, including the ICRC, from gaining access to the camp and its civilian inhabitants.

[Ann Clwyd]

It is an outrage that the United Nations has been refused permission to send a committee of investigation into Jenin, where we suspect that many violations of humanitarian law took place. It undermines the authority of the UN and the Secretary-General. Our Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have tried hard behind the scenes and the Security Council will meet yet again to decide on a resolution.

Wales has always played an important role in the world, and will continue to do so.

3.38 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I intended to concentrate my remarks on tourism, but I realised that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) had decided likewise. I must have made the wrong decision.

Mr. Martyn Jones: Again.

Mr. Llwyd: Indeed. However, I shall speak mostly about tourism so I wish to declare an interest. My daughter, Catrin, is a professional actress and she appears in the television advert for the Wales Tourist Board, which several hon. Members have mentioned. As a family, we are doing our bit. However, I shall be brief and I shall not take half as much time as some other hon. Members, because I know that others wish to speak.

The report that we are discussing refers to three main areas—the marketing of Wales as a destination for tourism, Welsh representation in governance at UK and EU level, and the marketing of Welsh trading interests in creative industries.

The report is a good one. The responses from the Assembly and the Government are heartening in parts, although disappointing here and there. We must see how the process develops. As the Secretary of State said, we are in the immediate post-devolution period. We are all trying to see how everything fits in. Clearly, it behoves us to work together to increase Wales's potential as a tourist destination. I am sure that that is why we are here today.

It is interesting to compare the responses. The Assembly seems to agree with the report's conclusion that more needs to be done to promote Wales, whereas the UK Government seem more satisfied with the present situation. Certain witnesses from the British Tourist Authority thought that the appropriate number of visitors to Wales could be calculated as a proportion of its population. That is a bizarre idea.

I say this with great respect to the BTA, but it is easy to sell holidays based in London, Stratford and Edinburgh. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, has already made that point. Wales is fitted in almost as, "By the way, how about a few days in Wales?" It is obvious that people who have been up to Edinburgh and back down to London do not want to cross into Wales. A conflict of interest is therefore bound to exist.

However, I am not whingeing. The English Tourism Council is entitled to market England abroad by itself, and through the BTA. Wales is therefore placed at a bit of a disadvantage. The report tries to tackle such matters. I am sure that the Government will address them in due course, given the huge importance of tourism to the Welsh economy. It is worth about £2 billion annually, and accounts for between 7 and 9 per cent. of Wales's gross domestic product. The relative contribution of tourism in many coastal areas, and some rural ones, is even higher. Tourism supports about 25,000 jobs directly in rural Wales, or about 10 per cent. of the work force. It supports many more jobs indirectly, and is Wales's largest industry.

In its response, the Assembly agrees that Wales's profile is too low. It outlines what it has done to raise it, and some good progress has been made. For example, Wales is due to host some high-profile events, with the Ryder cup golf tournament being held there in 2008. The FA cup final is being held in Cardiff on Saturday—I shall be there to do my bit, although I am not sure yet which team to support—and we must not forget the rugby world cup tournament. Rugby is a painful subject just now in Wales, so I shall not refer to it further today.

The Secretary of State spoke about liaison with the motor regions of Europe. High-profile visits have been made recently to the National Assembly for Wales by the Taoiseach, President Pujol of Catalonia, and the vice-premier of China. However, many of Wales's key overseas markets remain unaware of the realities of foot and mouth, either through misinformation or misunderstanding.

Many people in the US—and I say this with respect—think that one cannot eat meat safely in Wales or the rest of the UK because of foot and mouth. That is clearly nonsense, but I regret to say that that impression is still abroad. In addition, the horrific events of 11 September have had a significant impact on Wales's largest tourism market.

I am glad to say that the budget for the WTB for 2001–02 rose by 30 per cent. The total is still a quarter of that for the tourist board in the Irish Republic, but we are getting there: we cannot expect to complete the journey overnight.

The WTB is due to receive objective 1 money for a couple of projects. Reference has been made to the creation of Cymru'n Creu, a body to co-ordinate raising Wales's profile abroad. The Assembly states that it

"looks forward to strengthening further its links with UK Government Departments, and bodies"

to further the aims of tourism.

When the Under-Secretary of State for Wales winds up the debate, I hope that he will say what is happening with Cymru'n Creu, and what further developments there have been. If he cannot do so today, I hope that he will write to me.

A sub-committee has been established in the National Assembly which is called "Wales in the World." Not much has been heard of it so far, and I should be grateful if the Under Secretary told us what he knows about it. The debate is important, and the committee has a role to play in keeping it going. As the hon. Member for Ribble Valley said, it is to be hoped that the papers for today will not be packed away and forgotten about. I see no reason why Members of Parliament should not try to assist the committee by feeding it information.

The Government's response to the report does not accept that Wales has a lower profile than other European countries or regions of similar size. That is in sharp

contrast to the Assembly's view. The Government say that 4 per cent. of overseas visitors to the UK visit Wales. Given that Wales's population accounts for 5 per cent. of the UK total, the report says that the number of visitors is not bad.

I fail to see the logic of that assertion, which makes no sense at all. What is the population of Stratford-on-Avon? What percentage of all visitors go there? The Government's response is based on a strange assumption.

The main point is that there is a need to relaunch a rural tourism strategy. We must not allow the current malaise in rural areas, which stems from the knock-on problems from foot and mouth, to persist. Very often, the agricultural community and the tourist sector are inextricably linked. Some people are therefore liable to have suffered a double whammy: those who have tried to diversify into tourism have been hit not once, but twice.

Farm-based tourism has been hit, but it remains a growth area. It needs to be developed. The events of the past couple of years should not deter us from the task—and the challenge—of ensuring that farm-based tourism in Wales is brought up to speed. However, that has to be done fairly swiftly, as we are on the verge of the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Wales could also be well placed to profit from green tourism. Diversification will make it possible for such tourism to expand in Wales. We need to make sure that Wales makes full use of its great natural assets.

I take issue with the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), who referred to the number of acres in Wales devoted to farming. Farmers are the custodians of the landscape. If their custodianship were not careful, no part of rural Wales would be considered a tourist attraction. However, if I misunderstood him, I should be happy to allow him to intervene.

Lembit Öpik: For the sake of the record, I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. My point was simply that, although tourism may not account for a great proportion of Wales's GDP, farmers are the guardians of the overwhelming majority of the surface area that people come to visit. I am grateful to him for letting me clarify that.

Mr. Llwyd: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I accept what he says.

I also welcome the new walking campaign initiative. There are great walks all over Wales, and we need to look also at the concept of themed holidays. We have excellent facilities for fishing, golf and almost any activity that one could name. We need to make sure that people out there know that, as the story has not been told clearly enough hitherto.

Wales has a low share of tourism, due in part to the lack of facilities, but more to the fact that the country is not being sold as well as it should be abroad. That message comes over fairly clearly in the report.

Mrs. Betty Williams: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the Snowdonia Green Key scheme had gone ahead as intended, that would have been yet another kick in the teeth for tourism in north-west Wales?

Mr. Llwyd: I oppose that scheme. Places such as Betws-y-Coed and Llanrwst have been told that there will be gateway places, where people will have to park and take buses. There is no room to park as it is—it is absolutely ridiculous. We have heard fantasy figures about 75 jobs being created, but heaven only knows where those jobs will come from. There must be a rethink. I agree that there should be a regular bus service, but it must be voluntary. People should not be forced off at places that have no facilities. I agree entirely with the hon. Lady.

We could make more of the centre for alternative technology at Machynlleth, which is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), and I know that he is a regular visitor. It is a landmark development and has been for many years. It is at the cutting edge of environmental developments and could be linked to green tourism.

The Government's response also mentioned some welcome initiatives. The British Tourist Authority and the Wales Tourist Board organised a visit to Wales of trade and media leaders. Mr. Glyn Davies of the American embassy accepted an invitation at short notice to come up to Portmeirion to give an extra boost to tourism in Wales and to make it plain to his friends in America and beyond that the food is perfectly safe and that they are missing out. We all owe him a vote of thanks for that. We should also thank the ambassador who arranged the 1 March celebration at his residence. It was an astounding success and a very welcome initiative, which I hope will be repeated next year. I am not exactly singing for my supper, but I must say that it was rather good.

The report is concerned that the overall marketing of the United Kingdom fails to market the worth of the different countries within it. Predictably, the BTA and the British Council say that Wales has its fair share, but that is not the case and we need to look at the structures again.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): My hon. Friend will be aware that cultural tourism is a growth area worldwide. Does he agree that, as that trend continues, the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of Wales will give us an edge? Should we not, therefore, take steps to encourage greater bilingualism and ensure that a greater proportion of Welsh speakers work in the hospitality sector in all parts of Wales?

Mr. Llwyd: I agree entirely. We should no longer think of tourism as a Cinderella industry—it is not. Tourism can be very well paid. Our colleagues in Ireland, for example, look upon it as another respectable industry, not badly paid and very often year-round. We can develop our industry, and our cultural differences can play a part.

In 1996, S4C conducted a survey that showed that 62 per cent. of people from outside Wales thought that Wales was simply sheep and coal mines—a strange and not very positive image. Our cousins in Scotland and Ireland are marketing their industries expertly.

The recent campaign by the Wales Tourist Board is welcome, and not simply because it keeps my daughter in work. The big country campaign captures the "bigness" of spirit and emotion that is inspired by the Welsh people and our fabulous landscape.

The hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) has been instrumental in inviting people who are considering making a film about the Arthurian legend in north Wales,

[Mr. Llwyd]

and all credit to him for that. We could develop that further, because we have a distinct history that could be marketed.

We need to concentrate on the transport problems that are holding Wales back, although we must not talk Wales down in doing so. I agree that developing regional airports would be a useful measure.

The future of our £2 billion tourist industry depends to a large extent on nurturing a highly skilled work force to provide the high-quality holiday experience that is expected and demanded—rightly—by our discerning visitors. We need to come up to speed—very often we do, as we have excellent facilities.

The tourism training forum, a new independent body set up by the Wales Tourist Board, is doing a good job. Education and Learning in Wales is assisting, as is the National Assembly for Wales. However, according to the Welsh Economic Review, published yesterday, the National Assembly should play a more pivotal role in marketing Wales, extending to bringing the likes of the Wales Tourist Board and Welsh business together to market Wales fully on the back of events such as the Ryder cup and the Network Q rally.

The Government response points out that the Wales Office should do as much as it can to represent Wales abroad and to give a good view of it. Not long ago, the Secretary of State made a speech in Bruges, in which he denigrated nationalists and said:

"many nationalists would counter that theirs is a civic and inclusive nationalism. But I have to say that I regard their desire to put an international frontier between England and Wales as justifiable only in terms that would satisfy the faith and language nationalists."

The right hon. Gentleman went on to say that he did not regard English people as foreigners in Wales, thereby insinuating that English people were often not made to feel welcome in Wales. That is not part of our thinking—it never has been and never will be. Ministers should talk up Wales when they go abroad, not pick off their political opponents and give the wrong impression of Wales.

The Government response highlighted the important role of the Wales Office in representing Wales abroad. A parliamentary question answered on 17 April showed that, between them, the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Wales have undertaken only one trade mission since July 1999—the ill-fated and now fabled train ride to the Czech Republic. One trade mission in 22 months does not represent a high profile, I regret to say.

Chris Ruane: The hon. Gentleman criticises my right hon. Friend for saying in his speech in Bruges that the Welsh nationalists have an anti-English feeling. Is he aware that Dafydd Elis-Thomas, the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales, shares that view? He admitted that there is an anti-English feeling within Welsh language nationalism that risked deepening tensions between Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers.

Mr. Llwyd: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman knows this, but I have been singled out for criticism by those very people, so I am not really qualified to say anything. They are more prejudiced against me than against the hon. Gentleman, so I do not know where that leaves us. However, I was pleased to see the hon. Gentleman's colleague pass him that crib note.

We in Wales need to attract further investment in the knowledge-based industries. We are falling behind; we need more liaison with universities. The importance of inward investment in this sector cannot be overestimated.

Some 50 major Japanese companies currently operate in Wales. They recognise what Wales has to offer—a high standard of living, a loyal and adaptable work force and a clean, healthy and beautiful environment. Here comes the nasty bit—on Tuesday evening the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) criticised Plaid Cymru Members for not being in the Chamber for the Finance Bill debate. All four Members of Plaid Cymru spoke in the Budget debate proper or in the Welsh Grand Committee debate on the Budget. We were represented in the Finance Bill debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), a member of the Scottish National party.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly is a new Member, so he probably does not understand: we are a joint grouping, and we were represented that evening by my hon. Friend the Member for Angus. Furthermore, my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) popped in and out of the debate regularly. Neither the hon. Member for Caerphilly nor one single member of the Welsh parliamentary Labour party bothered to turn up to the debate on UK-Japanese relations on 11 April in Westminster Hall, despite many Labour Members having important Japanese concerns in their constituency. Of course, it was a Thursday—time to skive off. [Hon. Members: "No."]

Mr. David *rose—*

Mr. Llwyd: Let me finish what I am saying. The hon. Gentleman can have inclusive politics—allegedly the flavour of the month in Cardiff—or he can pick a fight. He can choose what he wants, but he should not lead with his chin.

Mr. David: I reiterate the point that I made in the debate on the Finance Bill. First, not one Welsh nationalist Member set foot in this Chamber for any length of time. Some of them might have poked their heads around the door to see what was happening, but they made no contribution. Secondly, it is an utter disgrace when a member of the Scottish National party has to speak on behalf of Plaid Cymru. Those two parties might have a cosy relationship, but that has no credibility with the people of Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: When the hon. Gentleman has been here long enough and begins to learn a little of our practice, he will find out that only one of my hon. Friends was entitled to speak, and my hon. Friend the Member for Angus spoke that evening. As for the hon. Gentleman's record, he went home instead of taking part in that debate on Japan, so he should stop digging when he is in a hole.

Mr. David *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman has finished his speech.

4 pm

Mr. Martin Caton (Gower): I am a member of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which undertook this inquiry. One of the most illuminating pieces of evidence that we considered was the report, which has already been mentioned by at least two hon. Members, on the British Council's survey of the attitudes of young professionals and postgraduate students in some 28 countries throughout the world. The survey was conducted by MORI in 1999 and 2000, and published under the title "Through Other Eyes".

As one assumes that the people surveyed—well-educated men and women aged between 24 and 35, with above-average incomes and excellent prospects—will be among the next generation of movers and shakers on the international scene, their attitudes towards Wales and the United Kingdom generally should be of more than passing interest.

For the United Kingdom as a whole, the message was mixed. There was generally a high opinion of our higher education provision, our businesses and our institutions, including our democratic institutions. However, we scored low, in their perception, for creativity and innovation. We did particularly badly under the heading "People and society", as there was a widespread view that we are still deeply divided by class and that we are sometimes racially intolerant and unwelcoming to foreigners.

Before dealing with the attitudes towards Wales, it is important to recognise that we in Wales have our part to play in building on the positive aspects of the perception of the United Kingdom and overcoming or correcting the negative image of the United Kingdom that some people identified.

When those in our young, upwardly mobile survey group were asked about the images that best summed up Wales for them, 20 per cent. identified Diana, Princess of Wales; 13 per cent. identified Charles, Prince of Wales; and 8 per cent. identified the royal family generally. They then listed castles, rugby and beautiful landscapes in that order, and all with less than 7 per cent.

To be fair, the associations with the other nations of the United Kingdom were almost equally limited and distorting. With Scotland, the No. 1 icon was kilts, followed by whisky, bagpipes, the highlands and cold weather.

In 1999 and 2000, when young go-getters from around the world were asked what they associated with Northern Ireland, 34 per cent. replied violence and religious conflict, followed by the IRA and then the scenery. Perhaps that has begun to change since then. England was represented by the Queen, football, London, the Houses of Parliament, Oxbridge education and bad weather in that order.

Perhaps Wales does not come out much worse than anyone else in that icon association game, although I am not sure that the Welsh contemporaries of those in the international survey group would agree with them in putting the royal family in the top three spots, even in this jubilee year. That may tie in with a more revealing figure: 16 per cent. of those intelligent and successful young people replied that they did not associate anything with Wales. I suspect that that figure would have been even higher if it had not been for the tragic loss of Princess Diana and the fact that the name "Wales" had appeared a great deal in the media in the two years before the survey.

When asked the same question, the figure was only 3 per cent. for England, 6 per cent. for Scotland and 10 per cent. for Northern Ireland. Clearly, Wales projects by far the least distinct image internationally of any of the countries of the United Kingdom. That is reinforced by the response to the question, "What countries go to make up the UK?" As has already been said, 85 per cent. identified England; 80 per cent., Scotland; 72 per cent., Northern Ireland; and just 67 per cent., Wales.

So we in Wales have an identity problem in the perception of the world. Of course, the significance of that can be easily exaggerated. We are a small nation that is part of a bigger state. We cannot expect everyone to know about us or to be aware of all our qualities. Let us face it, we would have a much bigger long-term problem if we somehow managed to create a fantastic image of Wales, but the quality—the substance, as opposed to the spin—did not come anywhere near matching it. Our challenge is to get the message across and tell people just how good Wales is and how much it has to offer, but we have not yet managed to do that well enough in some ways. That is true in several different, but related ways.

In our report, we broke the subject of Wales in the world into three broad categories: trade and investment, tourism and culture, and language and sport. Those are sensible subdivisions in which to address the practical issues that we considered in our inquiry, but the boundary lines are nowhere near as distinct, if they exist at all, when considering the more nebulous concepts of image, identification and recognition.

Put at its most obvious, we all know of investment decisions in Wales that have been influenced by positive experiences that the decision makers have had in their higher education, on holidays, attending conferences or through some cultural association. Equally, we all know of the impact—positive and negative—on image that the use of locations in major international films can have. Whatever people thought of the film "Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring", I have not met many who did not admit that it had increased their desire to visit New Zealand.

Establishing and marketing the right sort of consistent image can be valuable across a range of economic activities. I was going to talk about Scotland and Ireland, but they have been dealt with quite well by other hon. Members and the time is getting on.

Adam Price: The hon. Gentleman has just mentioned Scotland and Ireland in passing, but the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) mentioned the fact that there is now greater diplomatic representation in Edinburgh and Belfast. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that possibly one of the reasons for that greater representation is the fact the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly have law-making powers?

Mr. Caton: That is not yet a significant factor, but it may well come to that. Scotland and Ireland have moved away from a caricature image in people's minds towards a much more accurate and three-dimensional image because of various economic and cultural developments in both those countries. That is happening in Wales as well, but we are a little behind.

Chris Ruane: Is my hon. Friend aware that the American consulates in Belfast and Edinburgh have not

[Chris Ruane]

just been established but have existed for more than 100 years? Is he also aware that the consulate in Wales was withdrawn in 1965—years before devolution?

Mr. Caton: Yes, I am aware of that. Like my hon. Friend and the other members of the Select Committee, I know that we need to do all we can to get those consulate and international representatives into Cardiff. When we met the Irish consul general, he said how important the type of networking that is provided by the fact he is in Cardiff is for the Republic of Ireland and for Wales. We need to work on that.

I should like quickly to consider the inward investment and trade aspect of our inquiry. Naturally, we gave most of our attention to the role of Government—especially the UK Government—and agencies in promoting those twin objectives. However, it is important to remember that the most important component in getting foreign business to locate in Wales or in selling what we produce in Wales is not how we are promoted by the Government at any level, but the quality of what we offer and how well it fits what the investor or the customer wants.

For inward investment, the communications and sourcing materials and components, and the quality of education, training and the environment are far more significant than how good the WDA video was or how nice the Foreign and Commonwealth Office people were. Some investors, who have made a real contribution to our economic development in Wales, have become aware of what we have to offer through channels other than those offered by the Government at any level. I think in particular of the value of the higher education sector. Our universities and colleges can be a magnet for high-quality, high-tech, cutting-edge employment in Wales. This was brought home to me twice in the last few months, once in south Wales and once in north Wales.

The first occasion was the opening of the Technium centre on the docks in Swansea, which is a joint project involving the university, the Welsh Development Agency and the council, and which is the next stage on from the college's innovation centre. It is a base for developing the business and the technology for a whole new range of products. It is exciting, not least because it brings together established, successful and, sometimes, foreign companies with a new generation of Welsh entrepreneurs. That initiative needs to be rolled out across the whole of Wales to tie in to our existing educational and research network.

In north Wales, just a few weeks ago, the Welsh Affairs Committee was taking evidence for our current inquiry into broadband cabling in Wales. There was a lot of criticism of and concern about the adequacy of broadband provision and the comparative costs in north-west Wales in particular. Not unreasonably, therefore, we asked one company involved in advanced research and development why it had decided to locate in Bangor when it knew the disadvantages. It immediately replied, "Because of the university." It went on to explain the partnership that it had developed with the relevant department in the university, which was mutually beneficial. The quality of the graduates and postgraduates coming out of that department was even more important, however, and it had offered employment to some of them.

I am sure that maintaining and improving the excellence of our higher education and research institutions will be more and more important in attracting investment and developing new Welsh products. In fact, that can play a valuable part in improving Wales's identity and image in the world. One of the things that those young people whom the British Council surveyed admired about the UK was our educational institutions. The only colleges that they mentioned, however, were Oxford, Cambridge and the London School of Economics. Welsh universities, which are already world leaders in many areas, need to be recognised for a more general level of excellence.

I was going to talk about tourism, but that has been covered well in the debate. As many other Members wish to speak, I shall conclude.

4.12 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I commend the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) not least for identifying the importance of perceptions. We of all people should understand that, in the information age, perception is often more important than reality. The same applies when one is trying to promote a country, a nation or a city. I therefore also want to pick up the theme that he began—trade and investment—and to consider the position of Wales in the economic world.

The Select Committee, of which I am now a member—I was not a member when it prepared the report—received a wide variety of evidence about the characteristics of the Welsh economy. Those characteristics represent both strengths and weaknesses. Among comparative strengths, the most important items were a very skilled work force who have high productivity, and, in tandem with that, good industrial relations and few strikes. In addition, Wales has now developed centres of excellence in several different business sectors—the one that comes to mind is the information technology and telecommunications sector. Since 1990, £3 billion has come to Wales, involving 200 companies, in that sector alone. People in Wales can take considerable pride in that.

In terms of weaknesses—there must be two sides to any argument—one of the worries highlighted in the report is the relatively low level of research and development investment in Wales. Sometimes, that can be a symptom of inadequate innovation. Secondly, there seemed to be low levels of entrepreneurial activity.

Chris Ruane: The hon. Gentleman has a point—there has been a lack of research capabilities in Wales in the past. Is he aware, however, of a £10 million project, the Opto Electronic Incubation and Research Centre, which will be based in my constituency in north Wales? It is tied in to Aberystwyth university, Bangor university and the North East Wales institute of higher education. I hope that it will fill that gap in my part of north Wales.

Mr. Prisk: The hon. Gentleman brings good news to the House, which I am more than happy to support. It is a good example. We must hope, however, that it is not merely an example in isolation, and that there are more projects of that nature. I suspect that there will be many more.

Huw Irranca-Davies *rose—*

Mr. Prisk: As the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) is an even newer Member than me, I shall generously give way again.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy. The centre to which my hon. Friend the

Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) referred is not an isolated example. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would also welcome the Technium centre in Swansea.

Mr. Prisk: I am always happy to allow an advertising intermission. I shall now resume my speech.

The third aspect of the evidence to the Committee that worried me was the relatively low profile of Wales in the business world. The hon. Member for Gower referred to that. There was another allied weakness: an over- reliance, which is perhaps historical, on low-value products. That is not totally true—as Labour Members have demonstrated, there are always good examples to bring to the fore—and Ford's investment in the Premier Automotive Group in Bridgend is an encouraging sign that what might have been thought, historically, to be lower-value manufacturing products can be turned into higher-value products. That is a welcome trend.

In considering strengths and weaknesses, the Select Committee has recognised that the Welsh economy is undergoing a long-term fundamental transformation from an economy based on primary and manufacturing industry into a genuinely mixed economy. That transformation is, of course, still under way. If I may, I shall therefore focus on two aspects of the report's findings—inward investment and indigenous businesses.

The Welsh Development Agency has an excellent record on inward investment. Although the Welsh population is approximately only 5 per cent. of the United Kingdom population, inward investment in Wales throughout the 1980s and 1990s was pro rata far higher. In 1991, inward investment was 19 per cent. and, even last year, despite a considerable fall, it was 11 per cent. of total UK inward investment. That is still double the inward investment that we might expect were we to relate it to the population size of Wales. That is tremendous testimony to the work of the Welsh Development Agency and other Government agencies in the late 1980s and the 1990s.

Equally, we should not underestimate the value of signature projects such as the development of the Millennium stadium in Cardiff to which hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), who is not here at present, referred. These projects help to attract international attention and to change perceptions—as the hon. Member for Gower said—about the attractiveness of a city and its qualities as a business location. That is why I was happy to lend my support to Cardiff's bid to be European city of culture in the future. It was encouraging that that was supported across the House.

As the Secretary of State highlighted when he opened the debate, inward investment from international business has helped the Welsh economy change and has provided much-needed jobs. As he also accepted, however, it is not a panacea. In some ways, inward investment raises as many questions as it answers. For example, is there not a danger of merely replacing one big company with another, thus perpetuating a community's dependency on one employer? Can we rely on footloose multinationals to create jobs, given their collective record? Furthermore, is it not a fairly expensive way of creating jobs?

Those questions lead to a realisation that inward investment on its own will not produce the long-term structural changes to the economy that are so important. To do that, we need to address the needs of indigenous businesses, large and small. The Select Committee's report found that, by comparison with England and other European Union countries, entrepreneurship in Wales, sadly, lags behind: a low number of start-ups; poor levels of research and development, despite some good examples; a lack of key marketing skills; and too few Welsh small businesses engaged in international trade. Those are all symptoms of what I might term an entrepreneurial deficit.

The Select Committee's report identified objective 1 status and funding as offering perhaps the greatest hope of reversing that deficit. Although I am not opposed to objective 1 and similar projects, as a former small business man, I am sceptical about the genuine quality and opportunity that top-down government schemes offer. There is certainly much activity and many schemes, initiatives and funds. However, to date, the results do not bode well. What is lacking is a clear understanding of why people become their own boss—their motives and aspirations. We therefore need to be realistic about the environment in which enterprise operates in Wales.

First, many sole traders and husband—and—wife partnerships have no wish to grow. They run the local shop or pub, and they want simply to be independent and make their own way in the world. The prospect of radical growth and driving into new markets—together with all the bureaucracy that inevitably comes with that—holds little appeal for them. Given that many small businesses and self-employed firms already spend up to four working days a month filling in Government forms, is it any wonder that they are hesitant to embrace the ideology of growth?

Secondly, many Welsh and Cornish communities—I say this as a Cornishman—are naturally small and self-contained, and others may have known only one large employer throughout the history of the community. The employer might have been a mine or a steelworks, and that is how it has always been. The danger is that there is no entrepreneurial role model in those communities and no culture of making it by oneself. That is why I said that there is a sense in which inward investment does not necessarily tackle the root of the problem. The danger is that it will merely reinforce the problem. We move from one steelworks in a town to one call centre. I cite the example of call centres because of the sad news of the job losses at Pembroke dock. In some ways, that underlines the danger of relying simply on inward investment.

The third characteristic that shapes the environment for enterprise is the fact that, in the communities that have relied on the jobs of one employer, the people who want to get on often move on. The danger is that they will move to the bright lights of Cardiff or London. Therefore, the single most important thing that any Government can do to focus on changing the culture is to raise people's aspirations.

I would like to consider several practical ways in which we can make a difference in Wales and raise people's aspirations. First, in education, the emphasis has been on teaching business and enterprise in schools. That is fine, because teaching has its role. However, the real need is not to instruct but to inspire. How do we do that? A good example—I had the privilege of being part of it in the past—is the Prince's Trust, which was founded by the Prince of Wales. The trust supports budding entrepreneurs, and many Members will be familiar with its work. At the heart of its work is the role of the mentor.

[Mr. Prisk]

I was self-employed and I had the opportunity to help other youngsters to come through the process and get involved in becoming their own boss. It is important to provide hands-on experience or to act as a role model. Such a direct approach is highly successful.

The other aspect of the issue is to educate not just youngsters but members of the public sector. That means trying to help civil servants, who may not have direct experience of enterprise, to understand the practical realities of running a small or large business. In particular, the Industry and Parliament Trust does wonderful work to help civil servants and big business to work together. I am also aware that a fellowship for small businesses enables parliamentarians to gain experience. However, we need to go a step further. In Cardiff and Whitehall, we need to consider extending the scheme so that civil servants and small businesses can gain experience from one another. I do not know whether the new head of the civil service will embrace that suggestion, but the noises that he has made so far are encouraging.

Another practical suggestion that I wish to make relates to the removal of barriers to growth and enterprise, and I will give three brief examples. First, the report refers specifically to objective 1, and the Committee is engaged in further discussion of how that is working. However, the report shows that the process is too slow and that many enterprises find it too time consuming. The barriers are too high and the worry is that the administrative process is reactive and not proactive. We need change in that regard.

The second barrier that concerns people is the discrimination in the United Kingdom and Wales against the self-employed. We need to remove such discrimination in a legal and taxation sense and then go on to consider how we can end the discrimination against the self-employed when it comes to bank loans and mortgages. Both sides of the House can engage in that agenda.

The third barrier relates to regulations. Although I am sure that Labour Members would be only too thrilled to hear me wax lyrical on the subject at length, I will merely say that last year 4,642 new regulations were introduced. For many small business men—we return to the question of perception—that is 4,642 new reasons why they do not want to grow the business, take on a new employee or, for that matter, come into business at all.

Investing and doing business in Wales has much to commend it. A skilled and productive work force lie at the heart of Welsh competitiveness in what is an increasingly mobile and cost-conscious world economy. However, the root problem of changing the entrepreneurial culture in both towns and villages is not being addressed fully by the Government or by the Assembly's policies and schemes. Drawing in inward investors and multinationals has its place but, in the end, the future of the Welsh economy and enterprise lies in the hands of the Welsh people. They have raised their skills and their productivity; we now need to help them to raise their aspirations to be their best.

4.27 pm

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): As many Members have said, this is an important debate. We have talked about the Welsh diaspora, and the first Welsh person to start it was Prince Madoc in 1170. He discovered America 300 years before Columbus and 200 years before St. Brendan of Ireland.

Wales has a proud tradition in America. When I visited the deputy ambassador, Glyn Davies, two years ago to discuss Wales in America, he pointed out to me a brass plaque that depicted the declaration of independence. He went through the names of every one of those who signed the declaration. One third of them were Welsh. We have a proud tradition in north America. However, perhaps we should be less proud of the fact that five of the top 10 names for black people in America are Welsh names—Lewis, Williams, Jones and so on. That may be because the Welsh were the first colonists out there and owned slaves.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that hardly a family in Wales does not have a connection in America, and that applies to my family. My sister Maureen Ellis left Wales 24 years ago; my sister Kathy Wazera left for America 22 years ago; and my sister Amy Kelly went to America 12 years ago.

Mr. Evans: When is the hon. Gentleman going?

Chris Ruane: I am staying put.

Indeed, 4 million Americans claim Welsh heritage. The American census form contains a Welsh tick box, which will please Conservative Members. Some 4 million people ticked that box to say that they were of Welsh descent.

Kevin Brennan: Is my hon. Friend aware of two other interesting points about names in America? First, to emphasise what he said about the names of black Americans, the greatest long jump final of all time was between Mike Powell, Carl Lewis and Larry Meyrick. Secondly, a recent book indicates that America is probably named after a Welsh merchant who lived near Bristol called Ameurig.

Chris Ruane: We should not forget to include Jesse Owens on that proud list of black Americans with Welsh names.

There are 300 St. David's societies around the world. I was given a list of those five years ago and it was already out of date then. When I saw the list, I thought what a fantastic network to use to promote Welsh culture, investment, exports, tourism and academia. Indeed, we have made great gains in promoting Wales around the world and attracting investment into Wales. We have had significant successes—the 143 American companies that have invested in Wales are proof of that. Between 1983 and 2000, there was £5 billion of American investment in Wales, which created 75,000 jobs.

The Welsh Development Agency is probably the most successful development agency in the world. Twenty years ago, there were only three development agencies in Tokyo, one of which was the WDA. We have made good use of our consulates, increasingly so since devolution. Last summer, I travelled at my own expense to the Gymanfa Ganu in San Jose and spent an evening at the British consulate in San Francisco, where 150 people of Welsh extraction, including Welsh business people, mingled together, networking to strengthen the bonds between Wales and America.

However, we need to build on our successes. For relatively little money, with some organisational skills and through recognition and co-operation, we could help to expand Wales's influence around the world. Wales International produces an excellent publication that goes back 50 years called "Yr Enfys"—"The Rainbow". "Yr Enfys" is about to collapse for the sake of £5,000 per annum. Wales International contributed to the Welsh Affairs Committee when it looked into the position of Wales in the world. It is a fantastic organisation, whose aims are:

"To forge close and abiding world-wide links between Wales and the people of Welsh descent and friends of the language, culture and traditions of Wales . . . To promote present-day Wales, its work and culture outside Wales and to encourage and assist in the establishing of Welsh Societies outside Wales wherever this is possible. Many Societies Worldwide are already affiliated to the movement . . . To provide a meeting place every year at the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales for its members and its friends from all over the world . . . To develop and maintain a register/database of worldwide Welsh contacts for individuals, cultural organisations and public bodies."

It is possible for organisations such as Wales International to fold for the sake of £5,000.

The Gymanfa Ganu is a fantastic celebration of Welshness across the whole of north America. Last year, it was held in San Jose and more than 2,000 people of Welsh extraction attended. Rather than finance, that great organisation requires recognition and an awareness among the political and cultural classes within Wales of what it does. I travelled with my family, and Rhodri Morgan and his wife, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan), also attended. We were the only three political representatives there.

Mr. Prisk: Why does the hon. Gentleman think that, historically, Irish communities have got into the political culture of the countries that they have moved to, but Welsh communities have not been so successful?

Chris Ruane: Ruane is an Irish name from Galway on the west coast. I am aware of the great strides that the Irish people have taken in developing their international network.

I would urge all hon. Members to visit the Gymanfa Ganu at least once. I think that it takes place in Ontario this year. It deserves our political support and is a great networking opportunity for Welsh businesses, Welsh culture and Welsh academia.

Numerous hon. Members have pointed out that, when the Welsh Affairs Committee visited America to look into social exclusion, we were contacted by the Welsh North American Chamber of Commerce. The group comprises about 100 eminent business people who are spread across north America. Some of them are millionaires and multi-millionaires, and they provide a valuable Welsh network. Most of them are of Welsh extraction. The group is headed by David Williams, who has become a good friend of mine in the past couple of years. It thinks that it has been ignored by the WDA and the Wales Tourist Board, and instead of co-operation, there was confrontation. It is a valuable asset in America. Bridges have been built, but we still need more co-operation between independent Welsh organisations in America.

Adam Price: The hon. Gentleman has strongly made the point about the economic advantages of the Welsh diaspora several times. To pick up on something that the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) said, it is true that Welsh business people outside Wales have been tremendously successful, not least in America. I can think of JP Morgan, Jack Daniel and, more recently, the former head of CBS, who is of Welsh extraction.

Chris Ruane: Absolutely; I believe that the former head of CBS was at the Gymanfa Ganu last year. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the success of Welsh people in America.

David Williams has set up a business network across north America. He says that an equivalent networking system is desperately needed for Welsh academics. Our greatest export over the past 100 years has been our young people and our young qualified people, thousands of whom have ended up in academic institutions in Canada and the USA. It would be beneficial to the Welsh economy if we could develop a network between those academics, to make them aware of the research and the developments in Wales, and the fact that Wales is developing a booming economy. We could even try to convince them to return. That has been done in Ireland, where there is a skills shortage. At Easter and Christmas, people go to Dublin and Shannon airports to ask people where they are from and what their qualifications are, before pointing out job opportunities in Ireland. I urge the development of a Welsh academic establishment across America and, indeed, the world.

We could also develop the twinning of towns and counties in Wales. That already happens on a haphazard basis and has been mentioned by several hon. Members. My county of Denbighshire is twinned with a region of Sweden and my home town of Rhyl is developing a twinning relationship with Athay in county Clare in Ireland. I also believe that Lesotho and Wales have been twinned for a number of years. We need promotion, co-ordination and perhaps a pocket of finance to draw on to develop the bonds around the world between Welsh towns, counties and organisations.

Click Cymru is another idea that warrants attention. I was involved with Hicks Randles in Mold in north Wales, and mentioned the 300 Welsh societies that exist around the world. People at that company thought it would be an excellent idea if we harnessed the support of the societies to develop the Welsh economy. They did a great deal of work on that for no pay—it was all off their own bat. Over a two-year period, they met high-powered people in BT, Barclays and the National Library of Wales to develop a portal—a database—for Wales. Specifically, they were interested in developing tourism.

The hon. Members for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) said that we need to attract people to visit Wales as a first resort. It will be difficult to do that, but one way is by developing links with the Welsh diaspora and by developing research resources, as Ireland has done. Fifteen years ago, the Taoiseach took young people off the dole and taught them computer skills. They went through the parish registers of births, marriages and deaths and the shipping registers, and put them all on to computer databases. Each county in the north and south of Ireland had a research centre, and those were used as a worm on a hook to attract people of Irish extraction back to the old country to research their roots. Many people

[Chris Ruane]

did so and spent money in the local economy. They also strengthened even further the bond between Ireland, Irish-Americans and Irish people around the world.

Mr. Evans: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we must also explain how easy it is to get to Wales, particularly if people come to Manchester airport for north Wales? The links are very good there, but we must improve the links at Cardiff airport so that people can discover south and west Wales.

Chris Ruane: I agree entirely, but first we must put the idea in people's heads to come to Wales. How they get there is a secondary factor, which we do need to look into.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) that, along with the important marketing campaign that he describes, we should think seriously about the benefits of having a regional structure for existing airports? We do not need much investment to finish off the campaign that he describes.

Chris Ruane: Absolutely. I agree with both points. We need international airports as well as regional airports in Wales. Again, I point to the example of Ireland. My family come from Oranmore in County Galway, where my uncle sold off fields for the development of Galway airport. There are also airports at Knock, Shannon, Kerry and Cork—in fact, throughout Ireland. We should be developing such a network in Wales.

I worked closely with Click Cymru, which spent a great deal of time, effort and research developing the database and portal that I mentioned. It received enthusiastic responses from people throughout Wales, but its bid for objective 1 funding was unsuccessful and has withered on the vine, so a fantastic opportunity has disappeared.

A number of hon. Members have mentioned the importance of St. David's day, which I think should be a national holiday in Wales. We should have the day off, or perhaps the day after so that we could celebrate late on St. David's day and recuperate the following day. I think that there may be something of the Welsh methodist in us all—I speak as a Catholic—because we seem to have a negative attitude towards celebration. Or perhaps it is just laziness. What did we Members do, collectively, rather than as individuals or within our own parties, to celebrate St. David's day this year in the House of Commons? Perhaps we should develop a cross-party initiative to promote Wales in the House. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had a bit of a beano, or a soirée, in Gwydyr house, and we are thankful for that.

Again, we need to look to the Irish example. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) pointed out that the Dail in Ireland closes down for a week so that TDs and the Taoiseach can travel round the world to help to celebrate St. Patrick's day. That is not considered a freebie or a jolly: there is a database informing them who they are visiting, why they have been invited, who they are to talk to and what they are to say. The aim is to bring jobs and investment back to Ireland. We need to take a more structured approach to our St. David's day celebrations. I was pleased to hear that the First Minister was in New York celebrating St. Patrick's day and raising the Welsh profile. He was also, as I mentioned, at the Gymanfa Ganu in San Jose, where the WDA had a large tent.

Mr. Llwyd: I know of the hon. Gentleman's interest and enthusiasm in this area, but I point out that the First Minister was celebrating St. David's day, not St. Patrick's day.

Chris Ruane: I thank the hon. Gentleman for correcting me on that point, although I am sure that the First Minister celebrated St. Patrick's day too.

The Welsh Affairs Committee was told in evidence that the Taoiseach visits America with a list of people of Irish extraction, drawn from corporate America, whom he will meet and wine and dine, in the hope of getting a certain type of investment for Ireland. The Secretary of State and the First Minister should be doing as much of that as they can.

I urge hon. Members to take up their visits. We can now make three visits a year to European Union capitals.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): And to candidate countries.

Chris Ruane: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. We can now visit candidate countries in eastern Europe.

Lembit Öpik: Including Estonia.

Chris Ruane: Yes, including Estonia. We need to find out about the international and European links in our own constituencies and take advantage of our visits to develop those links.

We also need to consider the use that is made of Welsh celebrities, such as Charlotte Church, Catherine Zeta Jones, Ioan Gruffydd—who incidentally was said by American women to be sexier than George Clooney—Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey and Bryn Terfel. They are all proud to be Welsh, but we need a more structured and co-ordinated approach to taking advantage of their celebrity to promote Wales in America.

I turn now to a more contentious part of my speech. We must look carefully at the image of Wales being portrayed, especially in the UK, by certain sections in Wales. I am expecting hon. Members to intervene, but I will accept interventions—as many as are requested—at the end of these remarks. Over the past two years there have been a number of incidents of people speaking in strong and detrimental terms about what is happening to the language.

I am talking about people such as Gwilym ab Ioan, who said:

> "Montana is the dumping ground for oddballs, social misfits and society drop outs and Wales suffers from the same phenomenon. Soon Wales will be so full of foreigners, in our own land our voice will be drowned out."

I am talking about people such as John Elfed Jones, who compared the movement of non-Welsh speakers into Welsh-speaking communities, which includes people who, like me, were born and raised as Welshmen, to the spread of foot and mouth disease.

I am talking about people such as Eifion Lloyd Jones, who urged Welsh schools not to accept too many non-Welsh-speaking children. That includes my own daughter, who attends a Welsh-speaking school. In fact, it was the first Welsh-speaking school in the English language community in Wales, and I attended its 50-year celebration two years ago. In that school, 85 per cent. of the children are from families whose mother tongue is English, and it is doing a fantastic job. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is good to hear that agreement.

I know that Plaid Cymru Members have stood up to be counted and have criticised people like Eifion Lloyd Jones. They include the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, who is on the record in the House as having criticised Seimon Glyn for his racist comments last year. The hon. Gentleman said that the Secretary of State or his eminent PPS was passing up crib notes. These are not crib notes; they are notes that I have gleaned myself by typing the word "racist" into the computer and extracting about 20 different articles. Many of them are from *The Guardian* and other national newspapers, not just the *Daily Post* or the *Western Mail*.

Some Members have taken a principled stand. Again, I mention Dafydd Elis-Thomas, the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales, who admitted that there was an anti-English feeling within Welsh language nationalism which risked deepening tensions between Welsh and non-Welsh speakers. That development has been roundly criticised by eminent non-political people in Wales, including the Professor of Judaism at Lampeter university, who was deeply disturbed by attacks on incomers to Wales. He said:

"It's just the kind of language used in the early stages of Nazism in the 1930s."

If words like "mixed marriages", "incomers" and "in-migration" are bandied around, a political climate is created. If politicians stand back and do nothing, they are part of the process. I therefore welcome the interventions of some members of Plaid Cymru but, to make a political point, criticism has come from Back Benchers and the Presiding Officer, but not the leadership of the party.

None of the articles that I took off the internet mention Ieuan Wyn Jones, whose views are hidden. He should look at the lessons learned by the Labour party when it was infiltrated by extremists in the 1980s. It took a principled leader, Neil Kinnock, to stand up and root out those extremists. He was straight with them and said, "These our rules and this is the way we operate. If you don't like it, get out." That is exactly what should have been done with Seimon Glyn; the problem should have been nipped in the bud and he should have been told by Ieuan Wyn Jones, "Any more of this and you're out."

However, Ieuan Wyn Jones failed to take such action; as a result, extremism has spread both within and outside his own party, which is detrimental to Wales and sends out entirely the wrong message to people in England, the rest of the UK and elsewhere. Why should an investor invest in north Wales when he is told, "Come in, invest and build your factor, but don't you or your children come into our communities. Even if you want your children to speak Welsh, we do not want them in our Welsh language schools as they will pollute the language." Entirely the wrong message is sent out to tourists. Why should they come to Wales when offensive signs are stuck up?

I have not spoken on this topic before. I do not want to mix it with Plaid Cymru, which has its own agenda. However, the issue is pertinent to our debate on Wales in the world; it has a negative effect on the position of Wales in the UK. I urge Members on both sides of the House to do their utmost when racist comments are made in the media to stand shoulder to shoulder and say that they will not accept or tolerate them.

Mr. Llwyd: I noticed that the hon. Gentleman did not refer to what the hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas) said about incomers swamping Colwyn Bay and adding to pressure on social services. However, I have no truck with the kind of behaviour described by the hon. Gentleman, and neither does my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), who has just returned from the Le Pen protest in France. We are not signing up to any agenda of that description; we never have and we never will.

Chris Ruane: I accept the hon. Gentleman's assurance. As I have said, he is on record in the House of Commons as criticising Seimon Glyn on the issue.

There are other significant issues, including houses in multiple occupation in seaside towns, which my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas) has rightly brought into political debate. However, the language and terminology that we use to discuss that issue create a particular political climate. Preserving the Welsh language is important, as is preserving jobs in our rural communities, but we cannot develop proper policies on them if the language does not fit the issue, as has been the case. We need political unity to develop proper housing policies and make sure that finance and resources are available to spread the language. However, that has been made more difficult by certain sections of Plaid Cymru and the Welsh language movement.

Mr. Evans: I touched on that in my speech. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that while certain people say nasty, damaging and hurtful things, the message from our debate should be loud and clear to the people of the UK, particularly in England? They are extremely welcome to visit Wales, set up businesses and create employment there. Only a small minority of nasty people say damaging things; they discredit our country.

Chris Ruane: Absolutely. As I said, I am pleased that there have been comments from other Opposition parties in support of that.

In conclusion, if we work together as politicians and develop a political agenda to promote Wales within Wales, the UK and around the world, we are much more likely to achieve our goals than we are with a divisive political agenda in our own country.

4.56 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I congratulate the Welsh Affairs Committee on its report. It is sad but not surprising that the report did not reach the House earlier. I recently took part in a debate on the equally important social fund report produced by the former Social Security Committee, and it languished for at least a year before being debated.

We are debating the Welsh report on a quiet afternoon when other events have drawn attention elsewhere; it is sad that attendance in the Chamber is thin. We have heard about ignorance about Wales and the Welsh language

[Hywel Williams]

which seems to extend to BT. Recently, I dialled 192 and asked for a number in the blameless community of Garndolbenmaen. I was asked which country that was in; Members may be interested to know that I was dialling from Swansea.

Some Members have looked at the subject of our debate—Wales in the world—chosen the world rather than Wales, and decided to go elsewhere. It is sad that some of them represent Welsh constituencies. I note that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) has departed, perhaps to hone his literary skills after receiving a blast from my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). The hon. Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams) is no longer in the Chamber. Contrary to her usual views, perhaps she has succumbed to the delights of Virgin Rail.

Our debate is about Wales in the world, not Wales or the world, a principle that has guided many people from my constituency for many years, not least the entrepreneurial slate traders who carried slates from Porthmadog, Caernarfon, Porth Dinorwig and elsewhere to all parts of the world in the previous two centuries. The principle also guides the thoughts of my party and progressive national bodies, as I shall explain later. In my constituency, we have a large Polish community, as some Members may know. We have a Polish retirement community, Döm Polska, in a rural part of Caernarfon, which is trilingual; signs appear in Polish, Welsh and English. The communities of Llanbedrog, Pwllheli and Penrhos have gained tremendously for many years from the existence of that retirement home, not least from the substantial employment that it provides.

I propose three guiding aims for looking at Wales and the world. We should be consistent in speaking as Welsh people with one voice, and we should speak up for Wales, not talk it down. The pictures that we should present should be true pictures of ourselves, unencumbered by narrow political considerations. Our primary purpose should be to represent Wales, not other interests—that is the principle of our party. We have far to go before those aims are achieved.

Tourism has been discussed by many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy. In March, I attended a British Tourist Authority reception to mark St. David's day. It was a convivial evening attended by the Secretary of State for Wales, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), who is unaccountably absent. Given his ministerial interests and much-advertised internationalism, I would have expected to see him here at some point.

During that evening at the BTA, we heard many fine words, if to the accompaniment of some rather dodgy white wine.

Mr. Llwyd: It was not Welsh, was it?

Hywel Williams: No, but it was warm, to say the least.

Significantly, I soon found myself giving Wales the hard sell to some BTA executives. It was only later that I realised that it should have been the other way round: they should have been giving me the hard sell. However, they seemed interested, or at least polite. We heard fine words, and look forward to even finer action, especially as regards the recommendations of the report. In the past, the impression has wrongly been gained that tourism in the UK consists of a golden triangle to the east, and that the mountains of Eryri—Snowdonia—in my constituency are merely pimples on the body politic: or touristic, perhaps. I shall not go into any detail on where the pimples are to be found. That impression will be particularly wrong in future if the BTA lives up to its promises.

One of our priorities for tourism must be to promote the nature of the unique nature of the Welsh holiday experience, including ensuring the prosperity of the Welsh language and culture and of our unique take on the English language. Too many people forget that English is, after all, a Welsh language.

Another priority must be to address the transport problems that beset our country, not least north-south, by rail and by road. In my constituency we have the Cambrian line. Recently, when travelling on the west coast main line, I looked at the railway map and noticed that the Cambrian line was not there. The line went from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth; to the north there was nothing at all. I seem to remember that the last time I went in that direction there was a railway line all the way from Machynlleth to Pwllheli.

We must deal with training deficits in the tourism industry. Some good work is already in hand, as I have heard from my local colleges.

Lembit Öpik: Before the hon. Gentleman moves away from the rail network, does he agree, given that there is a lot of competition to take over the rail network, that an important factor in attracting people to Wales is the quality of the proposals to ensure that there is a truly national rail network across Wales, adding to what we hope will be an effective regional airport structure?

Hywel Williams: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Certainly, the quality of the Cambrian line leaves something to be desired. The sum required to bring it up to a proper standard is relatively small, but it faces competition from other rail priorities. We want to ensure that it is given proper attention, because investment is needed for the loop that will increase traffic tremendously on the northern part of the line.

As I said, it is important to deal with training deficits in the tourism industry, and some good work is already in hand, as I have seen in my local colleges. However, we have far to go to reach the point where working in tourism services is more than a second choice—or even worse—for our young people. During my time at school and as a student, I spent many summers working in the tourism industry, and at that time such employment left a great deal to be desired.

Given the system of government that we currently enjoy, it is important to develop secondments between Welsh institutions and public bodies in our European and UK counterparts. I note that the Assembly exceeded its target of six secondments per year to European institutions. Will the Minister tell us what progress has been made in developing secondments with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office? Secondment is a two-way process. What progress has been made in training UK

overseas staff about Wales to raise their awareness of the resources of its landscape, people, languages and culture? On the UK level, it is not only a matter of secondments to the Wales Office. What progress has been made as regards secondments to other UK Departments?

The vital sector of secondments to UK and international business will be of great help to Welsh business. On 26 October I received an answer from the Department of Trade and Industry in which I was told:

"It is not possible from central records to give the location"—[*Official Report*, 26 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 415W.]

of every secondment from private business into Government and from Government into private business. However, I was given a long list of 341 companies that have taken or given secondments to the DTI. The only one that I could discover that seemed to have any Welsh relevance was the Prince of Wales's press office, which, with all due respect, is not the powerhouse of the Welsh economy or Welsh industry. I note that Arthur Andersen also figures in the list.

On 17 October, I asked the Secretary of State a question about business in the private sector seconding people into the Wales Office. His reply stated that the current arrangements mean that

"it is not practicable to attribute individual outward secondments to the Wales Office. There have been no inward secondments from the private sector to the Wales Office."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 492W.]

Given the key role that international business and trade could play in developing the Welsh economy, that matter needs attention, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

I want to refer briefly to the Wales European Centre, which has been debated this afternoon in another place. The Assembly's response to the report states:

"Both the Assembly's Brussels Office and the WEC are important tools in forging an identity for Wales in Europe. They also ensure that we are well placed to engage with EU institutions at an early stage."

This month, the Assembly office decided to pull out of the Wales European Centre and to set up a separate office in Brussels. Plaid Cymru condemns the decision to withdraw funds from the Wales European Centre. We acknowledge that changes are needed, but we are worried about the lack of prior consultation, whatever the First Minister says.

Sir John Grey is currently conducting a review into the workings of the Wales European Centre. Perhaps it would have been better to await its conclusions before acting without consulting. The way in which the matter has been handled is damaging to Wales's reputation in Europe.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): My hon. Friend mentioned the Wales European Centre and embassies. Does he agree that we should also consider the British Council and its work in promoting Wales abroad? Does he share my anxiety that it has no worked-out programme for promoting devolved parts of the United Kingdom? Many people abroad learn about the activities and culture of the United Kingdom through the British Council. They would never know about the Welsh language and culture through the current programme.

Hywel Williams: I agree. I unfortunately have to listen to the BBC World Service in the small hours. Again, little attention is given to Wales in that Foreign Office-funded service. We need to use the instruments of the British state to promote Wales abroad more effectively.

I want to consider trade and industry, especially the creative industry. Three industries are based in my constituency. Ceka Tools was originally a German company, which was relocated to Pwllheli, and is now a substantial importer and exporter of hand tools and other goods. It has recently extended its market to Ireland. Instead of continually looking to the east, it has taken advantage of our excellent links with Ireland.

Sain records has developed a body of Welsh music on tape, disc, CD, video and DVD. It has a substantial list that it sells to the United States. It is very successful and is branching out locally and opening a shop in Caernarfon to sell its goods.

Hufenfa De Arfon—the South Caernarfonshire Creamery—has recently won an export reward. It is based in the west of my constituency, far from centres of population, yet it makes a cheese called Monterey Jack to an American recipe, which it manages to export to America. I am not sure what the English idiom is—

Chris Ruane: Sending coals to Newcastle.

Hywel Williams: I thank the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane).

The creamery is doing well because it has a basic sense of entrepreneurship to which I referred earlier in respect of state industry. Lest anyone doubts that such entrepreneurship exists in the Welsh language as well as the English language, I recently attended the creamery's annual general meeting with Carwyn Jones from the National Assembly for Wales and Dafydd Wigley, my immediate predecessor. It was successful and interesting and conducted entirely through the medium of Welsh.

On a lighter note, there is a story circulating in my constituency that we have a large French creamery in south Caernarfon. Some tourists saw a milk tanker carrying the name "Hufenfa De Arfon" and wondered, because of the way in which they pronounced it—houvenva d'arvon—why a French company was based in south Caernarfonshire. We therefore have real and imagined international links in Caernarfon.

I am sure that all hon. Members were glad about the launch of Cyfle Cymru—Opportunity Wales—on 22 April. It is the largest e-commerce initiative of its type in Europe. That will give Welsh business and commerce an advantage in exporting to and working in other countries. Cyfle Cymru will provide a wealth of opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises to extend their businesses and work up niche export markets.

The international image of Wales and Welsh business will increasingly be sourced locally in Wales to the whole world. I heartily subscribe to the principle of thinking globally and acting locally. I note that Cyfle Cymru's site is entirely bilingual—no narrow monoglotism there. I sincerely hope that many hon. Members will attend the London launch of Cyfle Cymru—Opportunity Wales—on 21 May.

Many companies in my constituency are associated with the television production industry. I was told recently that that industry had succeeded in creating up to 800 jobs in an area where jobs of such quality are scarce. It has

[Hywel Williams]

succeeded not only in providing Welsh language programmes to SpedwarC—S4C—but in establishing many joint productions with other countries. A friend recently returned from a long stint of filming in Poland and enjoyed good relations with film companies there. He looks forward to further work there.

The 800 jobs are vital and the success of the industry depends on secure funding, which needs to be extended when necessary. I was therefore glad to meet the chief executive of the North Wales Film Commission at my constituency office. Again, he is selling Wales hard, especially north Wales locations, to the film industry. He has achieved notable success in attracting major Hollywood productions as well as domestic UK and Welsh productions.

There is an interesting and varied picture of international links in trade and the creative industry in my constituency. Those links need to be supported and we look forward to their providing many more high quality, high value jobs in the future.

In reference to the three principles that I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, I note that the difference between Plaid Cymru, as a nationalist party, and the other parties in this place is that our prime purpose is to represent Wales. I am certainly proud to do that.

5.15 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this important debate. I also welcome the unanimity across the Floor of the House today in representing and putting the case for Wales. I should stress, however, that we are also here as United Kingdom Members of Parliament, so as well as putting the case for our own communities and for Wales we must put the case for the United Kingdom. I do not see a schism in those concepts.

If I may, I shall tread on dangerous ground by talking about Wales, the Welsh, tourism and the whole question of image and identity. These issues are crucial as we reach a turning point in Wales. We have gone through years of massive restructuring in industry involving the loss of the coal mining industry, and the turbulence in the steel industry at the moment. We can see the restructuring going on. This is a time of change and of pain. Out of that, however, will come opportunity and challenge.

We need to achieve—in the House, in our communities and as a Welsh nation—a clear confidence in what we are about, what we see ourselves as, and where we see ourselves going as a nation. If we can reach some degree of agreement on that, we shall have achieved a lot today, and we can take that message forward. This is not a political point. We need coherently and consistently to present the idea that we are not going to whinge when whingeing is not necessary. We should present the case that Wales is a nation of winners and of potential. We can do things as well as or better than anyone else. We in this House are aiming to present that case.

Why is this important? First, it is important for business. Some good points have been made this afternoon about business and entrepreneurship. It is vital that we change the culture and give people the structures and the confidence that will enable them to take forward that entrepreneurial vision. Wales has undoubtedly lacked those skills for many years, for whatever reason, so we must advance the case for such change.

Inward investment is important, but, as has rightly been pointed out, it is not the be all and end all. It has, however, been a great help and we have been very successful in attracting it. We should not turn our backs on it, but we also need to encourage our own small businesses and self-employed businesses to set up, to take on small numbers of people and to build from there. That is not to say, however, that they should set up in their own region and then move to a location where production costs are cheaper or the wages are a quarter of those in Wales. We have seen that happen before, and we have to encourage them to stay.

It is also important for society and the community that we agree on some kind of identity and cohesion. Sometimes, when we are considering the technical details, we underestimate the idea of having shared goals and aspirations—a vision that enables people to say, "Yes, the politicians in the House, the Assembly and throughout the land are saying that this is what we want. We want to bring our children up in the areas where we live because the politicians are trying to provide these opportunities and this vision." The vision thing can easily be dismissed if we concentrate only on the nuts and bolts. If we forget about the vision thing, however, and forget about where we want to be in 10 or 15 years, it will all fall down and cease to be worth while.

Mr. Prisk: Without wishing to engage in gratuitous back-slapping, I entirely agree with what the hon. Gentleman said earlier—not least because he was agreeing with me. Does he agree that it is at the heart of this matter to move from a culture of dependency—in this case, economic dependence on one employer—to one of independence and confidence? I endorse his comments about change, and I wonder whether he would agree with that suggestion.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Indeed, the hon. Gentleman is right. There is always a danger in relying too much on a single employer, which is why we need diversity in the economic community as much as in the cultural community. The Welsh Development Agency has been making strides in that direction, but it must go further. The Secretary of State will no doubt continue his discussions with it to ensure that there is a network of approaches in the business community rather than too much reliance on just one.

I want to speak specifically on tourism, which has been much discussed today. There is a subtle difference, which has not been mentioned, between the identity of a person and a nation and what is presented as a tourism product. Much has been said about kicking out the old stereotypes and getting rid of the idea of turning us into a heritage nation. As a chap called Hewison once said, "Who wants a nation when you can step off the plane from Heathrow and walk into a Disneyfied theme park of heritage and castles?" We must accept that many people want that—they come here because of the pageantry, the industrial heritage, the castles, the legends and the myths—and that it is an essential ingredient of tourism, even though it is not necessarily what we are now.

We talk about identity: one aspect is a forward-looking nation seeking dynamic industry and diversity of communities and culture; the other is giving the tourists

what they want. We must accept that as a nation, even though there may be a stereotypical element to it. Felix Mendelssohn, writing way back in the 19th century, said:

"Here I am in Wales . . . and a harper sits in the vestibule of every inn and never stops playing so-called folk melodies, that infamous, common stuff".

If the tourists demand such a product, let us give them what they want.

Kevin Brennan: A harp in every pub.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Yes, indeed.

This is undoubtedly a time of change, as well as opportunity. In 1945, there were more than 250,000 jobs in collieries, but by 1989 there were 10,000, and the story continues. In addition, we had immense industrial dereliction as a left-over. In the early 1960s, there were more than 8,000 hectares of disused spoil heaps, 3,000 hectares of disused mineral workings and 7,500 disused, derelict installations. That is still the image that some people hold of Wales—dereliction and despoiled valleys—but times have moved on significantly.

Back in 1935, Thomas Jones wrote in the *New Statesman:*

"What's wrong with Wales? . . . South Wales should be designated as a grant national ruin".

How times change. Would he not be interested to know that the Blaenavon ironworks is designated a world heritage site, along with the pyramids? We have the potential; we need to play to our strengths.

Before 1966, there were only three reclamation schemes for despoiled areas in the whole of Wales. By 1990, thanks to local authorities and the WDA, more than £170 million had been spent on 800 sites covering 17,000 acres. An area the size of a football pitch, every day of every year during this period, was turned back towards its natural state. That may be seen in my area—the Llynfi, Garw and Ogwr valleys have been turned back to their natural state—but we must put something back into those communities to acknowledge that the industries have gone and to provide a vision for the future. We have treated the areas cosmetically; now we must move on and bring jobs and a different vision.

In 1939, a pressure group called Political and Economic Planning proposed closing Merthyr and transporting all the residents down to sunny Monmouthshire, for the good of the residents and the taxpayer. The House, the WDA and the Assembly can suggest better remedies than that. I mention those illustrations because we do not want to dwell only on our history. We have the new image to contend with—for example, a dynamic industry such as adventure activities.

I used to be a lecturer at the Swansea institute. It now runs courses in adventure activity management, water sports and sailing management and golf management—as the Ryder cup comes to Wales. That is the sort of innovation that results from a different image, and from bringing major events to Wales and developing tourism there. We should consider how the past can benefit the future.

An example in my constituency is the Garw valley railway, the "Daffodil Line" . Volunteers united to seek funds, helped by the local authority and other agencies, to put a steam railway back into a cul-de-sac valley—a valley leading nowhere. Until recently, its future led nowhere as well. Now there will be a railway that we hope can be linked with the adventure activity centre at the top of the valley, and with crafts, the work of local painters, cafés and so on.

That is one instance of the vibrancy that we can develop in our communities and put across as the Welsh product. We must dwell partly on our industrial heritage and our culture and partly on a new entrepreneurial vision of not just a great unspoilt landscape, but a centre of interest and activity—adventure activities, and activities for the family.

The importance of tourism has already been mentioned, so I shall not say too much about it. Let me point out, however, that even in Bridgend, where there is a 10-year strategy for tourism development, tourism contributes £119 million a year, supporting 2,500 jobs. As has been said, Wales receives 8 per cent. of UK tourism spending but only 2 per cent. of overseas spending.

Tourism is not one-way traffic; it benefits areas. The conservation of the countryside and parks has been productive. Apparently, 63 per cent. of visitors to the Garw valley country park said that that had influenced their decision to visit the area. There are 750 public rights of way, including the Celtic trail and cycleways, which are likely to attract 200,000 people to south Wales; and there are crafts. There is, for instance, the Welsh Porcelain Company at Maesteg.

Let us look at Wales as a whole, however. Why do tourists go there? They mention certain attributes. A Wales Tourist Board survey carried out a year ago mentioned beautiful scenery, castles, the friendliness of the people, fresh air, a land of legend and mystery, and somewhere to enjoy the great outdoors. But what made people feel let down? What did they feel they had missed at the end of their visits? Apparently, the "legend" aspect, and the experience of a country that is famed for song, music and poetry.

We are failing to capitalise on our strengths. We should go beyond the stereotypes. We should look at what the Irish do with the idea of craic and fun—the idea of a harp in every pub, and an Irish jig band in every pub. Let us play to our strengths. It may seem coy to us and it may not be what happens at our local hostelries, but given the money that can flow from tourism, we need to be bold and imaginative. We are underselling ourselves.

I welcome the additional spending on the Wales Tourist Board and the British Tourist Authority. The BTA should extend more of the benefits from London into the regions. I would welcome ambitious targets, not just for the next two or three years but for the future generally. The "hidden Britain" campaign is helping to spread those benefits across the regions.

The comment

"Wales at present is little more than the highlands of England without a highland line: it is a geographical expression"

was made in 1886. Sometimes it seems that we have not moved much further in terms of tourist development. How can we persuade inbound tourists to go further out into the regions?

I was disappointed to read, on the BTA's very good website, that when it recommended a set itinerary for the UK involving 10 days' travel over 1,100 miles of the UK, tourists spent one day venturing across the border to

[Huw Irranca-Davies]

Welshpool, seeing the gardens and travelling down the Severn. That is not my idea of what Wales is. That does not capitalise on the products and opportunities that we have. I stress to the Secretary of State and to other Ministers that we need to look carefully at how Wales is marketed. The BTA has moved in the right direction, but it needs to move a little further.

The Welsh language is an important issue in that regard. Opposition Members have already said how important it is. We agree that the Welsh language has intrinsic value. It is part of our culture but it also has a value for tourism. I agree that it is what differentiates us. It gives us the authenticity of Wales and the Welsh. It is not spoken widely throughout Wales, but it is significant in certain parts of Wales.

On genealogical resources, we are being beaten again. The Scottish and Irish have easy access if they want to trace their ancestry. We are starting to get there, but we are not quite there: we are playing catch-up. We have gone in the right direction but we should go further to make it easy to access genealogical sources.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's general tone but I am sure that he would not let the opportunity pass without paying tribute to what the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth does to help people from abroad to trace their genealogical records. I am sure that he will find if he goes there that visitors from abroad can find all the information online, including important Welsh Mormon records, from which a lot of people trace their Welsh origins.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. That is right. My point was about the ease of access. The websites are fantastic but they should be easily accessible. They are available, as the Welsh and Scottish websites are. They do a tremendous job. Let us bring them to the forefront so that we can see more of them.

It is rare for poetry to be quoted in the Chamber, but I want to contrast a vision of Wales. R.S. Thomas wrote:

"There is no present in Wales.
And no future;
There is only the past,
Brittle with relics,
Wind-bitten towers and castles
With sham ghosts;
Mouldering quarries and mines;
And an impotent people,
Sick with inbreeding,
Worrying the carcase of an old song."

That has gone. We now need to move onwards with confidence. When the question is asked, "Who will answer for tomorrow?" it is us. Let us put that vision and the mechanisms in place, and let us drive in the tourism and get our fair share for Wales.

5.32 pm

Dr. Hywel Francis (Aberavon): I wish to declare an interest as the chair and trustee of the Paul Robeson Wales Trust.

I welcome the debate for two reasons. First, it gives the House the opportunity to consider the evidence, observations and conclusions of this important Select Committee report. Secondly, it gives hon. Members the opportunity to reflect beyond the report on issues that are critical to Wales in the world.

On the conclusions of the report, hon. Members on both sides of the House have spoken eloquently on many of the issues that were problems and challenges at the time of the inquiry. The welcome arrival of democratic devolution in Wales is already beginning to impact positively on the presence and understanding of Wales on the world stage. The report makes an important contribution to that cause, and I hope that its many constructive conclusions will be taken up both by the Assembly and by Parliament at the earliest opportunity.

I turn to issues and themes that will need to be dealt with if Wales is to have a more central and dynamic role in the world. We need to consider four themes: first, celebrating our cultural diversity, which reminds us of our international roots; secondly, recognising and emphasising our historical and contemporary international role; thirdly, building on the growing positive attitudes towards the Welsh language in Wales and how we portray that internationally; and, finally, strengthening our relationships with Europe.

The Rhondda writer Gwyn Thomas once wrote that we were

"one of the classic lands of emigration".

If we want to look at our motherland, we have to keep turning, for our brothers and sisters are everywhere. I believe that there is another meaning to those words. As Dr. Mashuq Ally, the head of the Commission for Racial Equality in Wales, has said:

"Wales is a commonwealth of communities."

Modern multicultural and multifaith Wales does look around the world as our Wales is worldwide in its origins and we should be proud of that. Again, Gwyn Thomas put it beautifully:

"As you move to the docks"—

in Cardiff—

"you hear the high soft speech of a hundred tongues from Africa and the East, or perhaps from the lips of a child born into the docks, the enchanting mixture of Somerset, Madagascar and Pontllanffraith".

The Commission for Racial Equality in Wales has done much in recent years to make us more aware of our cultural diversity, celebrating rather than fearing it. I hope that the role of the CRE will be enhanced and strengthened in years to come so as to achieve greater social cohesion within Wales and between Wales and the world and make our full contribution to conquering racism and xenophobia at home and abroad.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Will the hon. Gentleman join me in welcoming the fact that the CRE will contribute to the conference next Tuesday on the future of the Welsh language in Wales and the role of our Welsh-speaking communities? I am sure that he also welcomes the way in which the CRE is exploring these issues with Welsh language communities.

Dr. Francis: Indeed I do welcome the role of the CRE in all this work. I know that many of its officers have entered into fruitful discussion with many language groups on this important issue.

Many of us were brought up on a heady diet of Welsh internationalism. I believe that the children's hymn "Draw, draw yn China" was an internationalist hymn not an imperialist one. For us, Elfed's words:

"Da yw caru gwlad ein hunain,

Gwell yw caru'r gread gyfan",

which translate as:

"It is good to love one's country,

It is better to love the whole world",

were a statement of fact, not a political assertion.

The anti-fascist Jack Roberts, known locally as Jack Russia, born in Penrhyndeudraeth, captain in the international brigades and organiser of the national eisteddfod at Caerphilly, and Tom Jones, known throughout Wales as Twm Sbaen, a Franco prisoner from Rhosllanerchrugog and founder of the Wales TUC, are not details of history but the very essence of Welsh history and indeed world history, as is Eunice Stallard, who was born in Ystradgynlais. She collected money for Basque refugee children in the 1930s and was a founder of the Greenham women's peace camp. Emma Goldman, the Russian-American socialist writer, a frequent visitor to my constituency in Briton Ferry and Cwmafan, was given British citizenship by the comradely gesture of marriage by James Coltman, a Glanaman miner from Carmarthenshire.

Wales ignores its proud internationalist history at its peril. There are many lessons to be learned. Many great radical movements—the peace movement, the anti-apartheid movement, the green movement and the trade union movement—have their origins in the distinctive social justice and internationalist, welcoming and tolerant traditions of Wales.

Lembit Öpik: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that the Co-operative movement and Robert Owen's contribution is also important.

Dr. Francis: I apologise for not mentioning Robert Owen and the Co-operative movement. The first society of course was founded in Cwmbach in the Cynon valley in 1864.

When I want to think of Wales at its best, I think of our relationship with Paul Robeson and the causes of peace and justice which he espoused. It is thoroughly appropriate that "Let Paul Robeson sing!", the exhibition currently touring Wales, is funded by the National Assembly and local authorities, and the plans to take it to countries beyond Wales are most welcome. I hope that in time it will come to the Houses of Parliament.

I also think of Gregorio Esteban, who was born in Baracaldo in northern Spain, who taught Spanish through the medium of Welsh in Abercraf's miners' welfare hall, and of Salay Rahman, a founder of the Port Talbot Muslim Welfare Association and the Afan community credit union. Both were proud of their culture and faith, and proud to be Welsh.

I also think of the Welsh Centre for International Affairs, which is in Cardiff's temple of peace. It has for decades played a vital role in communicating Wales and Welsh aspirations to the world, and conversely explaining to Wales important contemporary, global, social, economic and cultural changes. The centre places strong emphasis on world citizenship, international youth exchanges, peace, conquering poverty and racism, and achieving global social justice. Its quiet, educational voice of tolerance and reason needs to be listened to and valued in Wales and beyond. It deserves our full support and we should be proud of its work.

I turn now to how we safeguard, portray and enhance the Welsh language, and how it is perceived internationally in cultural and commercial terms. We should be more confident in explaining how the Welsh language is very much part of modern Wales. The diligent work of bodies such as Cyd, Pont and the Urdd is largely unsung beyond Wales, yet but for their work and that of the Welsh-medium and bilingual pre-school and school movement over the decades, the language would not be as strong as it is today.

There is a danger that that benign, positive work will be eclipsed by other well-meaning and perhaps not so well-meaning forces. I am pleased that Neath Port Talbot county borough council is to welcome Europe's largest youth festival next year, the Urdd Eisteddfod, in my locality, and I am proud to be one of its vice-presidents Locally, nationally and internationally, the event will give great impetus to the Welsh language as a language of the future, and as one that takes its place with equal status alongside other languages in Britain.

I end on a contemporary note: Wales in Europe. Welsh involvement in the European Union has always been positive. It was particularly so in the 1980s, through structural funds in assisting rural, urban and valley communities which experienced enormous economic and traumatic change—climaxing of course with the sad recognition that west Wales and the valleys had achieved objective 1 status.

Two major challenges are before us: the single currency and EU enlargement. Quite simply, the single market needs a single currency. From a Welsh perspective, the case for entry is comprehensively made in the recently published pamphlet "Wales in Europe", which emphasises safer jobs, more foreign trade and investment, and higher standards of living. The single market, the single currency and European enlargement are very much in both the internationalist traditions and the contemporary interests of the Welsh people, in achieving what Paul Robeson called peace, dignity and abundance for all.

5.43 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I intend to focus on the role of the capital city in promoting Wales in the world, particularly its bid for European capital of culture in 2008.

Given the implications for Wales's image in the world, I should, however, first say a few words about the problems that occurred outside Ninian Park in my constituency after last night's second division play-off between Cardiff City and Stoke City. It would be wrong to exaggerate what happened or to tar all the Cardiff City supporters with the same brush. Indeed, problems were created by Stoke fans in the first leg. However, I say to those who were involved in any violence or disturbance that everyone understands the bitter disappointment of last night, following such a magnificent recent run, which was helped by the fantastic support of Cardiff City fans, but if such incidents are repeated, they will begin to threaten all our ambitions to see Cardiff in the premier league—in football and, indeed, in every sense.

[Kevin Brennan]

I draw the House's attention to early-day motion 1177, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan). I thank other hon. Members across the House, from Wales and beyond, who have given it their support. It commends Cardiff's bid to be European capital of culture in 2008. I also wish to draw hon. Members' attention to the fact that the bid document from Cardiff is now available and being circulated. An event will be held here in the House on 21 May to promote the bid to Members, and I ask them to make every effort to attend.

Cardiff's bid for European capital of culture highlights the transformation that has taken place in our capital city in recent years. Billy Connolly's recent programme, which showed his natural reaction to the changes that had taken place since he last visited the city, confirmed their radical nature. The statistics bear that out: the official mid-year estimate of Cardiff's population in 2000 was 327,500, which shows a population growth since 1991 of 9.2 per cent., compared with population growth in Wales as a whole of 1.9 per cent. and in the UK of 3.4 per cent. Given that the 2001 census is expected to confirm that the population of Wales is some 3 million, the metropolitan area of Cardiff hosts half the nation's population. Cardiff is also a cosmopolitan city. It is estimated that 2.3 per cent. of the population is black, 2.8 per cent. Asian and 2 per cent. Chinese or other ethnic group.

The bid is important for the image of Wales for several reasons. For most of its history, Cardiff, as many hon. Members will know, was a relatively small village. It had Roman remains, having been built on a giant mud-pat where three rivers meet the Bristol channel. Greater historians than me will know that towns such as Merthyr, at the time of the 1830 rebel rising, and Newport, at the time of the Chartist rising in 1839, were much more important than Cardiff. It was in the second half of the 19th century, when the population graph for Cardiff was rising at a right angle, that the city grew rapidly. Had that population growth continued, the population of Cardiff today would be 20 million.

It was coal, and the valleys of south Wales, that were responsible for Cardiff's development. Coal was also responsible for the multicultural nature of the modern Cardiff, with all the different languages that are spoken and the influences from across the world, including Somalia and Yemen. Powerful European influences are also at work. One of Cardiff's most famous sons, Roald Dahl, wrote in his book "Boy":

"To the shipbrokers, coal was black gold. My father and his new found friend, Mr. Andersen, understood this very well. It made sense, they told each other, to set up their shipbroking business in one of the greatest coaling ports in Europe. What was it to be? The answer was simple. The greatest coaling port in the world at that time was Cardiff in South Wales. So off to Cardiff they went."

That explains why Cardiff eventually became our capital city in the 20th century. In 1905, Cardiff was designated a city and, in an era of great municipal expansion, some of its civic jewels, such as the city hall, were built. Indeed, the old plans for Cathays park—home of the city hall—show a site reserved for a Welsh parliament, because home rule was a big issue at the end of the 19th century. In 2005, we shall celebrate the centenary of Cardiff becoming a city and I hope that by then it will have been named as the capital of culture for 2008.

In the 20th century, population growth slowed as the coal industry gradually declined. However, Cardiff had established its position as Wales's premier city. That position was cemented with events such as the 1927 FA cup final victory of Cardiff City over Arsenal. That was 75 years ago, almost to the day. Arsenal are playing in the final on Saturday, but not against Cardiff City, sadly.

Like many other British cities, Cardiff suffered in the second world war, but it also opened its arms to the world. As part of the city's bid to be capital of culture in 2008, residents of the Penalun house Jewish retirement home are writing a great Cardiff poem:

"Here in Cardiff we were German.

Back in Germany we were Jews.

Here, though, no one called us names.

Here in Cardiff we were welcomed."

That proud and honourable tradition forms part of the city's bid for 2008.

Cardiff was made the official capital of Wales in 1955, although it had been unofficially recognised as such for many years. Three years later, the Commonwealth games were held there. In the 1970s, the city was most famous for hosting the great rugby matches of that era, which included those involving the famous Welsh side of Barry John and Gareth Edwards, both of whom played for Cardiff rugby club.

There was a renaissance in the city during the 1980s and 1990s, with the redevelopment of Cardiff bay. My predecessor once spoke in the House for two hours and 40 minutes in opposition to the Cardiff bay barrage. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) went as far as to invent an endangered species, the Grangetown barking rat, to try and build opposition to the barrage. He was not successful, and the bay development is now almost complete. It has transformed the area, which was in decline after the coal industry in Wales almost completely disappeared.

In 1999, the Millennium stadium was built for the rugby world cup, and democratic devolution came to Wales. That has meant that Cardiff has become a real capital, perhaps for the first time. The city also hosts the FA cup final.

The cultural and economic renaissance of our capital city is accompanied by a political one, with the realisation of Keir Hardie's vision of home rule, which we now call devolution. However, the city needs to reach out more to the rest of Wales, and to reach out, with Wales, to the rest of the world. That is what today's debate has been about.

Cardiff has not reached out enough in the past. Perhaps its cosmopolitan history means that the city has taken for granted the rest of Wales and the rest of the world. The bid for culture capital status is a way of reaching out, as it is being made on behalf of Wales as a whole, not on the city's behalf alone. It seeks to emphasise Cardiff's links with the rest of Wales, and the cultural achievements of Wales as a whole—north, south, east, west, city and countryside. It is an inclusive bid, which is why it has attracted so much support from Welsh Members of Parliament.

Many of the events planned will be Wales-wide, and will not be restricted to Cardiff. They will include events involving the Pop Factory at Porth in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), who was here earlier, and the Merthyr movie film project.

in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard). Projects from all over Wales will be included in the bid.

Cardiff's bid will emphasise the youthfulness of Cardiff as a capital city in a devolved Wales, as well as the country's European links and cultural values. It will involve co-productions and exchanges with other countries across Europe. The communities of Cardiff and other parts of Wales will be included.

The great Cardiff poem is being compiled in conjunction with, and with the assistance of, the Welsh writers academy. Anyone visiting Cardiff can see the poem as a work in progress in the old library centre, where the bid headquarters is stationed.

The bid will emphasise inclusivity, diversity and multiculturalism. It will emphasise the languages of Wales—Welsh and English, of course, but also the other languages of ethnic minority communities so often heard in Cardiff and other parts of Wales.

Lembit Öpik: I am interested in the concept of inclusivity. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that there is a prospect of building in inclusivity in terms of performing arts events around Wales that feed into the central focus in Cardiff?

Kevin Brennan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. That is very much part of the bid. I commend the bid document to him; it is lengthy, but it contains a passage on that very idea, including events such as the Llangollen international eisteddfod that he mentioned. We need to build on existing cultural events.

The bid will also build on the existing and developing cultural infrastructure in our capital city. One of Cardiff's great features and strengths in terms of quality of life is the richness of its cultural infrastructure. We know about the new millennium centre that is to be built. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) might support expenditure on developing the millennium centre even if he will not support the neighbouring new building of the National Assembly.

Partners in the bid include Cardiff castle, one of Wales's major tourist attractions; the Museum of Welsh Life, in my constituency; Coopers field, which will be developed into a permanent event site for 20,000 participants—the Urdd eisteddfod is being held in Cardiff this year; the Millennium stadium; the Oval basin in the docks, to be renamed the Roald Dahl Plass, in honour of Cardiff's famous resident; the Bay arts studios; the Howard Gardens gallery in the Cardiff School of Art and Design; the Cardiff International Arena; City Hall; the Channel View centre; the Chapter arts centre; Llanover hall; Llandaff cathedral; the New Theatre; the National Museum and Galleries of Wales; the Norwegian Church arts centre; the Sherman theatre; St. David's hall; Techniquest—the hands-on science and technology museum in Cardiff bay; the centres for sports training and competition, including indoor athletics; the Welsh Institute of Sport and the Glamorgan county cricket club school of excellence; the BIG SHED project in the bay; the Cardiff City football club new stadium; and the multicultural arts centre for Wales. I could go on, but I do not have the time. We have a major cultural infrastructure in our capital city, and we can build on it.

Cardiff also has an outstanding track record of hosting major international sporting, cultural and political events, including the European summits, the FA cup, the rugby world cup and, indeed, the Labour party spring conference. *[Interruption.]* The Liberal Democrats have also held their conference in Cardiff.

The use of new technologies will also be part of the bid. It will be used as a transforming experience for Cardiff and for Wales, to try and change the perception of Wales in the world, raise its status and make people more aware of what modern Wales is all about. When Glasgow was European capital of culture, we saw the impact that can have on the image of a city and a country.

I should like to finish by quoting a poet I know quite well, Gwyneth Lewis, who lives in Cardiff:

"The past we inherit, the future we build."

Cardiff's bid to be European capital of culture in 2008 is an important part of building the future of Wales in the world.

5.58 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): We have had a remarkable debate, ranging from Gwyneth Lewis—and Estonia—to R.S. Thomas—and Estonia—to Gwyn Thomas—and Estonia. We even had a suggestion from the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk), who is fairly new to Welsh debates, of an entrepreneurial deficit in Wales. As he is new, perhaps I should remind him of the story of what happened when Keith Joseph addressed a Swansea business club. He said that there was not an enterprise culture in Wales—that there was not even a Welsh word for entrepreneur. Of course, a heckler asked, "What is the English word for entrepreneur?"

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) and his Select Committee on the report, which is wide-ranging, like our debate today, the theme of which has been the unknown image of Wales. The product is not well known outside Wales, but I take the wise remark of my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) that while image and product identification must be considered, quality is of greater importance. We may have the greatest tourism marketing, but if our restaurants and hotels are poor, the quality of our product will not be worth having. That said, the theme was essentially the lack of product identification and the adverse effects on tourism and inward investment, to which reference is made in paragraphs 9 and 27 of the report.

I found much of what was said perhaps too defeatist. We have an unfortunate Welsh trait of folding our arms and saying, "It's all too difficult", or "The Irish are much more lucky." It is rather like the Llanelli-Leicester game last week, when the ball hovered and twice banged the post. We say, "That's Wales's fate. It always happens to us."

Incidentally, I agree wholly with what my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) said about the millennium bid. My city, Swansea, is wholly in favour of that bid, but the challenge for Cardiff is to reach out to other parts of Wales. I recall that the people of Cardiff did not vote for devolution. Perhaps this is a debate for another day, but, in my judgment, the distance between Cardiff and other parts of Wales—the centralisation—is still proceeding apace. Whether measured by office rents, by house prices or by availability and location decisions, that is clearly a major problem for Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Donald Anderson: No, I must move on.

[Donald Anderson]

Perhaps I can quickly illustrate the nature of the problem. When I was a student in France, an elderly lady from the United States asked me where I was from. I said, "Wales", to which she replied by asking, "Is that anywhere near Stratford?" That gives some indication of the problem.

I should like to say a little about the US. The hon. Member for Town hill and Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) mentioned an advert that he saw in New York. He will tell me if I am wrong, but it said something like, "Follow in your father's and your grandfather's footsteps." Well, when we consider the Irish in America, we may say that 40 million Americans look back to an Irish heritage, but let us not forget the strengths of Wales in the US. Let us analyse the foundations on which we can build not just in genealogy but in theme holidays and so on.

I stand to be corrected by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) about our historical roots, but between a third and a half of the signatories of the declaration of independence were of Welsh extraction. Thomas Jefferson's father was a north Walian and called Snowdonia his home. As for the professions, some of the most eminent lawyers in US history were of Welsh origin, from Chief Justice Marshall—the seminal man in federalism—to Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, a Welsh speaker, who was only narrowly defeated by Woodrow Wilson in the 1916 presidential election.

Others with a Welsh background include Frank Lloyd Wright, the great architect of Chicago, and John L. Lewis, the great trade union leader—and in terms of professional competence, I remind the House that Al Capone's accountant, a Mr. Humphreys, was from Breconshire.

Mr. Llwyd: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Donald Anderson: Yes of course—if the hon. Gentleman wants to mention Al Capone.

Mr. Llwyd: I do not want to risk the right hon. Gentleman's wrath, but a former right hon. Member for Caernarfon was closely related to the said gentleman, Murray the Hump. I do not know whether that informs the debate—it probably does not.

Donald Anderson: As for the regional impact, which we have to target, Scranton and Walkes-Barr were bastions of Welsh culture in the 19th century. In Philadelphia, most of the place names on the mainline railway are related to Wales. Those in the old south were not of English background as they claimed, but mainly of Celtic background. Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy, was a Welsh American, as, perhaps rather more importantly, was Jack Daniel, who founded the whiskey firm in Tennessee.

As for culture, the Irish may have their nostalgic and schmaltzy films with John Wayne, but John Ford's "How Green Was My Valley" is a hymn of praise to Welsh working-class solidarity and values. Our stars today range from Richard Burton and Anthony Hopkins to Catherine Zeta Jones and Ioan Gruffydd, who has a cult following because of "Hornblower". I was reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) that Charlotte Church is billed as an English singer; there is a challenge for us.

In terms of cultural matters, President Carter came to Swansea on the Dylan Thomas trail. With regard to male voice choirs, the Swansea male choir, of which I have the honour to be president, has been in Chicago and elsewhere in Illinois in the past 12 months. The Morriston Orpheus choir from my constituency has sung not only on two occasions in the Sydney opera house but September in Carnegie hall, after 11 September. Why cannot we make visits by Welsh choirs opportunities for disseminating Welsh tourist literature? Why do we not send key historians to the United States—to targeted areas, such as Pittsburgh, parts of Chicago and parts of the south—to remind people there of the links with Wales? The distinguished Welsh historian, Professor Peter Stead, who happens to be a good personal friend, told me that he walked into a library in Wisconsin fairly recently and the first book that he saw was "Wisconsin and the Welsh". I should declare an interest, as he is a friend, but why do we not send such people on lecture tours around the United States?

Hywel Williams *rose—*

Donald Anderson: I have pledged to be brief.

Such opportunities should be used. My understanding is that, for instance, the opportunity of the Morriston Orpheus choir's visit to New York was not exploited. That was a public relations failing. It is a wonderful choir, which sang very well, but it was not adequately publicised; certainly, the Welsh element was not. We have a potential platform to exploit if we target it.

I have mentioned the United States, but I am sure that I could perform a similar exercise—I shall not do so, as colleagues will be pleased to hear—for the Welsh in Australia. We could try to build on our relationships there. I wonder whether we have been imaginative enough in considering those Welsh linkages. Having made a bid to send a friend of mine around the United States, I should not pursue that matter.

Hywel Williams *rose—*

Donald Anderson: I have promised to be brief.

On foreign diplomatic representation, I met a distinguished ambassador this morning from a Latin American country, and I tried this question on him: "What is your image, and your people's image, of Wales?" This distinguished ambassador—who had also been a foreign minister—said, "It is extremely hazy. My country, which is a major soccer country, thinks of the Welsh soccer team." Otherwise, he said that all his countrymen would think of Richard Burton as an English star. We have a problem of overcoming that image. Image can be helpful in terms of tourism and the attraction of industry. With regard to industry, however, we have been doing more in terms of using Welsh firms to act as missionaries for Wales.

To move away from the parochialism that sometimes exists in Wales—the valleys complex is the worst sort—cross-fertilisation in terms of the civil service was a valuable recommendation of the Committee. However, a quota of embassies overseas that should have people who have served in the Assembly was asking a little too much. It was, at least, something worth striving for—an impossible ideal, as Niebuhr said, which we should strive for nevertheless.

On honorary consuls—again, I am delighted that the Committee wrote around to embassies—I have, in little ways, urged several key ambassadors to look for local business men, not just in Cardiff but perhaps in Town hill, who would be very happy to be honorary consuls. Those honorary consulships might fructify into full consular positions, and that would improve relations.

The ambassador to whom I spoke this morning had never been to Wales and was looking forward to going there. We must be far more proactive in ensuring that most of the major countries at least have an honorary consul in Wales. We should also ensure that we use the instruments that we have—the Welsh diaspora and contacts in the American and Japanese firms in Wales—so that, when people ask us where we are from and we say Wales, we are not asked whether it is close to Stratford.

We face enormous problems with our profile and product identification, but we have a good product and we should not be defeatist about it. We should look to our strengths and to every way in which we can maximise the recognition factor for Wales. We should be imaginative, and each one of us should be ready to bang the drum for Wales.

6.11 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): I welcome the Select Committee report "Wales in the World". It is honest and recognises that Wales has some way to go to establish itself at the forefront of people's thinking and consciousness abroad. I will spare people a rerun of the Charlotte Church story—we have probably heard enough about it—but it illustrates a point.

The fact that people in the wider world do not identify a product, service or even an individual as being predominantly Welsh does not mean that Wales is not playing a major role in the world economy. My constituency of Alyn and Deeside and much of north-east Wales are heavily dependent on manufacturing for their employment and well-being. As well as many small and medium-sized manufacturers, we have several large players, including Toyota, Corus and Airbus to name but three. Those companies export products across the world and they are at the forefront of value-added manufacturing.

Those companies are not considered to be Welsh. Indeed, of the three that I have mentioned one is Japanese, one is Anglo-Dutch and Airbus is a European partnership. Airbus illustrates a point. Its factory was previously known as BAE Systems and, despite the fact that it is in Wales, it was known as BAE Systems Chester. Thankfully, that has now changed.

The three companies have chosen to locate in Wales. More important, they have decided to stay and invest in Wales because of the quality of the products that are manufactured. All three operate in fiercely competitive markets, and that point applies to established companies as well as to new entrants. Airbus's achievement in coming from a standing start to compete with established giants, such as Boeing, is testament to its success, a success that many so-called experts said would be impossible to achieve. Its growing market share and order book for all sizes and types of passenger airliner shows that Europe and, importantly, Wales can succeed and compete whatever the challenge may be.

The introduction of the A380—the so-called super jumbo that will be the world's largest passenger airliner—will cement Airbus's position as a world leader in its market. That seemed impossible only a few years ago when the Boeing 747 was considered to be the only large passenger aircraft.

The success of the plant at Broughton has been possible only because of Airbus's sizeable commitment. Indeed, the new hangar in which the wings for the A380 will be built is under construction. It is the largest commercial building project in the UK, and Airbus is spending more than £1 million a week on it. The completed building, which will be open in May 2003, will contain more than 14,000 tonnes of steel all produced and supplied by Corus. The building will have more than 1 million sq ft of floor space. It is a mammoth project, and a great achievement for Britain and Wales. However, it will be the work inside the building that will secure the position of Airbus and the jobs of thousands of people. The quality of that work must be the best, and I am confident that that will be achieved through the use of cutting-edge technology at the plant. We must maintain our intellectual property in that respect. The quality will also be achieved because of the skills of the work force at Broughton and, indeed, throughout north-east Wales.

Maintaining and enhancing the skills base is vital if we are to retain manufacturing jobs. That applies throughout Wales. In addition, we want to attract new inward investors to Wales. That is a big challenge for us, just as it is for Britain as a whole. Even in times of economic growth and low unemployment, there is a danger of eroding the skills base.

All hon. Members can give examples of manufacturing jobs in our constituencies which have been lost and replaced with jobs in the service sector or in more basic assembly operations. I am not denigrating those jobs, and they do provide employment but, as several hon. Members said, such jobs are readily exported to lower cost producers in eastern Europe or the developing world. That will always be a danger if we lack the value-added element and do not have real intellectual property. Those jobs can always be uprooted and transported elsewhere, and Wales has suffered as much, if not more, than any other part of Britain in that respect.

When my predecessor, now Lord Jones, made his maiden speech in the House, he spoke of the importance of the textile industry to what was then Flint, East and the almost total reliance on the steel industry for employment in the area. That pattern has changed dramatically since the 1970s, however. There has been a painful and damaging period of change throughout Wales, but new industries and employers have appeared. The change has not been seamless and it has been far from smooth.

There was massive unemployment throughout Wales in the 1980s. Our traditional employers did not so much go into decline as collapse. Large areas of Wales are still recovering from that dark period and we still have major issues to address, especially with regard to reskilling and re-equipping some of those people who lost their jobs and who need to re-enter the job market. North-east Wales has probably been more fortunate in rebuilding after that period than some other areas. The geography of the area has helped. We have a good road network and, following an announcement by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, I am glad to note that it will get even better in the near future.

Our proximity to north-west England has been especially important, in terms of both the supply chain and the interchange of employees and skills. Many of my

[Mark Tami]

constituents work in manufacturing companies across the border, such as Vauxhall at Ellesmere Port. Equally, many people from those areas come to Wales to work. So the solution to securing future employment and growth in north-east Wales is not simply a matter for Wales. We have to build on our successes; and look to the future, not the past. In north-east Wales we have a genuine possibility of establishing the premier location in Britain for quality manufacturing jobs. If we are to meet that potential, we need to continue to provide the right environment both for existing businesses, big and small, and for new inward investors.

I have spoken in the House of my disappointment at the decision of the Welsh Assembly not to grant permission to extend the Deeside industrial park. That would have created thousands of good quality jobs for Wales as a whole. North-east Wales therefore faces a challenge in finding alternative areas to develop, but I am sure that we will do so. The demand is there, and we must meet it.

North-east Wales has much to offer and a good story to tell, but companies will continue to invest in Wales only if we make them aware of the opportunities and benefits there. Importantly, politicians have a major job to do in that respect. We have to paint a positive picture of Wales. We must not denigrate it or portray it as a place of Victorian-era misery and depression. It is not like that, and we have a positive story to tell. We want people to come to Wales, to invest their money, to help to build our economy and to secure the long-term future for the people of Wales.

6.20 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I apologise for not being here for the early part of the debate. I was a member of the Select Committee when it undertook this inquiry, but I am no longer a member.

This has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate. I was impressed by the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) who made yet another good speech, using his expertise in tourism. He mentioned the success in achieving world heritage status for Blaenavon, which shows how much collaboration there has been between the local authorities of Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire. When that project is developed, it will be a great success.

I was interested in the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis). He will know that I have strong family connections with his constituency and in nearby Neath. He made important points, using his extensive historical knowledge. I also commend my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) for his comments. I assure him that those people who support culture will support Cardiff's bid to be the European city of culture. That decision will be made soon, and I hope that we can make whatever representations are necessary to ensure that Cardiff is successful.

The Select Committee received evidence from significant organisations that are working hard to promote Wales abroad, including the Welsh Development Agency, the Wales Tourist Board and Wales Trade International. In the short time that I have to speak, I want to stress the importance of promoting Wales abroad and of promoting the interests of Monmouthshire.

Monmouthshire is part of Wales. I know that there has been debate about that in the past, and I get a few letters questioning the fact, but I assure my constituents and all Members of the House that Monmouthshire is most certainly part of Wales. I am particularly proud to be a Welsh Member of Parliament representing a Welsh constituency, although I was brought up in the fine Welsh community here in London. One of the ambassadors for Wales from my little Welsh community is our latest operatic dame, Anne Evans, who was a member of our little chapel, capel y Borough, just a few miles away in Southwark.

I should like to focus on three aspects of the Select Committee's report. The first is tourism. I represent an area of Monmouthshire which is outstandingly beautiful and includes world-famous sites such as the Wye valley and Tintern abbey. It attracts visitors from all over the world. I wonder sometimes whether they come to the Wye valley but go no further into Wales. I sincerely want people coming from Heathrow, Gatwick or Birmingham airports to use Monmouthshire as an entrance to Wales.

I was particularly delighted to see in the Wales Tourist Board's promotional literature, which goes to other countries, a 10-day tour starting in Monmouthshire, but when I went into the tourist office in Monmouthshire, no such literature was available because the tour is only promoted abroad. I hope that such literature can be made available within Monmouthshire itself.

Recently, Monmouthshire has been severely hit by foot and mouth. In the Easter holiday and the few weeks since then, there has been a revitalisation of rural tourism in Monmouthshire. I was delighted to spend time over Easter in a beautiful part of my constituency, the Llanthony valley, which I think is unknown in England, in the world and in Wales. It goes from the village of Llanfihangel Crucorney, past Llanthony priory, towards Capel-y-Fin and over to Hay. Capel-y-Fin is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams), and has the smallest polling station in the country.

I hope that hon. Members will be able to see the amusing video that was filmed, and recently launched, in Monmouthshire, "Arthur's Dyke", which depicts the walk along Offa's dyke. There are beautiful locations in Wales, so the film industry can invest there. We have a tremendous international film school in the university of Wales college just outside Monmouthshire at Newport. I give credit to everyone who campaigned to get Newport city status, which will benefit Newport, south-east Wales and Monmouthshire.

The Select Committee took evidence from Wales Trade International and the Welsh Development Agency, and realised the significance of promoting Wales abroad. I have a particular interest in links between Wales and Japan. I am delighted that Wales has an honorary Japanese consul and that events in the Japan-UK 2001–02 festival were held in Monmouthshire at the Monmouth Boys school and the superb but largely unknown Nimbus concert hall, which is the only quality concert hall between Birmingham and Cardiff. I wish that more people in Wales knew about it. Japan has done a tremendous amount to help Wales. I would hate to think of the state of the Welsh economy had it not been for Japanese investment in the 1980s. There are strong links between the two countries. I was delighted that the former Japanese

ambassador, Mr. Hayashi, made a memorable visit to Monmouth a couple of years ago; I trust that it established good links between Monmouth and Japan.

I have visited companies in the past couple of years that have developed a world reputation for their products. Last Friday, I went to the Mitel telecommunications factory. I was impressed by new developments in information technology that could be of great benefit in education and health care, including a remote district nurse service which would be particularly useful in rural areas. Television and interactive IT can be used to monitor old people and others in isolated areas. That would be a tremendous investment, and I hope that Mitel can trial its work in Wales.

I have also visited Nimbus, which is involved in advanced technology and makes CD machines that are exported across the world. Fairfield-Mabey manufactures bridge girders which are exported to developing countries across the world; it works with the Department for International Development to try to get infrastructure investment into other countries, which is to its credit. Ocean Resource develops installations for the petro-chemical industry; and the Cambian Group received the Queen's award for export achievement a couple of years ago—I was delighted to attend the ceremony.

We can also promote Monmouthshire as a sporting venue. I am sure that we all share delight in winning the bid to host the Ryder cup at the Celtic Manor, and give credit to Sir Terry Matthews, Tony Lewis and everyone else who worked hard on the bid on their tremendous achievement. One or two of the holes on the Ryder cup course are in Monmouthshire; when it is expanded, I hope that there will be more. Monmouthshire has other world-famous sporting facilities. We have two of the finest salmon rivers in the world, the Usk and the Wye, and have outstanding cultural traditions.

We want to attract people from across the world to Monmouthshire so that they can use it as a gateway into Wales. However, I want Monmouthshire and all its assets to be enjoyed by the people of Wales. I hope that visitors will appreciate it as they do the north-east and north-west of Wales. We can do more to promote our own areas. It was a great pleasure to serve on the Select Committee, and I commend its recommendations to the House.

6.29 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): It is a pleasure to wind up the debate on behalf of the official Opposition. Not many Conservative Members are here, for reasons that are well known to the House—some important elections are going on around the country, at least in England. I do not know what excuse the many missing Welsh Labour Members have, but it is a pleasure to see those who are here, and I congratulate them on having turned up and taken part.

We have heard no fewer than 14 Back-Bench speeches, all of which made an important contribution. Many debates become repetitive, but on this occasion each speech has added something new to the debate, and it has been a privilege to listen to it.

The Secretary of State opened the debate by making several important points, one or two of which I should like to add to. He talked about the benefits of the European Union to Wales. We should bear it in mind that one of the problems involved in the money that comes from Europe is that it is no more than recycled money from the very few net contributors to the European Union, of which this country is one. We should not get too excited about what Europe may be doing for Wales. The Secretary of State mentioned that money in the context of objective 1 arrangements. As he will be aware, the report points to problems with delays in objective 1 payments. The Welsh European Funding Office, an executive agency of the National Assembly, is responsible for such payments. Clearly, members of the Committee believe that that issue should be urgently addressed.

The Secretary of State spoke about Wales with obvious pride and stressed what a beautiful country it is. In describing the importance of tourism, he explained why Wales has not been able to promote itself throughout the world as have England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and, indeed, the Republic. His comments about the problems faced by Wales were useful and gave a good background to the subject, although that does not mean to say that we should let the matter rest there.

The shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), made several practical points. At times he was somewhat controversial, which is not unusual for him. In discussing the cost of the Assembly building, he suggested that the money might have been better spent on some of the more important functions of government in Wales.

My hon. Friend also covered matters relating to tourism, such as people's ability nowadays to travel abroad very cheaply. It sometimes costs more to drive to and park at the airport than to fly to certain elegant settings in Europe and beyond. That problem should not be underestimated. I speak as an Englishman—I say that before anyone else can—but I have spent many weeks and months travelling Wales and have enjoyed many holidays there. It has recently become obvious to me that fewer people are doing that because it is so easy and cheap to travel abroad. My hon. Friend put his finger on an important point and, characteristically, suggested one or two ways in which it might be addressed—for example, by improving airports.

My hon. Friend touched on the problem of ITV Digital, which has unfortunately hit Wales very hard. I want to return to that in a few minutes.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), who chairs the Welsh Affairs Select Committee, gave a comprehensive and useful outline of the report. It was interesting to hear about the number and quality of the people he invited to give evidence, one or two of whom, if they had turned up, would have attracted a record attendance at the Committee. It is sad that that did not happen. He also listed several people who have Welsh ancestry, and pointed out that many people have Welsh ancestry but do not recognise it. That was an important point. He also mentioned several things that are associated with Wales. Again, it is perhaps unfortunate that that is not fully recognised.

I like and admire the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) a great deal. As ever, he made an entertaining speech full of good points. He mentioned the aerospace industry, which several other hon. Members discussed. It is also important to my constituency of Tewkesbury, where several aerospace jobs have been lost. There have been many aerospace mergers,

[Mr. Laurence Robertson]

but there are also many opportunities. It is therefore important for the United Kingdom, especially Wales, to grasp them.

It is important for aerospace companies in this country to work on a level playing field. We hear so much about the level playing field for agriculture, but it is no less vital for aerospace. We must ensure that our competitors do not receive benefits from their Governments that the Government do not give ours. I am asking not for handouts to aerospace companies—far from it—but for them not to be disadvantaged when competing with companies abroad.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be helpful if Ministers agreed with Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister, on the aerospace industry? He was present at the formal launch of the aerospace group for professional and business people directly related to aerospace in Wales.

Mr. Robertson: Yes. I am sure that the Minister will respond to that point. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire talked a great deal about his constituency as well as Estonia. I am sure that he will not be described as the hon. Member for Estonia for long after today.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) spoke about Wales's wider role in human rights. She made an extremely interesting and important contribution.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd)—I hope that I have pronounced it correctly—[HON. MEMBERS: "Well done."] Since serving on a Standing Committee with the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), I have been practising pronouncing some Welsh names. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy spoke about tourism and the need to market Wales better. That was a recurring theme of the debate.

The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) spoke about the importance of perception and stressed the amount that Wales has to offer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) spoke about Wales positively, but he outlined several matters on which we need to concentrate, including the need for greater research funding and capability, which one or two other hon. Members also mentioned. He referred to Wales's low profile in the business world, but he also mentioned the Millennium stadium, which adds credibility and brings recognition to Wales. That is extremely positive.

My hon. Friend spoke about entrepreneurial problems: "entrepreneurial" is difficult to pronounce and I understand why the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) suggested that it was not an English or a Welsh word. My hon. Friend also talked about the low rate of start-ups. There is a need in Wales and throughout the United Kingdom to stop standing in the way of small businesses and to encourage them as best we can.

The hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) mentioned involving more politicians in spreading the news about Wales throughout the world and using the many celebrities that Wales can boast. He made an extremely important point about his regret at the running down of Wales, and also about—I hesitate to use the term—racist or strongly nationalist remarks. Perhaps he felt that they were damaging. He drew support from all sides about that. It is a problem in most countries, but it does not help Wales and he was right to draw attention to it.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) discussed secondments from business to promote Wales abroad and made many other detailed points. The hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) made a lively speech that reminded me of his excellent maiden speech, in which he broke with convention by being controversial and party political as well as entertaining. Whenever he is on his feet in the Chamber, I shall do my best to listen to the important points that he makes. He stressed how important it is to remember that we are here not only as MPs from Wales, England, Northern Ireland or Scotland, but as Members of the United Kingdom Parliament, and that we should do all that we can to promote the United Kingdom as a whole as well as promoting all its parts.

The hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) made some important points about Welsh history. As someone who is interested in history, I believe that it can make the present and the future come alive, and I found his remarks most refreshing. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) rightly condemned the hooligans at the football match last night. He also talked about Cardiff's bid to become the European capital of culture in 2008. While hon. Members from different areas might have conflicting interests in relation to which city achieves that title, I certainly wish Cardiff well.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, East reminded us, in a characteristically interesting speech, of Welsh stars, and of famous and important people, whom we really should use more, as has been suggested.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) spoke about the importance of the aerospace industry and the Airbus. He also mentioned the textile industry, about which I, too, have some concerns, having worked in it for many years, in north Wales and elsewhere.

Last, but not least, the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) spoke about the attractiveness of his area—which he insists is Welsh—and about the importance of Japanese investment in Wales.

Mr. Edwards: Knowing the hon. Gentleman's interest in horse racing, I was delighted to welcome him to Chepstow race course. I know that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) has also attended. Does he agree that Chepstow is not only the capital race course of Wales but one of the finest in Britain?

Mr. Robertson: I certainly agree. I understand that there are plans to build another race course in Wales. If that goes ahead, I wish it luck. It is always a privilege to visit Chepstow race course, even though I usually—not always—come away a lot poorer, but, in another way, much richer for the experience of having been there.

It is important to recognise the investment made not only by the Japanese but by the Americans. That kind of investment adds to the international flavour that we all want to see in Wales. I was rather disturbed to discover the extent of the decline of inward investment in Wales—I was not aware of the extent of it until I researched this

debate. The levels used to be a lot higher than they are now. They are still impressive when compared with the population size, but it is a matter that we need to address.

We also need to address the problems of agriculture, which is also in decline. All these things declining is not very good. As the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) pointed out in an intervention, it is important that we put out good-news stories about Wales. By way of an analogy, I take a great interest in Ethiopia. The ambassador for Ethiopia always tells me how important it is for his country to get the right image across. Ethiopia is not just about desperate people suffering starvation and disease; that is not the sum total of the country. He feels that it is important to get across the right image for his country, and it is important to do the same for Wales.

We need to address the problems of agriculture. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley was right to say that there should be a public inquiry into foot and mouth disease, which was as devastating for Wales as it was for so many other areas. It is also important that farmers and others working in agriculture should be allowed to diversify. We often find, however, that they are blocked from doing so by the rules of planning. I am sure that that applies throughout the United Kingdom, and it is another issue that needs to be addressed.

I would like to make many more points, but time is against me. This has been a very interesting debate, and I shall finish by echoing the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley, who suggested that, having concluded this debate, we should not just go away and forget about what has been said. Let us use many of the points that have been raised on both sides of the House for the benefit of Wales.

6.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): We have had a wide-ranging and comprehensive debate on Wales in the world, covering the report and a significant range of recent achievements. The debate has been of a high standard, which again proves that we have a good story to tell about Wales. That is a warning to the whingers and knockers to stop talking Wales down. We should see the Severn bridge as a gateway to markets for Welsh goods, not a drawbridge to be pulled up, shutting out the rest of the world.

"Wales for the Welsh" is a slogan that bears deep menace for all of us in the House. It is important for Members of all parties to confront that evil, because it will not help Wales and Wales in the world, and we know what will happen if we go down the road of challenging who is and who is not Welsh. Who decides who is Welsh?

We all know what happens when a country thinks that the only issue to be tackled is who fits in ethnically and who does not. It starts with people saying, "If you can't speak Welsh, you're not Welsh." Then comes, "If your grandparents weren't born in Wales, you're not Welsh." It ends with, "If you're not white, you're not Welsh." Those are the dangers. Our parents' generation took up arms against those who advocated a new dark age in Europe. They defeated them; we must ensure that we defeat such people in this generation.

We can look back with satisfaction on the fact that our own Welsh Development Agency first spread the message that Wales is a great place to grow a business and a great place to come and invest. The agency's success over the past quarter of a century is shown by the fact that it became the template for the regional development agencies that followed. Indeed, the WDA has opened up new horizons for Welsh business and the Welsh economy.

Furthermore, in Wales Trade International we have an organisation with an ambitious programme of trade missions for the coming year. I was proud and pleased to meet its delegation in the Czech Republic in March. The entrepreneurial spirit of the small firms that took part encouraged me, and I can tell the House of some successes. Mr. John Wyn Williams, chairman of Vaynol Estates in Bangor, said that the visit was a great success for his organisation, resulting in five contacts. Terry Gorman, of Swansea-based HPA Property, which specialises in repairing and maintaining glass structures, had 15 meetings. Four companies that he met want to establish partnerships, while another wanted prices immediately for work to be carried out.

Lyn Powell, from RPS Chapman Warren, a Cardiff-based planning and environment consultancy, has been asked by the Brno city authorities to submit plans to relocate the central railway station and redevelop the site. Suzanne Wilkinson, from Invest E in Welshpool, was immediately asked for quotes for her software products by a non-governmental agency involved in waste management. The visit was a success and I pay tribute to all who took part. I was impressed, too, by my welcome in north Bohemia and, in particular, in south Bohemia, when I visited a small town called Pisek. Tucked away in the local museum was a display of art by Welsh artists.

Wales can be proud of its tourism industry and the bodies that work hard to promote Wales as a tourist destination. The British Tourist Authority has nine core campaigns running at the moment. They were all developed in consultation with the Wales Tourist Board and they feature considerable Welsh content. Everyone in Wales feels pride when they see the imaginative WTB advertising campaign promoting Wales—the big country.

Those campaigns capitalise on Wales's core strengths of being a country that inspires and that is welcoming and passionate. We have a rich heritage of poetry, song, legend and mystery as well as wonderful and dramatic countryside. We also have a rich industrial heritage. Let us not forget that we spearheaded the industrial revolution, and that Welsh coal and iron are the two products that changed the world in the 19th century.

Wales can be rightly proud of its achievements in developing creative industries, which a number of colleagues mentioned. Now we seek to make an impression on the world through high-tech companies, the expansion of information technology and the creative and performing arts. We can and do attract high-tech companies involved in research and development. When considering where to locate its European headquarters and its research and development facility, General Dynamics received a consultant's report, which was, it told me, completed with apparent academic rigour. It strongly advised General Dynamics against coming to Wales. Following a little prompting from me and from others, the company located itself in Oakdale in my constituency in the Welsh valleys. Only this morning, the human resources director told me that it had had no problem in recruiting highly skilled, high-quality staff in Wales. It had not had to headhunt; it had used job fairs and other

[Mr. Don Touhig]

conventional means of attracting a work force, and had secured people with the right qualifications and the right chemistry for the company.

General Dynamics, incidentally, is now forging ahead with a major research and development initiative, in partnership with the university of Wales in Cardiff.

Last autumn I visited Cyfle in Cardiff bay. Cyfle is a company engaged in training for the film, television and media industry, and, thankfully, is well supported by S4C. I also visited the International Film School at Newport, where it was brought home to me how important the film and television industry is to Wales. Those two centres support and nurture the creative and communications industries in Wales—industries that employ many people through the three television networks we have in Wales, and will be important to Wales in this 21st century.

Our communities, too, benefit from Wales's greater capacity to be outward-looking. They benefit from twinning arrangements, for instance. My own children attended a comprehensive school that was twinned with a school in Germany, and my constituency and many others have twinning links with European towns. Blaenavon, in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, is twinned with one of the world's best wine-producing areas, in Bordeaux. I commend it to Members.

All these experiences serve to broaden the horizons of our people, and to boost their confidence in their ability to handle what is different and then use that to improve their quality of life and that of their families. It is improving the quality of life and increasing our people's prosperity that bring us all to the House of Commons.

The world is our market, culturally and economically. Wales has seen enormous changes in its economic fortunes in the past few years. The strong economic policies introduced by this Government have sustained us well, even in the tragic and awful aftermath of 11 September. We have one of the strongest and most robust economies in the western world. Our economy is growing at a rate of 2.25 per cent. a year, faster than the economy of any other G7 country. There is strong consumer demand, which I see when I travel around Wales, and our unemployment is at its lowest for 27 years. That is a remarkable achievement.

Mr. Evans: The Minister mentions unemployment. Will he and the Secretary of State work with the Assembly and the WDA to ensure that Pembrokeshire receives inward investment following the collapse of ITV Digital?

Mr. Touhig: The hon. Gentleman can be assured that that will happen. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had discussions with fellow Cabinet Ministers and other members of the Government, with Members of the Assembly and with others to try to overcome the awful problems now being faced in that part of the world.

We heard speeches from my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Caton), the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk), my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane), the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams), my hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) and for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan), my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), my hon. Friends the Members for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) and, of course, the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson).

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) made his usual robust contribution, but I thought it negative at first. He rose at 1.47 pm, and it was 2.2 pm before he said anything positive, when he admitted that Wales was a jewel. He went on to make some important points about regional airports. My colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will soon publish reports on their investigation of the valley and how we can develop regional airports across the United Kingdom and in Wales in particular. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned Atlantic college, which makes an important contribution to education in Wales. I can tell him that Education and Learning Wales has discretion to fund support for scholarships.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South has done a superb job in leading the Welsh Affairs Committee, which produced the report that prompted this debate. He spoke about the problems we experience as a result of stereotyped perceptions of Wales and its people, and helpfully suggested answers to the questions posed by the report. We are indebted to him and his Committee for an excellent job.

My hon. Friend mentioned the importance of exchanges between staff working in the Assembly and Government agencies with those working in our embassies and agencies abroad. That is encouraged by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and a number of colleagues who work in the Assembly are currently on secondment in Brussels. My hon. Friend also mentioned the celebration of St. David's day. The FCO encourages all our embassies to organise events celebrating our national saint.

My hon. Friend referred in particular to the British Tourist Authority's efforts and involvement. The three-year funding agreement with the BTA and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport includes a target for increasing the proportion of additional spend that the BTA delivers through visits outside London.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire was right to stress the importance of selling Wales. He pointed out the successes that other countries have had in promoting their identity, including Estonia. He made some good points about promoting Wales through the performing arts. I hope that, when it is completed, the millennium centre will be a focus for that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley was right to remind us of Wales's important contribution to internationalism. She also reminded us of her childhood and how important it is that we educate ourselves about other countries. That breaks down barriers and fears.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy made a number of important points about ensuring that Wales is promoted as a tourist destination. Recently, I had a meeting with the Wales Tourist Board, and I have offered the use of the House to promote Wales as a tourist destination.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the awful problems that foot and mouth caused the tourism industry and the whole of Wales. Initial indications are that we are overcoming those problems and that tourists are returning. In the next few days, I will write to him about a number of other matters that he raised.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned that the Secretary of State and I have made just one trade mission in 22 months. That is true. Our visit to the Czech Republic was a success. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may laugh but companies in his part of the world have benefited from that trade mission. We should not knock that. It is good for Wales and for Welsh business. The Secretary of State has also visited the Republic of Ireland, Brussels and Spain. He has been very active in that regard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower made an important point about the perception of Wales overseas. The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford made a thoughtful contribution, which those on the Conservative Front Bench may benefit from reading. It was useful and important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd highlighted the importance of the profile of Wales in north America. As we all know, north America was discovered by a Welshman. He spoke of the importance of allowing the language not to divide us, but to unite us. The hon. Member for Caernarfon was right to say that we must speak up for Wales at all times. He referred to the importance of training in tourism. We must ensure that we promote that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore was right to say that we must seek to change people's perception of Wales, a point also made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon, who reminded us of the strong links between Paul Robeson and Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West referred to Cardiff's bid to become the European city of culture. We all wish the city every success in that. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East reminded us of the many famous people who have had links with Wales. It was good that he did that. My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside pointed out the importance of north-east Wales as a major area of manufacturing, where companies can meet all the problems that the economy faces. My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth brought his knowledge of the Committee's work to bear and said how important it was that we promote Wales abroad.

As I have said, we have heard many important contributions. It has been a very good debate. It has shown that we can make and have made great strides in Wales. The devolution settlement has given new impetus to the way in which we govern ourselves and manage our affairs and key public services.

Wales is making a significant contribution in a European context. It is attracting inward investment and increasing its capacity for international trade. It is developing and promoting its tourism products to appeal to an increasingly wide range of visitors. It is raising its profile around the world in terms of culture, its language and its arts. Indeed, a group of Welsh artists will be exhibiting in Chicago in the coming months.

Devolution means less introspection. It means being more outward looking and having greater confidence in ourselves. The National Assembly, working in partnership with the Government and Parliament, can promote Wales widely around the world. That unity and partnership bring many benefits to Wales, and of course it is beneficial that we are part of the fourth largest economy on the planet. It is important that we provide opportunities for debate, so that we can solve the problems that we face as a country.

We have proved today that Wales in the world is not a bad issue to debate. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley suggested that we might return to it on many other occasions. Perhaps we will. As I said at the start of my speech, the standard of debate today has been very high indeed. It has given us the chance—

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Housing (Edmonton)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

7 pm

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I am grateful to have secured this evening's Adjournment debate and I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister for keeping her so late on a Thursday.

I raise this as a constituency issue, not on behalf of any individual but on behalf of all 1,849 of my constituents—the most recent estimate that I have—who have raised housing or housing-related issues with me since 1997. Sadly, I have been unable to assist most of them. The difficulties are illustrated by a number of recent cases. I should stress that these are average cases and not the most extreme examples.

Mr. and Mrs. K-W, who have three children, have been living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation since March 2000. Mr. K-W is in a very poor state of health. They have several concerns: they have no privacy because their landlord continues to enter and leave the property as he chooses; they cannot plan for the future as they do not know when they will be rehoused; and they pay £100 a month to keep their furniture in storage and the local authority pays £850 a month for their accommodation. In their case, work would not pay as they then could not afford their current accommodation.

Turning to the private sector, Mr. Campbell, who has an 11-year-old daughter, lives in a one-bedroom flat that is almost uninhabitable, yet if he chooses to leave he will be declared to have made himself intentionally homeless. The environmental health department has tried to assist him in dealing with his landlord, but has had no joy. His daughter, who lives with him, has no privacy and nowhere to study, and her health and education are suffering.

In the council sector, Ms Q lives with her partner and three children in two-bedroom accommodation. Her three children—two boys and a girl, two of whom are in their teens—sleep in the same room. The youngest child, a girl, suffers from severe asthma and often keeps them all up all night. The oldest boy has no privacy and his education is beginning to suffer.

Those are just some of the cases that illustrate the deterioration in housing provision in my constituency. We can look at that in a number of different ways. Let me start with affordability, given the announcement two days ago that we have just had the highest monthly increase in house price inflation since records began, at 3.4 per cent.

Let us consider the average owner-occupier in a flat or maisonette in my constituency. At the beginning of 2001, such a flat would have cost £94,000 and average gross earnings were £26,000. It is simple to work out that, assuming that they could borrow on a multiplier of 2.5 times income, the average owner-occupier in my constituency would require a deposit of some £29,000. Assuming that they could find a sympathetic bank, they would have to borrow about 3.5 times their salary in order to purchase an average flat. Even those at the top 10 per cent. of earnings would require a multiplier of 2.25 times their salary to buy average accommodation in my constituency.

I have taken figures from this week's local press on the private rented sector. A one-bedroom flat costs £140 a week and a three-bedroom terraced house costs nearly £200 a week. A person on average earnings would have to pay one third of their gross weekly income to rent an average two-bedroom flat in my constituency. Even those at the top 10 per cent. of earnings would be paying a fifth of their income in rent.

A recent study carried out by my local authority showed that, of those deemed to be in housing need, 95 per cent. could not afford either to rent in the private sector or to buy a property. That has done two things: first, it has put enormous pressure on the social rented sector; and, secondly and perhaps just as importantly—in some ways even more importantly—it has reduced movement from the social sector into owner-occupation or private renting. Such movement has simply dried up for people in my constituency.

The result of all that has been an explosion since 1997 in the numbers featuring in housing stress statistics. Homelessness acceptance has risen from 550 people to 1,230, and the number of those in temporary accommodation has risen from 1,134 to 2,327. Even the number of those using bed-and-breakfast accommodation has gone up from 122 to 287. That is against a backdrop of an inadequate supply of new accommodation locally. In the three years from 1998 to 2001, 567 new units of accommodation were completed, yet in that same period, 706 properties were sold under the right-to-buy scheme. I do not want to raise that issue in this debate—it is very sensitive—but urgent steps need to be taken to restrain the right to buy. Otherwise, the situation in London and especially in my constituency will continue to deteriorate.

We are paying a very high price for the problem. We are paying it economically, with the mismatch of skills and jobs—everyone is well aware of the problem of key workers; we are also paying the price socially, in terms of education. I have spoken about some of the problems of my younger constituents—the impact on their health of living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and the family breakdown that regularly results from housing stress. We must therefore take such issues extremely seriously. I should like to suggest a number of ways in which they can be addressed.

I believe—I know that the Government support this—that we must end the scandal of bed-and-breakfast and bed-and-breakfast annexe accommodation. Therefore, I welcome the setting up of the bed-and-breakfast unit. I recognise the need to co-ordinate action across the capital to disseminate the best information and best practice available. However, for the unit to be successful—I note that it will exist only until the end of 2003—we must set it ambitious targets. I should like to hear the Minister's comments on that.

I recognise that the provision of permanent accommodation will not improve significantly in the very near future, so reducing the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation will mean substituting other temporary accommodation. I commend the Shelter scheme on developing private sector leasing, under which it suggests that we could increase the number of private sector, leased temporary accommodation units by 10,000. I hope that the Minister will be able to comment positively on providing the necessary support, which will of course significantly reduce local authorities' rental costs.

The second issue that I want to consider is that of maximising the amount of new, affordable accommodation through the planning system. My local

authority, like many others, has a target of 25 per cent. of affordable accommodation in any new housing development. I note that the Government are consulting on a Green Paper on planning obligations and have suggested introducing tariffs. I welcome that suggestion for a number of reasons.

I accept that we needed to extend the tariff regime not only to housing development but to commercial development, and I am pleased that that has happened. I welcome the fact that it can take the form of either cash or kind, but I want to express just a little concern—it is expressed by many—about our willingness and ability to continue to achieve mixed communities as a result.

The most important point that I want to raise about the consultation is twofold. First, it is important that the tariff be allowed on any size of development; there should not be a minimum size. Secondly, when the tariffs have been introduced, it is critical that they are adequately monitored to ensure that we achieve increases in the amount of affordable accommodation, especially in the capital.

We must also use innovative ways of increasing the amount of new affordable accommodation. I commend to the Minister the scheme initiated by my own local authority—the comprehensive development initiative—which, over the next couple of years, will develop some 2,000 new units of accommodation on existing council-owned lands. It uses several mechanisms to achieve that, including proper consultation with its tenants and ensuring a positive aspect for everyone involved in the development. It will require a contribution to the approved development programme from partners in the housing association movement.

That brings me to my final and most important point, which is critical to the future of my constituency. We desperately need to increase the supply of affordable accommodation to address the acute shortages that exist in my local authority, which is probably the worst affected in outer London, and throughout the capital. I welcome the funding for that purpose in the current round of the comprehensive spending review. This year, some £500 million has been allocated for new accommodation in London, and I welcome that. Indeed, my local authority has been able to double its programme this year. I recognise and welcome the fact that, in the three years of that plan, 100,000 new affordable units will be built.

I also welcome the fact that next year will see an even more significant increase in the funding available for new accommodation. However, because of the bleakness of the situation in my constituency and across London, I question whether that amount will address the real needs and stop any further increase in housing stress against the backdrop of escalating construction costs. We all know about the skill shortages and the capacity constraints that are beginning to emerge, and we recognise that it is becoming increasingly expensive to build in the capital.

I have read the estimates that various academics and others have produced about the housing need in Greater London and in high-demand areas throughout the country. However, we must address housing stress, which will take up resources. I have a few suggestions. First, we should maintain the programme in the comprehensive spending review in 2003–04 and, if possible, increase that level of funding in the future. That is the only way in which we will begin to address the housing need. Secondly, the Minister should look carefully at the share of the housing investment programme that comes to the capital. We all know about the controversy surrounding the index of local deprivation, which has meant that the proportion of the HIP going to high-demand areas of the capital has not increased. Indeed, it may have decreased. If we are to deal with the great pressures on housing in the capital, that must be reviewed as a priority.

My constituents should, and will, demand nothing less. Otherwise, they will continue to languish in appalling bed-and-breakfast accommodation, inadequate private sector accommodation or even overcrowded social housing. They recognise that the Government have set priorities in health and education, and they know that other parts of the country have housing problems.

I welcome the recent report from the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions on empty homes, which exposed a real scandal. I also welcome the important investigation into affordable accommodation that is about to be undertaken by the Select Committee. I think that it will show the acute need that exists in my area, and across the capital. Addressing such matters must be a priority for the Government. Otherwise, I shall remain impotent when faced with my constituents' housing problems.

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on securing this debate, on what is clearly an important issue for everyone in Edmonton. Today is a most appropriate date for this debate on a key service such as housing, given that the local government elections are being held.

I am very aware that my hon. Friend has taken an active interest in this subject for a long time—indeed, he was interested in it long before he entered this House. I know too that he is doing a great service for his constituents by raising the profile of a problem that faces many people in his area.

Housing problems dominate the surgeries of all hon. Members, and are often the most difficult and the saddest that we encounter. I sympathise with my hon. Friend and—more to the point—with his constituents, given some of the problems that need to be resolved. They include overcrowding and the pressures of living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

The Government are obviously acutely aware of the problems. We are very concerned about the sharp increase in the number of homeless households, in London and elsewhere, being placed in temporary accommodation or in bed-and-breakfast units. Over the past five years, the number of homeless households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has risen to nearly 12,500. Most of those homeless households—nearly 8,500—are in London. In Enfield, the borough covering the constituency of my hon. Friend there are more than 2,300 households in temporary accommodation, of which over 300 are in bed and breakfast. That figure is the second highest in outer London.

The Government are concerned about the quality of life of families living in temporary accommodation and bed-and-breakfast units. We are especially worried about what happens to the children, given the well-documented and well-charted impact on health. We are also aware of

[Ms Sally Keeble]

the bad effects of repeat moves, and of the effects suffered by people in overcrowded accommodation. We are also aware of the financial constraints on local authorities to manage temporary accommodation and bed-and-breakfast units.

Although there has been a rise in the number of homeless households in accommodation recently, the Government have taken action to respond very quickly, introducing a series of measures and establishing new units. I shall speak at greater length about those later. However, the figures for London overall are still well below what they were 10 years ago. The Government have acted to intervene and deal with the problem before it reaches the crisis proportions evident in London 10 years ago.

I shall talk first about the general issues and then move to the specific solutions being considered for Edmonton. I shall also deal with the matters that my hon. Friend raised.

My hon. Friend was right to note that the Department has established a homelessness directorate, which will bring together and lead a number of Government initiatives aimed at tackling homelessness. The directorate is responsible for taking forward the work of the former rough sleepers unit, helping to sustain the reductions in rough sleeping achieved over the past two years.

That means continuing to help those vulnerable people who remain on the streets. It also means continuing to rebuild the lives of those who have already been helped away from the streets, particularly through schemes to offer training and employment opportunities and a real chance of independence. It also means building on the work of the unit to prevent those most at risk of sleeping rough from reaching the streets in the first place.

The directorate also includes the Government's bed-and-breakfast unit, which has a clear remit to work with local authorities such as Enfield to help reduce homelessness and the number of people in bed-and-breakfast and temporary accommodation. The unit has held meetings with a number of agencies working in the sector.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently gave a commitment that by March 2004 local authorities will ensure that no homeless family with children has to live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation except in an emergency, and then for no more than six weeks and only in accommodation of a suitable standard. Some £35 million will be available to help meet this commitment in 2002–03. The bed-and-breakfast unit is currently discussing with local authorities like Enfield, which has a high level of bed-and-breakfast usage, their individual action plans to meet this commitment. While the unit should spearhead initiatives and find solutions to the problem, the service provision is still at local authority level.

My hon. Friend referred to annexes, an issue about which the Government are also concerned. I will make sure that he receives details of the thinking and decisions on that issue in writing. The problem is localised and restricted to a number of specific local authorities.

Tackling homelessness involves working across Departments. That is why the bed-and-breakfast unit will also be looking at the wider issues of access to health and other services for those placed in this form of accommodation. The Department for Work and Pensions has announced changes to housing benefit rules worth around £10 million to boost incentives for private sector leasing by local authorities. That deals with one of the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend.

One of the directorate's first responsibilities was to produce a national homelessness framework, within which the Government will work in tackling homelessness and look to their key voluntary, statutory and private sector partners to play their part in tackling homelessness.

The directorate will also be responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002, which provides stronger protection for those who become homeless and also ensures that local authorities such as Enfield and their partners take a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness.

We will be issuing a revised statutory code of guidance on allocation and homelessness, reflecting changes brought about by the new Homelessness Act and the proposed priority needs order. We will allocate additional resources to help local authorities deliver the new priority needs order which, as I am sure my hon. Friend knows, will give young people the rights to housing for the first time and to be treated as homeless. It will also give rights to other people. I expect that it will lead in the short term to an increase in the number of homeless people although in the longer term it will ensure that we meet the real and often hidden housing needs of people up and down the country.

My hon. Friend mentioned housing costs, which leads me to the problems of supply and demand. The need for housing in London is rising sharply. Current projections for London suggest a growth of 26,000 households a year between 1996 and 2016, but only about 18,000 new dwellings are being built each year and only 4,000 of those could be termed affordable.

If we are to have any prospect of tackling London's shortage of affordable housing, and the problems that my hon. Friend referred to in Edmonton, the first priority must be to increase the rate of new build. This will require an innovative and radical approach from the Government, the Mayor, local authorities, community leaders and others. A key element will be a much stronger drive to redevelop existing sites to provide mixed-use, high-quality and higher-density housing. My hon. Friend is right about the impact of changes in the planning system. We recently published a Green Paper setting out our proposals for long-term reform of the planning system, but there is a great deal that we can do to simplify and speed up the process.

My hon. Friend is also right about the need to look at the issues surrounding planning gain and the way in which we provide and develop integrated housing schemes. I realise that there are concerns about our ability to continue to provide mixed communities, but it is essential that we do so. The supply of housing is a problem and there is also an issue about sustainable housing. I am sure that my hon. Friend does not want to go back to the time when London saw the proliferation of monolithic, single-tenure housing estates. Most of them are being pulled down because they simply did not meet people's housing aspirations. That is one of the strongest arguments for the Government persisting in getting mixed communities instead of the old monolithic housing estates.

The trend of rising homelessness, which increases pressure on the social housing stock, and the housing needs of key workers, require innovative approaches to provision. Of course we need to look at many other issues affecting the delivery of affordable housing, including funding, attracting private finance, using public sector stock and public sector land and encouraging industry and employers to respond to the challenge.

I understand that the London borough of Enfield is taking that approach through the comprehensive development initiative. Some 2,000 homes are to be built on brownfield sites, including disused garages and open spaces, over seven years. That initiative is being delivered in partnership with registered social landlords and local residents to develop good quality affordable homes for local people. The land, owned by the council, is disposed of in return for 100 per cent. nominations. Funding has come from the Housing Corporation and private sector match funding.

As well as encouraging the fullest use of identified brownfield sites, there may be scope for greater regeneration of existing rundown properties and to improve the local environment, especially in areas with worn-out dwellings and surroundings. Again, I understand that the London borough of Enfield is taking that approach in Edmonton, through the major regeneration scheme—the Edmonton partnership initiative—which my hon. Friend mentioned.

The initiative is centred on community involvement and on the transfer of over 1,300 council properties to two housing associations. It includes the phased demolition of three 25-storey tower blocks, as well as improvements and major repairs to each residential property in Edmonton. It also involves working with local people—traders, and the private and voluntary sectors—and aims to improve the shopping, transport, environment and social and economic conditions in Edmonton. It is a good example of a successful partnership, and I am sure that it will help to ensure that we have not only good homes, but sustainable communities.

I am pleased to note that the London borough of Enfield is also supporting the Government's starter home initiative and, by working in partnership with housing associations, will provide assistance to key workers. About 72 teachers, 14 police officers and 86 health staff will benefit from that initiative in Enfield.

My hon. Friend mentioned capacity problems, particularly in the building industry, and the problems that that would create in trying to build the number of homes that are needed throughout London. That is a problem not just in London but throughout the country. The high wages and skills shortages in London are attracting building workers from all over the country to the capital.

Just as housing schemes in London are finding it difficult to get the right number of skilled builders, in the low-demand areas—for example, in Liverpool and elsewhere where building is taking place to regenerate some of the very poor-quality, low-demand properties—schemes are also being held back by labour shortages because those areas have lost all their skilled workers to London.

The Government are acutely aware of the problems that that is creating and are working closely with the industry and others to boost the number of people—especially by attracting people from sectors of society that traditionally have not worked in the building industry, such as women and people in the black and ethnic minority communities, to try to improve the number of skilled people in the building industry.

Of course there are severe pressures on housing in London, but we also have to consider carefully the problems throughout the country. The Government have such a commitment and have funded programmes to meet the housing problems that have been identified not only in high-value areas in London, but in the low-demand areas in the midlands and the north of the country.

For all those initiatives to work, there must be sufficiently strong local leadership and a can-do mentality among all concerned—whether in the private, public or voluntary sectors—to drive through the necessary changes. I believe that that already exists in many parts of London; of course, we must encourage it where it does not.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will play an important part in ensuring that there is a strong can-do mentality in his constituency and that the local authorities and others will work together to meet the housing needs of the local community. This debate has highlighted some important issues, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising them. If he has any questions remaining, I should be very happy to write to him about them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Seven o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 23 April 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Public Appointments

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

9.30 am

Tony Cunningham (Workington): I am delighted to have this opportunity to share some of my concerns about appointments to public bodies. I am particularly concerned about the enormous power given to many members of public bodies, some of whom have responsibility for huge sums of money. Public bodies play an important role in helping to shape and develop Government policy. More than 1,000 non-departmental public bodies influence the expenditure of a total budget of about £23 billion a year—as I said, it is a huge sum. In addition, there are approximately 500 national health service trust and health authority boards.

Those appointed bodies, often referred to as quangos, have a considerable influence over public life. In that respect, I have no doubt that public bodies are a force for good—a force for progress and social improvement that is to be wholeheartedly welcomed. Indeed, because those bodies have the potential to be at the heart of delivering the programme of social justice to which the Government are committed, I would like to see more effort being made to encourage fair practice within them.

Thousands of people participate in public life through service to schools, colleges, NHS trusts, magistrates courts and tribunals. According to a Cabinet Office paper on the subject,

"Public involvement provides accountability, brings a wealth of skills and experience into the running of Public Bodies and supports democracy by allowing 'ordinary' people"—

I do not like that term—

"to play an important and constructive role in the process of local and national government".

According to a paper on frequently asked questions published by the public appointments unit, appointments are made to public bodies using fair selection procedures in accordance with the relevant codes of practice. However, although such quangos have well-intentioned objectives, I am worried that those aims are not effectively realised.

In the mid-1990s, under the auspices of Lord Nolan, the Committee on Standards in Public Life established seven general principles that should govern public life. I am sure that we all agree on those principles. They are selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. It will come as little surprise to hon. Members that such principles are reflected in the remit of many public bodies. However, the extent of openness of those organisations, and by extension their transparency, is questionable.

I stress that I do not believe that some sort of cynical operation is occurring beneath the purported policy of attempting to widen participation in public life. On the contrary, the Government are genuinely committed to recruiting people who more accurately reflect the society in which we live. They are actively attempting to recruit more women and ethnic minorities to public positions. I shall return to that theme later, but it sufficiently highlights the fact that any suggestion that jobs in public bodies are solely for the great and the good would be an exaggeration. I would like to think that society has moved on from that.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Could the hon. Gentleman say which of the people's peers is not one of the great and the good?

Tony Cunningham: If the hon. Gentleman wants to debate the House of Lords, I am sure that time can be found. He need only catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I wish to highlight the fact that although we have moved on from bodies being simply for the great and the good, a series of structural constraints on the process of appointment make it difficult to counter some of the problems that I am about to raise. Public bodies carry out some of the most important and prominent tasks in public life, but their members, unlike parliamentarians and councillors, are not elected, and the processes by which they are selected are neither well known nor well understood. A recent MORI poll stated:

"The majority of the public know very little of the ministerial public appointments process",

but I would argue that the vast, vast majority know very little about it.

The Nolan rules recommend that organisations use as many methods as possible to find suitable candidates for jobs in public service. The rationale behind that is surely to allow as wide a range of people as possible to apply. It is impossible to get precise empirical data to support the claim that I am about to make, but I am sure that colleagues will agree that we, as representatives of our constituents, are suitably placed to assess the extent to which they feel that they have adequate access to information about public and civic life. I am sure that so-called ordinary people in my constituency are not aware of the vacancies that arise in public bodies to anywhere near the extent that the Government would like. We might think that advertising on the internet would increase the number of people who apply for vacancies, but people in parts of my constituency have little or no access to the internet, so it does not often affect them.

The next issue is perhaps more parochial, but it is still of great importance. I am far from convinced that people in Cumbria—it is nice to see the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) in the Chamber—and particularly in west Cumbria, which I represent, have a fair opportunity to get involved in public bodies. The Committee of the Regions was set up because

"about three quarters of EU legislation is implemented at local or regional level, so it makes sense for local and regional representatives to have a say in the development of new EU laws."

I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman knows who our nearest Committee Members are, but they are probably some distance away—in Lancaster or

[Tony Cunningham]

somewhere in the north-east. Cumbria has no representative on the Committee—indeed, it has never had one.

The regional development agency is a key regional player in my constituency, and indeed throughout Cumbria. Let me quote from its website to demonstrate just how important it is. The RDA

"co-ordinates economic development, regeneration, skills development, strategic sites, business relocation and inward investment in North West England".

West Cumbria and Furness have been identified as its top priorities, along with east Manchester and Liverpool, yet it has no west Cumbrian representative. If west Cumbria and Furness are such a high priority, we should have a representative.

The Government remain committed to increasing the range and diversity of all their public appointments. They are committed to ensuring that there is an equal proportion of men and women and a pro rata number of people from ethnic minority backgrounds. They are also attempting to increase public appointments of people with disabilities, and I am sure that we all share those sentiments. Since 1992, the proportion of women in non-departmental public bodies has risen by about 8 per cent. The proportion of people from ethnic minorities who hold a public appointment more than doubled over the same period, but the figure remains low. Indeed, according to *The Sunday Times*,

"the average quango member still fits the white, male, middle-aged stereotype".

About three quarters of appointees are aged between 46 and pensionable age, with fewer than 3 per cent. under 35. Women make up only 38 per cent. of public appointees and—I am sure that hon. Members will be interested in the next statistic—only 3 per cent. of those who earn £50,000 or more. That is interesting, is it not? Some 8.5 per cent. of appointees come from ethnic minorities, and just 2.4 per cent. are disabled. A huge amount of work remains to be done.

However, while gender and ethnicity are at least considered, regional discrepancies are not. Perhaps that is an important factor in explaining the relative disadvantages faced by the regions, and particularly the north of England. The Government are committed to promoting equality of opportunity in all walks of life, and discrimination by gender, ethnic background and age are unacceptable. I contend that discrimination by geographical location is equally intolerable. It is difficult to establish precisely the proportion of people in Workington holding a public appointment, because—strangely—figures published by the Cabinet Office are not broken down geographically. It does not report on quangos in Cumbria and tends to refer to "offices throughout England and Wales". That flaw must be addressed. Many of my constituents would be [illegible]dously interested to know how many appointees to public bodies are residents of the 88 local authorities with the most deprived neighbourhoods. If we are serious about social inclusion, such people must be better represented on public bodies.

The final issue that I would like to draw to hon. Members' attention is the training and managerial acumen of people appointed to public bodies. If people from various backgrounds are to be appointed to public bodies and retained, we must ensure that they are properly trained. People appointed to important bodies with huge budgets, such as health authorities and primary care trusts, need excellent managerial and communications skills, and we must provide them with the skills and know-how to do their jobs properly. Without such skills, they will surely not perform at the level that we expect of them. Their ability to do their jobs well will have an enormous impact on their local communities. It is essential to invest in proper and effective training—sustained over time—so that they remain fully equipped to carry out their work.

My intention has been to provide a constructive platform on which future public appointments can be made. The Government should feel no shame at the advances that they have made in actively encouraging more women and members of ethnic minorities to engage in all areas of public life. The Minister has expressed the Government's desire for a wider representation of people regardless of age, disability, gender, ethnicity, geographic or socio-economic background. There is no such diversity of representation at the moment. I hope that highlighting some areas of concern will lead to a genuine, informed debate about how we can widen participation in public life. I am sure that other hon. Members have much to add and would like to raise other concerns. I look forward to hearing from them.

9.43 am

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) on having secured this important debate. The Government have built up a justifiable reputation for seeking to control every nook and cranny of our lives. One hears examples of the way in which they seek to control their Back Benchers so that many are reduced to clones who, if one is to believe the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), are induced not to spill the beans about what the Government, through Millbank and No. 10, try to do.

The hon. Member for Workington has given us an excellent opportunity to debate the question of public appointments that affect our lives. I shall start by considering the areas on which I could not agree more with him—and, I suspect, with the Minister. We need the best individuals from all walks of life and from all backgrounds—whether ethnic or gender backgrounds—to contribute to the vast array of public bodies in this country that rely on the selfless duty and commitment of those who want to serve. However, on considering the areas in which such individuals are needed, one discovers that all is not well with regard to appointments.

The national health service, for example, is a crucial area, especially in the light of the problems that we have all faced with it over the past few years. As the hon. Member for Workington said, there are 373 chairmen of NHS trusts and slightly more than 1,800 non-executive directors. Until 1 April, the health authorities that were created in 1999 will remain in place, with 520 non-executive directors. Those were all public appointments, made before 2 July last year through a process that eventually depended on Ministers. In addition, from 1 April the strategic health authorities will come into

being, which will have non-executive directors. There will also be those that remain of the primary care groups, and a significant number of primary care trusts that have come into existence over the past few months.

All those bodies require a significant number of appointments. Because of the numbers, a significant temptation or potential for patronage is vested in the power of Ministers. That is a worrying fact, and the remedy that Ministers have sought to apply to the health service in the form of the Appointments Commission has not rectified the problem but accentuated it.

The Minister can be a bruiser on occasions, and will no doubt make the point that when the Government were in opposition they made the accusation that the health service was stuffed with Conservative placemen. Before he gets too excited about that statement, I should state that the reality was very different, but if one spins a yarn often enough it takes root, regardless of its accuracy. Figures given by the Government in written answers have proved the fallacy of that statement. Of those appointed to NHS bodies who declared a political activity in the last full year of the last Conservative Government, 8.2 per cent. were Labour supporters and 7.2 per cent. were Conservative supporters, with the Liberal Democrats left drifting further down the scale. The Minister could argue that that shows the failure of the Conservative Government. His Government have not made the same mistake, because they are systematically packing the bodies with Labour placemen.

I make my case about the health service through information given in written answers and the Government's own statistics. When Dame Rennie Fritchie became Appointments Commissioner in March or April 1999, she received so many criticisms and complaints about the appointments process that she carried out an investigation. Her report makes interesting reading. She says that in the 1998 appointments round in the north-west national health service region, 70 per cent. of the 109 candidates declared political activity on behalf of the Labour party. She also cites the example of a former Conservative Minister—

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): The hon. Gentleman has given us the figures for candidates, not for appointments. Would he like to give us the figures for appointments?

Mr. Burns: Yes, I certainly will. If the hon. Lady is kind enough to let me develop my argument, I will give her the figures that she requires, in buckets—

Helen Jones: For the north-west.

Mr. Burns: No, the overall figures, because what matters is what is happening throughout the country.

It transpired from the report that a former Conservative Minister had acted as referee for someone who was seeking a position in an NHS body. The candidate's politics were unknown to the referee, but the individual was known in the local area in which the position was sought and was well qualified as a result of experience gained in professional life. Time and time again, that individual was turned down for a position, and the former Minister reached the conclusion that it would be better if he did not act as referee, because it seemed to be harming the candidate's prospects. I confess that, long ago, I gave up agreeing to act as referee for anyone seeking an appointment—usually in the NHS in Essex—because I decided that, notwithstanding my judgment and experience, giving my support to any suitable candidate would be the kiss of death for them. I thought that it was actually kinder not to agree to act as referee because to do so would be counter-productive.

Furthermore, more and more of those who are being placed on NHS trusts and the old health authorities—I suspect that nothing has changed with the introduction of new strategic health authorities and primary care trusts—have declared affiliations to, or act on behalf of, the Labour party. I am not suggesting that simply being associated with politics, be it Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or any other sort of politics, should be a barrier to a public appointment—of course it should not. Just because one engages in political activity does not mean that one does not have a great deal to contribute, outside that sphere, to a public body.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that most of those people, whether they are Conservative, Labour or Liberal party members, are also active in voluntary and political organisations in their local communities, so they are exactly the people who should be appointed to NHS trusts, for example? It is not that the current situation is anti-Conservative or anti-Liberal Democrat: the establishment is anti-anyone who has any political affiliation.

Mr. Burns: No, I am afraid I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. Of course, many people who are politically active are also active in their communities, but as a Member of Parliament, visiting charitable organisations and local businesses in one's constituency, one encounters many people whose political activities are probably zero—certainly unknown—and who contribute in their different ways to the local community. However, the figures show that about a third of those who are appointed have a declared political affiliation, and of those a significant number—far more significant than the Liberal Democrat and Conservative appointees added together—happen to be Labour activists.

Before anyone accuses me of fiddling the figures, let me tell hon. Members that these figures were provided by Department of Health Ministers during the past year or so. Between 2 May 1997 and 31 March 2001, successive Secretaries of State at the Department of Health appointed 5,543 individuals to trusts, PCTs and health authorities. Of those who declared a political interest, 5.2 per cent were Conservatives, 3.9 per cent. were Liberal Democrats and a staggering 25.1 per cent. were Labour activists. Between 1 April and 2 July 2001—I use that time scale because on 2 July the Secretary of State ceased to have a role in the appointments, as the Appointments Commission came into force—4.5 per cent. of appointees were Conservatives, 2.9 per cent. were Liberal Democrats and 25.2 per cent. were Labour activists.

[Mr. Burns]

Once the Appointments Commission was established and had started its work on 2 July, one would have assumed, from the rhetoric—bearing it in mind that the members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Health—that the situation would have been different. Ministers would argue that the purpose of the commission is that it should be independent and not influenced—as Ministers might be—in its appointments. However, extraordinarily, the situation has not improved. Between 2 July 2001 and 10 January 2002, 4.9 per cent. of appointees were Conservatives, 5.4 per cent. were Liberal Democrats and 23.5 per cent. were Labour activists.

If one considers the figures for all the work that the commission has done up to the latest time for which figures are available, which happens to be 4 April 2002, the situation is even worse. Some 4.5 per cent. of appointees were Conservatives and 4.4 per cent. were Liberal Democrats, but the proportion of Labour appointees increased from 23.5 per cent. to 26.5 per cent. Sadly, there is something rotten in the system, whether under the new Appointments Commission system or the old system of Ministers giving final approval to appointees. A disproportionate number of those declaring a political affiliation are from the governing party.

I can come to only one conclusion, given the record and the history of this Government. In the press and information units of the Departments, where we used to have a totally non-political civil service, there is increasing politicisation, as the unfortunate ongoing saga at the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions has shown. Mr. Alastair Campbell at No. 10 Downing street has control of information officers and the flow of information across the board. The media are manipulated with good news stories and through what used to be—the spin doctors are losing their touch—the highly skilled practice of burying bad news. One comes to the conclusion that the Government are continuing the politicisation of our society through the appointment of people to public bodies.

It does no service to public bodies or the local community for those bodies to be stuffed with Labour party political hacks. Some are being rewarded for an undue length of time in local government or for retirement from this House. Some who fail to get elected to the House or a local authority are given such jobs as a recompense both financially and to massage their egos.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is the hon. Gentleman contending that the Appointments Commission is acting improperly, or is he saying that we have a high proportion of Labour activist applicants and that that may reflect a wide public assumption that a person will not be appointed to a position unless he or she is a supporter of the Labour party?

Mr. Burns: I am certainly not accusing the Appointments Commission of wrongdoing, but I believe that it has failed to meet the aims for which it was ostensibly set up. I am also arguing that if a person happens to be a Labour party activist, the system is slanted to benefit such an applicant in appointment to the jobs that he or she seeks.

The statistics show that in recent years there has been a dramatic increase in people with a declared political affiliation being placed on a public body, and an exorbitant increase in those with a political affiliation on a body being supporters of the ruling party. The system is becoming more and more tainted, so we should seek a return to a system in which the person with the best qualifications is appointed, rather than one in which a person is favoured because they happen to support a political party. I am not confident that we will see that during this Government's lifetime, but that does not mean that we should not hold the Government to account over what they are doing about what is, in effect, a distorting and a stuffing of our public bodies with political appointees

10.1 am

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) on securing the debate. He spoke so eloquently, and touched on so many subjects, that I have little to add. However, as he looked in my direction when he spoke about the lack of black and Asian representation on public bodies, I thought that I would make a small contribution.

The subject has greater urgency following the events in France on Monday. The far right was successful in France because it portrayed the immigrant community there as spongers, rather than contributors. In Britain, we can learn the lessons of France and ensure that the black and Asian community plays a leading role in the way in which society operates.

We have an impressive and talented ethnic minority group in Britain. It is settled here and is now in its second generation. Young black and Asian men and women make a great contribution to our public services, but sadly their contribution to public bodies has not been of the order that some of us would like. In 1997, I published a report entitled "The Glass Ceiling", and in its opening I quoted the Prime Minister's speech in Brighton on 30 September 1997 when he said that we cannot be a beacon to the world unless we allow the talents of all our people to shine through. That was a commitment from the highest level that the Government would be different, and that they would ensure that black and Asian people were properly represented, not just in the civil service, but on public bodies.

I am pleased to say that progress has been made. I congratulate the various Departments, which have, during the past five years, attempted to ensure that black and Asian people are appointed to public bodies. However, one should consider the appointments that were made up to 1997 in three Departments. In the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, there were 225 appointees, none of whom were of Asian origin; in the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, there were three out of 134; even in the Home Office, there were only 16 out of 332. At that stage, the Department of Health would not release its figures. I am glad to say that the present Secretary of State for Health has not only ensured that the names of ethnic minority people are published, but that a register is now produced each year setting out how many have been appointed. In the overall figures, of the 2,005 appointments made in 1997, only 35 were of people of Asian origin. I hope that when the Minister replies, he can give us the up-to-date figures.

I know that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) thinks that people like me are just clones of the Minister because we Back Benchers are fairly well controlled, but it is actually much easier to ask the Government to produce the figures than to request the information through parliamentary questions. Judging by the amount of money that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) has spent—more than £500,000 I think—it is probably cheaper too. Politicians, from the Prime Minister downwards, are committed to ensuring that such appointments are made.

I pay tribute to the work of Sir Richard Wilson, the Cabinet Secretary. When appointed, he made sure that issues of race and diversity were very much a part of his term in that post. He has just managed to appoint the first Asian permanent secretary before leaving office, which he will in July this year. I very much hope that when Sir Andrew Turnbull, the new Cabinet Secretary, takes over, he continues the excellent work of Sir Richard Wilson.

When I published my survey, I found that one of the most interesting facets of the whole debate on public appointments was the lack of understanding of how they were made, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Workington also referred. That is especially important in the black and Asian communities. When I wrote seeking information before the publication of the report, I discovered that some people on the public appointments register had died. Because that register, from which the pool of talent is drawn, was not regularly updated, there was a risk that the information held on it was very old. I notice that the Government now advertise for those posts. Obviously, that means that information is current, but can the Minister tell us whether the problems encountered in the past over the way in which the civil service gather information have diminished? That would be one way of ensuring that we can modernise the system.

We could also ensure that the appointments are not only published in the mainstream press. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington quoted *The Sunday Times*. We see public appointments advertised in such newspapers, but if we want more black and Asian people to sit on public bodies, we should advertise in the ethnic minority press and on ethnic minority television and radio. We should seek nominations from a wider range of people. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford said that he does not recommend people. Such matters are difficult because, as hon. Members know, people come to us and ask for our support. It is important for them to realise that they do not need the support of politicians to be considered. That would be the best way of getting really talented people to serve on the committees.

We are coming to an era in which people have a career in quangocracy—they do not just sit on one body, but are appointed to others. That is grossly unfair. We want to ensure that the most talented people come forward for what are not full-time appointments. In some of the posts people are paid, but they always, inevitably, spend more time on them than that for which the remuneration, which is pretty low overall, provides. We should introduce a rule that prevents people from serving on more of those bodies. Unless they have retired, I do not see how people have the time to serve on several. Such a rule would enable more women and people from ethnic minority communities to be appointed, and would project a much better image.

We have a great deal of work to do, but the enormous power of appointment is very important. In the debate on race and citizenship, the need for more black and Asian people to be elected to Parliament and appointed to the House of Lords is discussed, but elections come only once every five years and can only get us so far, although people can stand for local government and be elected as councillors. The Minister's power, and that of the Cabinet Office and other Ministers, is absolutely enormous as far as public bodies are concerned.

We can change the shape and face of Britain by making our public appointments reflect the whole of society. The shadow of Le Pen is, of course, now over Britain, and we should take the leadership role about which the Prime Minister spoke in September 1997. We have the largest settled black and Asian population of any country in Europe. Many black and Asian people who live in Germany and France do not even have the right to vote. We have a huge contribution to make to the European debate. Let us start by giving the black and Asian population the chance to contribute and to serve, and make them truly a part of our multicultural society.

10.10 am

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) on securing the debate, and on the lucid way in which he set out some of the difficulties in the public appointments process.

I want to concentrate on another aspect of the matter. Although I recognise the progress that the Government have made in appointing more women and people from ethnic minorities, I particularly want to consider the situation of our more deprived communities. We are all, of course, primarily interested in our constituencies, and constituencies such as mine can show a great deal about how deprived communities are treated. There are few people from deprived communities, and indeed from certain areas of the country, serving on our public bodies. That issue ought seriously to concern us if we really want to create a civic society in which all kinds of people participate in decision making.

I have asked a number of questions about what has happened in my constituency. It is fair to say that some areas have made better progress than others. Progress has been made in appointing more people from my constituency to the magistracy, for example, but the raw figures hide a more serious problem because people from the most deprived communities do not sit on the bench. Bewsey, the most deprived area in my constituency, has no magistrates. Orford, which is the centre of my constituency and covers several wards, has only four magistrates. Things such as that pose a serious problem. Those communities are not represented, yet seven magistrates from outside Warrington sit on the bench. The people who have most experience of crime and antisocial behaviour do not, for whatever reason, have an input into the process of administering the law, which makes us all poorer.

Contrary to what the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) said, the real problem facing my constituency is health authority appointments. I

[Helen Jones]

represent most of the health-deprived areas in Warrington, yet my constituency has consistently been under-represented on health authorities and trusts. In fact, one of the early meetings that I had in the last Parliament was with the then chair of the north-west region to raise that issue. I was promised that there would be an active programme to encourage people to apply; to provide training; and actively to seek applicants from all sections of the community. Then we got the spanking new Appointments Commission, and I am sorry to say that the situation did not get better.

In the past, my constituency had one person on the North Cheshire health authority and one person serving on the Warrington hospital trust. There were six members, four of whom were from Warrington, South and two of whom were from Warrington, North, on the old Warrington community health care trust, which has now ceased to be. Under the new Appointments Commission, we have one member on the new strategic health authority and one member on the hospital trust, which now covers both Warrington and Halton because the hospitals have merged. I have to say to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford that, contrary to the argument that he was making, in an area that is overwhelmingly Labour, there is only one person with a declared Labour affiliation on that trust. We have one member on the new Five Boroughs mental health trust.

It is, however, appointments to the primary care trust about which I am most concerned. They highlight the problem because the primary care trust serves the Warrington borough—the two constituencies. There are five non-executive appointments plus the chairman. Of those six people, only one comes from Warrington, North. The other five come from three wards in Warrington: two from Stockton Heath, one from Lymm and two from Appleton. Statistically, that seems a very unlikely result.

There are 24 wards in the Warrington borough, and I find it odd that three of those wards—including one of the small wards, Stockton Heath—throw up so many members of the PCT. I have to ask why. It is not geographical balance. When I raised that with the appointments commissioner for the north-west, he was rather unhelpful. I am sorry to say that I would rate him as the most smug and self-satisfied public official whom I have ever encountered in my years as a councillor or a Member of Parliament. He told me that the commission appointed the best people. I cannot believe that all the best people come from such a small geographical area.

We have to ask whether there is a flaw in the appointments system. I think that there is. I know of applicants whose applications were not acknowledged. I know that when the interviews took place, the interviewees were asked very technical questions. One of the interviewees, being a fairly lively lady, asked the chair of the PCT—who had been appointed by then—what he was looking for. She was told that he was looking for someone with financial or medical expertise. That is not the job of non-executive members. It is the job of the professional executive committee.

I have to say to the Minister that there is no equal opportunities process. People from deprived communities are not encouraged to apply. The commissioner told me that he was not a politician, and that he did not know where the boundaries were. That is, to say the least, somewhat disingenuous, since he was a parliamentary candidate in the 1970s, and I understand—although I have not been able to confirm this—that he lived in Lymm. Although he may not know where the boundary lies in the centre of Warrington, he certainly knows that Lymm, Stockton Heath and Appleton are nowhere near the deprived areas of Warrington, North.

The guidance says nothing about parliamentary constituencies, but I remind the Minister of the answer given to me by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears):

> "The National Health Service Appointments Commission aims at ensuring that board membership reflects the geographical areas served by the bodies concerned."

It does not in my area. She also said that

> "it is crucial that a proper cross-section of the public serves on boards."—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 741–42.]

That is not happening.

The same situation can be seen in national bodies. I asked Departments several questions about how many people from my constituency had been appointed to non-departmental public bodies. Most of the answers were notable for their brevity. The answer was "None" for the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport or the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Department of Trade and Industry did better in one respect, in that it managed to appoint one person from Warrington, North to the employment appeals tribunal—an event for which we were tempted to put out the flags. However, when I asked the DTI and the Home Office about other appointments, I received the usual answer that we all expect, about the information being "not held centrally". That raises some interesting questions.

How can we possibly monitor the make-up of national bodies if we do not hold the information? What information is put before a Minister when making an appointment? How do we manage to write to people to tell them of their appointments if we do not know where they live? Does that make a difference? I think that it does. If we are interested in promoting a civic society, and we want to involve people in decisions about how society moves forward, we must ensure that a cross-section of the community is involved and that areas are not excluded from the process.

The Government are committed to ending social exclusion, but they can do that properly only if people from the communities are involved in the delivery of the services. If we do not involve them, we lose a lot of experience and expertise. The people who live in our poorer communities know most about tackling poverty. Those who suffer most from crime and antisocial behaviour can tell us the most about what affects their lives and their neighbours' lives. Those who live in health-deprived communities can tell us why people do not access services. For example, there is no point designing health services that people in the communities cannot access because there is no public transport, or lecturing people about healthy diets if they do not have access to cheap fruit and vegetables. We need their

expertise if we are to make real progress, and we ought to have learned the lessons of the past: trying to regenerate communities from the outside does not work. People from the inside must be involved if we are to design good services.

Nationally, there must be proper monitoring to ensure that appointments to non-departmental public bodies reflect the regional diversity of the country. It may come as a surprise to some officials in Whitehall that not everyone with brains lives in London. In fact, those of us from the north argue that people with brains opt for a better lifestyle outside London. In addition to the existing criteria for appointments to public bodies, regional diversity should be encouraged.

I suggest that the Minister talk to his colleagues in the Department of Health about the criteria of the NHS Appointments Commission. Locally, it should be required actively to seek out, encourage, train and support people from under-represented sections of the community. If the PCT in my area does not have confidence in my constituents, why should my constituents have confidence in it? That is the key. I want my constituents to get a fair deal in representation on other bodies. At present, they and many people in similar communities do not, and that must be addressed if we are serious about encouraging participation in public life.

Miss Anne Begg (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that the summing-up speeches must begin at 10.30.

10.22 am

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) on initiating the debate. I want to concentrate on appointments to health bodies and to draw attention to my concerns about the way in which the NHS Appointments Commission operates in Durham.

As has already been said, the commission was set up following Dame Rennie Fritchie's report in 1998. The view of the Secretary of State for Health was that an independent commission should be set up, because that was the only way to reassure the public that appointments were being made fairly. The NHS Appointments Commission's website refers to the need

"to ensure that the public, the NHS and Ministers have confidence in the openness, transparency and fairness of the procedures which are used."

Openness and transparency are not words that easily spring to mind when one examines how the NHS Appointments Commission operates in Durham. On 5 December last year, I initiated an Adjournment debate in the main Chamber on the appointment of the chairman of the North Durham NHS trust and the removal of its existing chairman, Mr. Kevin Earley. I do not intend to repeat all the details of the case, so I urge hon. Members to read the debate if they want to know about the commission's unsatisfactory operations. I want to highlight the facts that I have since found out and some other concerns about how the commission is operating in Durham.

Following my Adjournment debate, and on the advice of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), I arranged a meeting on 5 March with Sir William Wells, the chairman of the NHS Appointments Commission, to discuss Kevin Earley's case and some other concerns. Mr. Roger Moore, the commission chief executive, was in attendance.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones), I find Sir William Wells's attitude high-handed. He gave the clear impression that he did not want to be at the meeting, and that he thought it an affront that an elected Member of Parliament should question him or his organisation. Things were so bad that 10 minutes into the meeting I told him that I thought it was a waste of time. That pricked his conscience a little, and he started to listen to what I had to say. The chairman of the commission's lack of interest in the concerns of an elected MP is representative of the mindset of the rest of the organisation.

I raised three questions about the case of Kevin Earley. First, if the appraisals that Mr. Earley undertook were good, why did the commission not automatically reappoint him to the chair of the North Durham NHS trust? Secondly, why had he not received full reasons why he had been removed? Thirdly, when the commission failed to make an appointment first time around, why did it exclude at least one chair of a primary care trust from its shortlist of candidates?

The answer to the first question is simple: the commission did not use the appraisals. It consulted the regional director of health, Mr. Peter Garland. Mr. Earley's reappointment was in his hands, even though this is the same Mr. Garland with whom Mr. Earley crossed swords a year earlier about the appointment of a new chief executive of the North Durham trust. I have long suspected that this was Mr. Garland's attempt to get his own back on Mr. Earley, and that is now evident. I tried to find mention of a consultation with the regional director in the appointments procedure, but could not find one anywhere. The case is clearly an example of someone employed by the health service determining who sits on a health board. That cannot be right.

Until I intervened on Mr. Earley's behalf, he had been given no reason why he had been removed. I could not find mention of a decision not to use appraisals anywhere in the procedure book. It is clearly the commission's trademark that it makes up the rules as it goes along. On the subject of existing chairmen, the document, "The Appointment Process for NHS Chairs and Non-Executives", says:

"Whilst there can be no right to reappointment, there will be a presumption that all candidates who have served a single term will be eligible for consideration for uncontested reappointment if their appraised performance has been consistently good."

There is no mention of the regional director. I even looked in annexe D, which is headed "Exceptional Procedures", but I could not find any mention of it there. It is ironic that it was Sir William Wells who gave me a copy of the document at our meeting.

In my Adjournment debate, I questioned the basis on which the shortlist of the new candidates for the trust was drawn up, as it does not appear in the appointment process document. In my meeting with Sir William Wells, he admitted that it was not part of the procedure. I also asked why one of the chairs of the party trust was

[Mr. Kevan Jones]

not included on the shortlist. As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North says, the NHS trust is not very good on boundaries; it answered that it did not know that the chairman lived in Durham. Therefore, the shortlist of candidates did not include at least one able and appointable candidate. That raises questions about the process that arrived at the appointment of Mrs. Angela Ballatti.

Equal opportunities has already been mentioned. Mrs. Dorothy Burnett, who applied to be a non-executive member of the local primary care trust, asked me whether I would support her application, and I did, as she was a very able candidate, a committed trade unionist and a past president of her union who sits on the employment appeals tribunal, was an observer to Nicaraguan elections in 1999 and lives in one of the most deprived parts of my constituency, Tantobie. She applied last August and received an acknowledgment on 5 September. After that, she received no further communication and had no reply when she tried ringing the number given in the letter. In January, I wrote to Dr. John Marshall, the regional commissioner, to find out what had happened to her application. She received a letter on 3 February saying that she had been unsuccessful because of the high number and standard of candidates. To date, I, the local Member of Parliament, have not received a reply. How the commission treats Members of Parliament should be examined. If—

Miss Anne Begg (in the Chair): Order. I warned the hon. Gentleman that summing-up speeches had to begin at 10.30, and it is now 10.31.

10.31 am

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Obviously, the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) could dig deeper into his treasure store of the workings of the appointments system, but time does not permit him to do so.

The hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) has done us a service in bringing this matter before us, because of the extent of public bodies to which such appointments are made, the value of the public service done on them and the serious failure to get to grips with the under-representation of various groups, including women, ethnic minorities, people from particular parts of the country or, as the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) so effectively described, from deprived areas within regions and constituencies. She is a model of a Government supporter holding Ministers vigorously to account, which is not a contradiction in terms. The practice should be encouraged.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) made an interesting trawl through the figures. He might have looked at the figures for water authorities during the earlier years of the Conservative Administration, too, which showed similar trends. All parties should recognise that if procedures are not in place for public appointments that are not heavily influenced by political preference or affiliation, difficulties will be experienced and circumstances such as exist now will be created. In some areas, just as happened in other areas when the Conservatives were in government, people assume that it is not worth applying for public positions because they will all go to people from the ruling party. Whether that view is always justified is open to argument, but it is widely held and deters people from applying. That is also true of other considerations, such as the belief that someone with their background would not be considered, have a fair chance or withstand the interview process that they fear they may face.

Various concerns have been expressed. Much reference has been made, as perhaps it should be, to gender balance, because of the continuing conspicuous failure in that area. The Departments that have shown an improvement in the proportion of women on public bodies are the smallest, and include the Cabinet Office and the Export Credits Guarantee Department—all the Departments that started from a very low base. The record of large Departments, such as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which has vast numbers of appointments, is frightening. The Department still achieves only an 87:13 male to female ratio of appointments. Its target is only 80:20, and it seems unlikely to meet it. That shows how far short it is falling of the objective of achieving a better balance. Let us compare departmental figures with those for the Scottish Executive, who have a male to female ratio for public appointments of 53:47. It is obviously possible to do a great deal better than most Departments in England are doing.

Achieving a gender balance presents a serious problem, which Dame Rennie Fritchie has examined. It has been suggested that the emphasis that she places on the legal framework may be a factor in that and other problems of representation—because of the merit argument. I am not arguing that people should be appointed to jobs for which they are not suitably qualified or appropriately experienced. In the appointment of single posts, such as chief executive or chairman, a particular mix of qualities will be required and one will want to get the best person available.

If one appoints several people to a body over a period of time, however, one wants it to be broadly representative, so background and experience are relevant factors in assessing merit. We must ensure that merit is defined in that broad context, especially in bodies that, taken together, are expected to be representative and to reflect a variety of backgrounds—as most public bodies should.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) spoke about the representation of ethnic minorities. I agree that we must advertise the opportunities for public service and contributions one can make to public life that are available to people in ethnic minorities, as to other groups. A more active effort is required to overcome any feeling that there might not be a place for ethnic minority groups in the apparently closed world of advisory bodies.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford spoke extensively about the problem of achieving political balance. It is especially acute in the national health service, in which so many appointments have been necessary because of the constant reorganisations and the creation of new trusts. In my experience in the north-east, in the earlier years of this Administration, appointment lists were stuffed with people who could

declare Labour political activism. Almost every name on any list, of those who were political activists, was the name of a Labour activist. There were some non-political appointments, but the political ones were almost wholly Labour.

There was conspicuous representation on the lists of people who had lost their positions as leaders of councils, for example, which included some able and competent people. However, the new system is designed to escape such clear bias in the lists. It is disappointing to hear that, in the experience of hon. Members from other constituencies, the new system may be failing to draw on the full range of people who should serve on public bodies.

To some extent, the appointments reflect the applicants: many applications in the north-east were from Labour activists. We should not simply accept that. Rather, we should counteract it: efforts should be made to recruit from a wider group than those who recognise, perhaps because of their political experience, that they would have a good chance of being appointed to a public body.

The hon. Member for Workington quoted a newspaper article that probably referred to a recent report by the Institute for Public Policy Research about public bodies in the field of culture and media. The report pointed out that such bodies were heavily white, middle-class and Oxbridge in their composition. Some are Government-appointed bodies, although some of the worst offenders are self-appointed bodies. High sheriffs, for example, are appointed by their predecessors. Those who have a political affiliation are almost invariably Conservative, and in rural areas they are almost always landowners or have substantial landowning or farming interests. We should examine cases in which people appoint their successors, which is the case with some of the cultural bodies referred to in the report. That should be of concern to the Government.

Too many responsibilities are in the hands of unelected bodies. People often say that they do not want regional government. We have regional government, but it is not elected: it is conducted by people who are appointed and are therefore the product of a system that, as we all recognise, has serious defects. Whenever possible, responsibilities should be handled by elected bodies, whether existing ones such as local government, or regional or specialised elected bodies. There is a role for unelected or partly unelected advisory bodies that draw together a particular mix of experience, but we would much rather put major executive responsibility in the hands of people who have to account to the public and who may lose their jobs if the public are not satisfied with how that responsibility is discharged.

Some of the many unelected advisory bodies and taskforces seem to escape the public body rules because they are temporary—even though they seem to last a long time. The new lobbying to get on taskforces is increasingly leading to questions about whether political donors are more likely to be appointed to taskforces than others. The proliferation of temporary taskforces, which are not particularly transparent in their appointments systems, suggests that whole areas of policy are being influenced by those who have come to public positions through a defective appointments system—one that clearly fails to represent many sections of society. The Minister should take such concerns seriously, and I look forward to his response.

10.40 am

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I, too, congratulate my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham), on securing this debate and on the interesting way in which he opened it. He raised a series of concerns, which have been developed by other hon. Members.

The hon. Gentleman said that about £23 billion of public money had been spent by non-departmental public bodies. The latest figure that I have is £25 billion, but whatever the exact figure it is a substantial sum—and it has increased since the Government came to office. The Minister may say that the number of quangos has been reduced, but the number of people employed by them and the amount of public money that they spend has increased substantially since Labour came to power.

The hon. Gentleman was right to lead off by saying that the fundamental issue, which relates to a whole range of concerns expressed in the debate, is accountability. A number of clear concerns have been expressed by members of both main parties this morning, and I hope that the Minister will address them by saying how appointments are made. I hope that he will also deal with the widely expressed concerns about the workings of the NHS Appointments Commission. I know that that body is new, and that it is the responsibility of the Department of Health; none the less I hope that the Minister will take our concern as a sign that a debate on that subject on the Floor of the House would be useful in the not too distant future.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), in his characteristically robust way, flattered the Minister shamelessly by calling him something of a bruiser—a remark that I suspect the Minister will have framed in his smallest room before the end of the week. In a characteristic tour de force, my hon. Friend spoke of the appointments system in the NHS and more broadly, saying—the Minister would not expect me to make my speech without gently tweaking his tail—that it is important to put things in context.

The Government are of course entitled to take the view that they have won two general elections, that they are now in office, and that they would expect to appoint more supporters of the Labour party than supporters of other parties. However, that needs to be put in the context of what happened at the general election. For every vote won by the Conservative party, the Labour party had 1.3 votes; the evidence now is that for every appointment of a Conservative party member by the NHS Appointments Commission, five members of the Labour party are appointed. That seems a little out of kilter with how people voted at the general election.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) made some important points. I imagine that all of us here today would thoroughly endorse what he had to say about the unfortunate events in France, and would endorse his wish for a steady growth in the proportion

[Mr. Tim Collins]

of ethnic minorities at all levels of public appointments, including the most senior. I applaud, as he did, the early steps that have been taken by Sir Richard Wilson, but little progress has yet been made and a lot more needs to be done.

I strongly endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about the horrors of people making what he called a career in quangocracy. I endorse his view not only because, as he pointed out, if some people are getting themselves appointed to a multiplicity of quangos, it will mean fewer appointments for everyone else, but because if people are spending all their time on one quango or another, the very merit that they supposedly bring to those quangos—their outside experience and links—is likely to be lost.

The hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) made an excellent speech. I very much agreed with everything she said. I hope that she will not regard praise from the Conservative Front Bench as damning her further, as she has already been praised by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith)—we are not trying to bury her political career. She is right that if our civic society is genuinely to mean anything, the issue of geographical representation must be carefully considered. I imagine that, like me, she would not expect any Minister in any Government easily to be able to divide the number of appointments made by central Government by 650 and allocate them evenly to constituencies, but she is right to say that some constituencies and types of constituency are under-represented.

I recognise that the hon. Lady represents an area where social deprivation and exclusion are widespread. My own constituency is in many ways more fortunate, but some people there feel excluded, as the hon. Member for Workington said. That applies throughout Cumbria because of its geographical distance from London, the difficulties in rural areas and the differences that arise even within regions, because Cumbria is very different from other parts of the north-west. The Government have a responsibility to address those issues of geographical representation. It would be helpful if the Minister would say whether the Government would like to address those issues, because I believe that any positive comments from the Government would be widely welcomed across the political divide.

The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) raised some extremely powerful and cogent concerns about the workings of the NHS Appointments Commission. He is clearly much more familiar with the details of the cases to which he referred than I am, but he seemed to raise matters of grave concern. Certainly, the principle that those who are to be supervised by NHS bodies should not have a hand in deciding who should be on those bodies seems to be correct, and that reinforces the need to consider how the Appointments Commission is working in the health service.

In addition to paying tribute to the hon. Member for Warrington, North, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed also made a fair point when he said that there had been difficulties under successive Governments—this is not something that has suddenly sprung to life since 1997. He said that the best way of tackling the problem that he correctly identified—the fact that some people do not feel that it is even worth their while putting their names forward for nomination—is to increase the element of democracy and accountability.

We might differ about whether that should be achieved through regional government. Some of us are concerned that that would result in decisions that are currently taken at county level being hoovered up and decided at a more distant level. None the less there is a case, as the Conservative party has proposed, for Parliament to take on a role comparable with one in the American system, whereby Select Committees play a part in approving the appointments of very senior officials to non-departmental public bodies.

For example, we have suggested that that should apply to some of the individuals who have been mentioned in the debate, such as the head of the NHS Appointments Commission. Perhaps one way of ensuring that that person has a more constructive working relationship with Members of Parliament of all parties would be to decide that such an appointment could go ahead only with the support of the relevant departmental Select Committee. The hon. Member for North Durham is nodding his head, so he recognises that that might be one way to counter people's perceptions of arrogance and unaccountability.

Before the Government came to power, they made clear declarations about what they would do about the quango state. When he was shadow Home Secretary, the present Foreign Secretary said:

"Labour will dismantle this unelected quango state."

In his final speech to the Labour party conference before the 1997 general election, the present Prime Minister said that he would place

"the quango-state in history's dustbin where it belongs."

Given the statistics that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford has quoted today, perhaps he would like to reflect on the somewhat ironic comment by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who in 1996 was shadow Secretary of State for Health:

"Solely political appointments made to non-executive directorships on the boards of trusts and authorities must end."

As my hon. Friend pointed out, he did not say that they must "sort of change".

We have a huge number of these wonderful tsars. I was going to read out the list, but it is so long that I do not have time. After going through a list of two or three dozen tsars, one comes upon the classic title of the "red tape tsar". That seems a little ironic to some of us.

I would expect from the Minister an admirably well intentioned declaration of Government belief in wider access to appointments and greater openness and transparency. However, we need to hear about how the Government propose to make the process even more democratic than he would maintain it currently is, and whether he can address hon. Members' concerns, not least those expressed by his hon. Friends about the workings of the NHS Appointments Commission.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I shall try to live up to expectations, although the text of my speech has more pages than there are minutes left for me to deliver it, so I hope hon. Members will forgive me if I have to pass as quickly as possible over as many issues as possible.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) on securing the debate. It has been both refreshing and wide ranging, even if it has featured cross-party compliments going from one side to the other—perhaps too many for my liking. My hon. Friend stressed the need to broaden awareness and knowledge of the appointments processes. I would like to touch on those processes and develop that theme, but first it is important to consider the nature of public bodies. They operate at arm's length from Ministers, but Ministers are ultimately responsible for what they do. Some public bodies are well known in Parliament and have a high profile with the general public. Others are less well known, but all of them have an impact on our lives, whether they are concerned with the development of policy or the delivery of public services, or whether they help define issues or advise Ministers in that process.

There has for decades been a concern about the proliferation of so-called quangos. The Government are committed to keeping their number to a minimum. There are now fewer in the UK than at any other time during the past 20 years. As of 31 March there were 1,025 such bodies—a 10 per cent. decrease since 1997.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) made an important contribution when talking about the composition of these bodies. Of the roughly 30,000 individuals serving as board members, 34 per cent. are women. However, his particular concern related to the proportions from ethnic minority communities. In 1992, 2 per cent. of board members were from those communities, and in 1997 the proportion was 3.6 per cent. As of 2001, it is 4.8 per cent. There has been some progress, although I accept that a lot more still needs to be done to ensure that we focus on increasing involvement among the black and Asian community. I will read his report, entitled "The Glass Ceiling", and consider it for the future.

The accountability of public bodies is extremely important. Ministers are accountable to Parliament on behalf of the public bodies within their Departments. We have tried to take steps since 1997 to promote greater awareness of what such bodies do and to make them more open and accountable to the communities that they serve.

We publish detailed information on all public bodies. We intend to publish the next edition before the end of this year, and the intention is that that should include, for the first time, summary information on the arrangements that each body has in place for ensuring greater openness and transparency in what it does. I pay tribute to Dame Rennie Fritchie, the Commissioner for Public Appointments, who is responsible for governing the appointment processes and ensuring that the code of practice is properly adhered to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington urged us to give greater attention to the process of appointing local people to local public bodies. Where a public body serves a clearly defined neighbourhood, district or region, it makes sense for its members to have experience of living or working in that community. Merit and ability to do the job are the overriding criteria for appointment to any public body, but Ministers have to account to Parliament for the performance of local as well as national public bodies, so it is desirable for local decision makers to be drawn from a pool of candidates who are likely to engage with and understand local needs.

Clearly there are many communities in which we need to make extra efforts to encourage applications for places on the boards of quangos. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) was articulate in voicing her concern that lower income groups and deprived communities are not sufficiently represented. Successful local boards are those with a wide range of people from diverse social, economic and employment backgrounds. We must engage proactively with individuals who, although they have the skills and abilities to do the job, for some reason do not know when vacancies arise, or how to apply. I shall continue to examine policies and practices to see how improvements might be made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington also made comments about the regional development agency in his area. It is difficult to achieve a balance in all specifics and to secure appointments on merit. I am assured that a member of that RDA, John Dunning, does live in Cumbria. Strict proportionality is never fully attainable, but I recognise the need to keep a close eye on such matters.

I have a deep-rooted concern about achieving diversity nationally, not just to represent the composition of the nation better, but to enrich the character and the work of public bodies. I am anxious to ensure that we are clear about our targets and aspirations. Gender, ethnicity and disability all require more attention; there have been positive improvements, but there remains a historic, lingering under-representation of women, ethnic and other minorities and disabled people. We have introduced various measures to address that problem, and seminars throughout the country have encouraged women to join public bodies. None the less, greater national diversity is still required, so the Government will continue to promote vacancies nationwide, so that people living in all areas of the UK have a fair chance of winning seats on boards.

There have been comments about the NHS Appointments Commission, particularly from the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who developed his frenzied conspiracy theory at length. In April 2001, we established the independent NHS Appointments Commission, which has effectively taken NHS appointments out of the political domain. The appointments that it makes—there have been more than 4,500 to various trusts—still come under the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, Dame Rennie Fritchie. She has said that there is no significant difference between the political activity of applicants and that of those appointed, nor is there evidence of any political bias in the appointments process. My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) made a number of points about his discontent with a

[(Mr. Christopher Leslie]

specific case. I listened to his comments with care and will ensure that I again draw them to the attention of Ministers in the Department of Health.

I want to stress the ways in which the Government can ensure faster progress on diversity, which should have high priority in our policy approach to public bodies. We publish the annual report to give all Departments a strong incentive to improve their performance. The Cabinet Office will now focus on making greater efforts to help Departments to apply best practice in making appointments to the public bodies that they sponsor, so that they can meet the published targets on diversity.

Work is also in hand to identify new initiatives and policies in order to broaden the range of options available to Ministers. That will allow us more radically to drive progress on diversity in its widest sense, while preserving the overriding principle of selection on merit. Merit is always our overriding principle, but we must keep a close eye on diversity issues. Our main focus must be on putting the right people in the right posts so that they can deliver higher quality public services. That must be the outcome that we all seek, and I am glad to have had this opportunity to highlight those matters.

Pensions

11 am

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): The greatest domestic problem facing all developed countries is how to finance retirement incomes for populations that are experiencing increasing longevity and declining fertility. People are living longer and having fewer children from whom to draw the work force of the future, and that is a serious problem. It behoves us all to participate as constructively and positively as possible in such debates, and I shall certainly approach this debate in that spirit.

Britain is better placed to cope with the problems of an ageing population than most other countries in Europe. That is not only because our expected population pattern is more favourable than those on the continent, but because we have taken steps to encourage people to save and invest for their retirement. We have more funded private provision for retirement than any other European country; indeed, we have more provision than all other European countries together, and the value of our funds exceeds that of all of theirs.

None the less, funded private provision still meets only 40 per cent. of this country's future pension liabilities. When the Government came into office, they set a target of raising that percentage to 60 per cent. by the middle of the century, and I unreservedly praise them for that. After all, we require companies to save and invest to ensure that they meet their pension promises to their employees. Even though Governments cannot legally bind their successors, it is extraordinary that they have not considered it necessary similarly to ensure that money and resources are saved and invested so that their pensions promises can be met. I therefore welcome the fact that the Government have at least set the target of making a major step towards more funded provision for our pensions liabilities over the next few decades.

Unfortunately, having set that target, they have, in practice, moved decisively in the opposite direction. They have vastly increased their unfunded pensions and retirement-provision liabilities by replacing the state earnings-related pension scheme with the state second pension, which is set at a more elevated level. Furthermore, they have raised the value of the basic state pension by introducing the minimum income guarantee, raising it and extending it across the spectrum through the pension credit.

At the same time, funded occupational schemes are in crisis. Many are closing to new members, many are cutting contributions and, therefore, the benefits to which employees are entitled, and many are in deficit. Insurance companies are advising older members in particular to opt back into the state second pension, which they will receive on a pay-as-you-go basis, not a funded basis.

Occupational schemes are being pushed in that direction largely because of the underlying problem of increasing longevity, which has been accentuated by the decline in investment returns in recent years. However, the situation was aggravated most of all by the extraordinary decision of the incoming Chancellor to impose a £5 billion a year pensions tax on people's pension funds. I christened it the "Maxwell memorial

tax," not only because two of the Treasury Ministers were formerly close colleagues of Robert Maxwell, but because up to that point he had been the only person who believed that one could siphon money out of a pension fund and get away with it, as pensioners would not discover until many years later that the money was missing. The Government's action undermined private occupational schemes.

That effect was aggravated further by an increase in the regulatory burden and the disincentives to savings created by raising the minimum income guarantee and extending it up the scale through pension credit. That, in turn, was aggravated by the impact of the financial reporting standard 17, which is not directly the Government's responsibility but has caused problems. I hope that the relevant accounting bodies will consider the proposals of the Confederation of British Industry to allow a spreading of the impact of pension liabilities on companies' reported accounts.

As a result of all those factors, the savings ratio has collapsed. There has been a serious overall impact that we cannot ignore. However, we must be constructive and consider how the Government might pull back from that decline and meet the targets that they have set and which I welcome. In substance, there are only two ways in which they can do that.

First, they could promote more saving, investment and back-up, and supplement state pension pledges. When I was Secretary of State for Social Security in the last year of the Conservative Government, I proposed a scheme called "basic pension plus", which would have ensured that every entrant to the labour market—every young person starting work—was given his own pension fund, into which a rebate would be paid that was sufficient, over their lifetime, to fund a pension at least equal to the basic pension and the earnings-related pension. That would have been backed up by a guarantee from the state that if, through any misfortune or bad investment, the fund did not reach that target, the actual pension would be supplemented and topped up to the level guaranteed by the state through the old basic pension system. Those people would have had the prospect of sharing in a buoyant economy on the upside. If their funds did better than the modest projections by the Government Actuary, that would have acted as the basis for the rebates.

The scheme would have guaranteed the basic state pension to everyone in the country, enabled future pensioners to share in economic growth and given a massive boost to investment such that, if it had raised the growth level of the country from 2.2 per cent. to 2.3 per cent., it would have paid for the whole scheme through the extra revenues that it generated. It would have relieved taxpayers of the biggest single element of public expenditure that they faced and brought about the greatest extension of personal ownership since the spread of home ownership that ensued by allowing people to buy their council houses. In so doing, it would have resolved a major issue facing modern Governments: how to provide a decent, secure pension for increasing numbers of elderly people.

Sadly, although the scheme was widely welcomed by all the media—apart from the *Daily Mirror*, and I should have been alarmed if it had supported it—by those across the political spectrum and by commentators, the Government decided not to go ahead and implement it, as they could have done. I should have been only too happy to have seen my ideas purloined. Instead they have wasted five years, as we are five years further back from entering a system in which everyone has his own savings pot for the future. If we had introduced it, 3 million young people would now have their own pension funds, with £3 billion invested in them, growing towards their future retirement needs.

The Government went so far, as they often do, as to borrow some of my rhetoric and dress it up in stakeholder pensions, saying that they were adopting some of the substance of Lilley's ideas. Unfortunately, stakeholder pensions, about which I have said many favourable things, are as close to basic pension plus as a hologram is to the real thing that it represents—as soon as one gets to it, one finds that the substance has disappeared. The most desirable feature of the stakeholder pension is that it is to be hoped that it will reduce the cost of provision and the element of savings siphoned off for administrative costs rather than being invested for future pensions.

It is said that people will save and invest only if they are either persuaded or compelled to do so. Persuasion costs money. Introducing stakeholder pensions, with their limit on costs, has removed the reward that could persuade people to save without replacing it with any element of compulsion that makes them save. Compulsion was clearly envisaged in the paper produced by the Government, "Partnership in Pensions" when the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) was still gracing the Government. Since his departure, matters which were then going in the right direction have taken a downturn. The famous page 105, paragraph 9 of "Partnership in Pensions" referred to

"compulsory funded pensions for those earning over £9,000 a year".

Obviously, that was the Government's original proposal, and they failed to proof-read it out of the final published document.

I urge the Government to think again. If they intend to meet their pledge, should they not consider automatically giving to all or some of those accruing the state second pension rights their own pension fund, with a rebate paid into it and a guarantee that their pensions will, at the end of the day, be topped up if, by any misfortune, the fund is not able to provide them with the pensions foreseen by the state second pension scheme? In many ways, the state second pension lends itself to such an approach even better than the basic pension lent itself to basic pension plus. That is because the state second pension is accruing, over a generation, rights to a better pension when people retire. It therefore lends itself to a scheme that comes in gradually, with a generation.

As the scheme is, in essence, a flat-rate one, or will become so for most people, it is rather more suitable for people to opt out of than was the case with the state earnings-related pensions scheme. As SERPS was earnings-related, people with low earnings received a very low rebate, which was inadequate to cover the fixed costs of setting up and maintaining a fund. The state second pension would have a flat-rate rebate paid into private funds that would be more than sufficient to make it worth while for everyone, on all income levels, to opt out of the scheme and have their own fund generating a pension at least as good.

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

At present, 8.3 million people contribute to employers' pension schemes and 5.5 million have personal pension schemes. About 13.8 million in all have, therefore, opted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme, and about 7.5 million have opted in. We are talking of moving from a world in which two thirds of people have the benefit of a private pension to one in which 100 per cent. of those earning above the lower earnings limit have their own pension scheme. The current value of rebates paid into such pension schemes is £6.8 billion a year. That would have to be increased to cover the third not covered at present.

I have some questions for the Minister. I do not expect her necessarily to respond to them all here and now, but I hope that she will be able to provide answers in due course and that they will be placed in the Library to allow other Members to benefit from them. Why did the Government abandon their original proposal to make it automatic for everybody to have their own personal pension fund, equal in value to the state second pension, rather than leaving many people opted into the pay-as-you-go system? What would the value of the extra rebates be if the Government were to move to that system? What would be the value of a fund of an individual on average earnings if they paid into a fund to meet their state second pension liability by the time that they retired? How many ten or hundreds of thousands of pounds would they have accumulated through investing their rebates over a working life?

Was the reason why the Government were reluctant to move towards automatic opting out that for those who are older the structure of rebates does not fully reflect the rate of accrual—the value of the pension rights accrued by people who are working in older age—because there is less time for those rebates to accumulate compound? How much would it cost if only younger people, perhaps those under 30 or under 50, were automatically opted out of the state second pension? I calculate that if new entrants only were opted out, the net cost of extra rebates for each year's cohort of people would accumulate at a rate of £100 million per annum, but I ask the Minister to check whether that back-of-the-envelope calculation is correct.

The underlying problem facing our pension system is that we are living longer, but we are not working longer. In 1950–52, the life expectancy of a man who had reached the retirement age of 65 was, on average, 11.7 years, which meant that he could, on average, expect to enjoy 11.7 years of retired life. By 1997–99, a man reaching 65 had a life expectancy of 15.3 years. For women, whose retirement age was and still is 60, their life expectancy in 1950 was 18.1 years at 60, but now it is 22.8 years. Roughly speaking, average life expectancy in retirement has been rising by about one month every year for the past few decades.

In theory, if people worked for a bit longer and were therefore retired for a correspondingly shorter period of time, they would have more time to save and they would be able to buy a higher pension at a lower cost for the slightly shorter remaining period of their lives. Ideally, people should be free to make that choice and should be equipped with their own pension fund. When they reach the sort of age at which they may want to think about retiring, if they have a fund sufficient to cover a pension at least equal to the minimum that the state deems to be adequate or appropriate for them, they could decide to retire. Alternatively, they could decide to work a bit longer and build up a bigger pension fund to have a higher pension for their retired life.

The evidence—I seem to remember seeing it when I was Secretary of State—that people would behave like that is provided by the fact that those with money-purchase pensions, predominantly the self-employed, have been working for longer, while those with defined benefit pensions or those who are reliant on the state pension have been retiring earlier, despite their longer life expectancy. When people have a money-purchase pension to which they can continue to add by working a bit longer, they do that to enjoy a higher standard of living during a slightly shorter period of retirement.

Other countries have encouraged that process to a considerable degree. I was in Washington a while ago, and my taxi driver told me that he was 92. At first, I was slightly shaken by that, but he pointed out that he did not drive at precipitate speed, he drove with great caution, he had more experience than most taxi drivers and he drove extremely safely, which was proved because he had lived so long. People can continue working to very considerable ages if they so wish. Ideally, it should be up to them, but the Government have effectively repudiated plans to move towards a position in which all of us have our own pension funds, and all of us are free to make our own decisions about when we retire and whether we decide to work a bit longer. The Government have to face taking that decision collectively on our behalf rather than leaving it to us as individuals to make the decision.

In the Scandinavian countries and America, Governments have already begun to consider moving the pension age, or have already legislated to raise the state pension age, from 65, typically, to 67. I believe that it is time for the Government, working within their own parameters, to launch a debate about the future retirement age that they will be able to afford. They must consider whether it is more logical to raise the pension age by, for example, a month per year, so that those starting work now would probably work for three or four years longer than the previous generation, just as they would expect to live three or four years longer.

The decision will be important, whether the Government decide to go down that route or not. I emphasis that it is a decision that they face because they have chosen to rely largely on state pay-as-you-go obligations. They have increased those obligations and unless they do something about that they will not be able to meet their target of reducing the cost of state unfunded liabilities to just 40 per cent. of the total by the middle of this century.

My decision to equalise the state pension age for men and women at 65, rather than reducing it to 60 for both sexes, was extremely important. That was actually the biggest single cost-saving decision that any Government or Minister have or has ever taken. I am glad to say that it was endorsed by the then Opposition. Effectively, a consensus was achieved through the process of launching a debate, floating the arguments and allowing discussion. I believe that if the Government did a similar thing now, they would receive a similar constructive response across the political spectrum.

Are the Government considering that process, or have they closed their eyes to that option? What is the cost to the taxpayer of a failure to reflect in any way longer life expectancy in the state pension age? My calculation is that a single month's deferment of the state pension age would save about £3 billion gross—perhaps £2 billion net—of any extra benefits that would have to be paid. That is a very significant decision.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is interesting and remarkable that the incentives for deferment of state retirement pension to a greater age are relatively modest and that doing so provides very little return? That may be reflected, as the memory of the earnings rule dissipates, in the much lower number of people who are deferring retirement and claming their benefit at the age at which they are entitled to it.

Mr. Lilley: I announced an increase in incentives for those who chose to defer retirement. Under the long-established system—I think, since 1948—anyone who deferred taking their state pension for a year subsequently received a pension that was 7.5 per cent. higher. I announced that that would be raised to 10 per cent. I am not sure whether that promise is being honoured by the Government, but I hope that it will be. I do not expect a huge impact from that. The evidence suggests that it will not be as effective as people having their own pension fund to which they can pay in extra if they work a month or two longer and buy a slightly higher pension at a lower cost as a result.

I reiterate that the Government have created the problem, not us. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and for Havant (Mr. Willetts) for the constructive way in which they have approached the problems of longevity. I hope that the Minister will give a similarly positive and constructive response, rather than descend into the scaremongering and point-scoring that we saw during the 1997 general election. The problem is too important for us to take too partisan an approach.

In practice, pension provision over the years has been a case of each Government building on predecessors' work rather than undoing it. I hope that the Government respond to the building blocks that we have put in place, and to the ideas that I have put forward in today's debate.

11.26 am

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) on securing the debate. He raised several important pension issues, including how longevity in our population poses new challenges for the Government, and I look forward to the Minister's response. I shall expand the debate to incorporate final salary pension schemes, and discuss how the Government can seek to protect employees as more and more companies move away from such schemes.

A final salary pension is a type of defined benefit pension that guarantees, on retirement, to pay out a pension based on the final salary that the individual earned in a job—that includes their years of service for a company plus any pension that they have transferred to that employer's pension scheme from another employer. Most importantly, members of such schemes are guaranteed a specific pension, which they can calculate, and on which they can base retirement plans. The final salary membership has sadly declined from 51 per cent. in 1983 to 41 per cent. in 1995, but it is still the dominant occupational pension.

However, such schemes are expensive for today's employers. Several factors have played a part in making final salary schemes much more expensive for them. There are social factors, such as demography and, as the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, an increase in life expectancy. Policy changes, such as the introduction of the minimum funding requirement and financial reporting standard 17, and economic circumstances, such as the fall in stock market returns have also contributed. Those economic conditions and policy changes have impacted enormously on employers who previously offered final salary schemes, so we must consider how the Government can instigate policy changes to take off some pressure. If we do not remedy the situation now, although the full impact will not be felt for 20 or 30 years, it will be felt. Failure to act will create a pensions time bomb.

The alternative pension scheme that companies are embracing is the defined-contribution or money-purchase scheme, which transfers any investment risk to the individual away from the company. Thus if the stock market underperforms, the employee's pension is likely to be less than it would have been under a final salary scheme. In broad terms, a final salary scheme guarantees a pension at a given fraction of final salary—the firm has to fund the scheme to achieve that—but a defined-contribution scheme guarantees absolutely nothing.

According to the National Association of Pension Funds, 46 companies stopped accepting new contributions to their final salary schemes last year, offering money-purchase schemes instead. Nearly half the companies that ran defined-contribution pension schemes contributed 5 per cent. or less of employees' salaries. In a typical final salary scheme, companies contributed 10 per cent. or more. Without final salary pension schemes, retired workers could be 30 per cent. worse off.

A vast number of companies have closed their final salary schemes to new employees, citing the aforementioned factors, individually or collectively, as reasons. British Telecom closed the BT pension scheme, of which I am a member, to new employees on 1 April 2001, and many others, such as HSBC, Marks and Spencer, Abbey National and Barclays, have closed their schemes. To my certain knowledge, two companies have even closed their schemes to existing employees, and I fear that that may become commonplace. The Trades Union Congress estimates that the numbers in final salary schemes may have fallen from 5.6 million in 1991 to 3.8 million in 2001.

With money-purchase schemes, the size of the individual's pot at retirement determines the size of his or her pension. If the individual has not put in enough, or if investment returns have been poor, there may well not be enough to fund a decent pension. At present, the situation is made immeasurably worse by the high price

[John Robertson]

of annuities. The law obliges people to use their pension fund to buy an annuity. If they look up annuity rates on the financial pages of newspapers, they will find that they need an absolutely huge pot of money to buy a half-decent pension. For a retirement income of £10,000 per annum, a half-pension for a partner, should the pensioner die first, and inflation proofing of up to 5 per cent., a pension pot of at least £250,000 is required. Clearly, that is impossible for the vast majority of people. The pension industry says that people need to save 20 to 25 per cent. of their salary for the whole of their working life to ensure a reasonably decent pension. For all but the richest in society, that is nothing more than a pipe dream.

Closure of final salary schemes also has implications for employee relations. Although closing a final salary scheme may not be a breach of contract, it may break an implicit promise in the employer-employee relationship. Apart from the obvious damage to the commitment that employees have to their company, the loss of a guaranteed pension and reduced company contributions may increase wage demands as employees seek to maximise their pension.

There are several problems with the minimum funding requirement, which is an assessment of the funding status of pension schemes on the basis of rules established by the pensions industry with Government support. The test for the schemes is too onerous. A scheme fully funded under MFR rules—one that can meet its pensions obligations—is in fact over-funded; in other words, the MFR is too cautious. It might seem absurd to advance that argument, but it is not. Under MFR rules, schemes have to be returned to fully funded status in a fairly short period of time. It is now 10 years, and it used to be five years. The only way that that can happen is if employers make sizable payments to their pension schemes. The onus is placed on them to make up the shortfall, although in many cases the shortfall is really nothing of the kind.

Another problem is FRS 17, a new accounting convention, which is designed to force companies to show any shortfall in their pension scheme funding as a liability on their balance sheet. It is designed to aid transparency in company accounts by forcing companies to disclose the real state of their liabilities.

We must appreciate the sheer size of most mature pension funds. The BT scheme is capitalised at £28 billion, and is worth about 50 per cent. more than BT itself. If it were shown to be 10 per cent. less than fully funded, there would, under FRS 17, be a £2.8 billion liability on the BT balance sheet. That is a totally artificial state of affairs. First, when we define a pension fund using MFR, we greatly exaggerate the size of the deficit. Secondly, even under MFR, we have 10 years to put it right. FRS 17 grossly exaggerates that liability. It can seriously damage a firm's share value and current rating, making capital more expensive. Those two issues are, between them, driving firms to close their final salary schemes.

Peter Thompson, chairman of the National Association of Pension Funds, said that companies were facing a number of cost pressures. He said:

"People are living longer, stock market returns in the last few years have been relatively poor, interest rates have been declining, so the cost of buying a pension has gone up by about 40% in the last five years."

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Would the hon. Gentleman care to evaluate the impact that the rises in national insurance contributions will have on those companies? Does he agree with me that they will greatly aggravate companies' difficulties in paying generous pensions? He has not mentioned in his analysis the advance corporation tax, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) rightly compared to a Maxwell memorial tax. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that, too, has had a severe impact on company pension schemes?

John Robertson: The hon. Gentleman has obviously read the penultimate page of my contribution. On his first point, I refer him back to the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, who instigated the debate and said that we should not try to score points on the subject, as it is too serious. However, I would probably disagree with the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) about national insurance contributions.

Given the comments of Mr. Peter Thompson, and the fact that buying a pension has gone up by 40 per cent. in the past five years, the Government might well say that they want people and their employers to take more responsibility for pension provision. However, the introduction of MFR and FRS 17 has created an environment in which that is practically impossible. The result is that we shall increasingly have to step in and use taxes to fund pension subsidies in order to prevent consigning the elderly to poverty and future Governments of all colours to electoral disaster.

What should the Government be doing? A first step should be at least to reform or, ideally, get rid of FRS 17 so that it does not have such a major effect on decision making. There should also be further reform of MFR to make it more realistic. FRS 17 is due to be replaced in 2005 with an international accounting standard. I would like that to be speeded up, although I am concerned that the international standard may well be based on FRS 17. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that.

We could add incentives, such as abolishing advance corporation tax for those firms that maintain their final salary schemes, and abolishing it retrospectively for those who reopen such schemes. We could also consider giving firms transitional relief from other taxes if they can show that they are under genuine pressure because of their final salary pension schemes. We could lift the requirement on people to purchase annuities with their money-purchase schemes and make it mandatory for firms to pay a minimum of 10 per cent. of salaries into money-purchase or stakeholder schemes. Essentially, we must make it cheaper for firms to keep final salary schemes going while making it more expensive to switch to money-purchase schemes.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I realise that some of my ideas to alleviate pressure on companies and encourage employers back into final salary schemes may fall under

the responsibility of the Treasury, and I shall seek assurances from the Minister that she will raise them with that Department. I look forward to her response.

Miss Anne Begg (in the Chair): Order. I remind hon. Members that summing-up speeches must begin at midday. Two hon. Members have indicated that they wish to speak. I call Mr. Boris Johnson.

11.39 am

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I shall be very brief, as all my points have essentially been made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), at whose feet I sit and to whose briefings on pensions I used to listen humbly and sincerely when I was a mere journalist—which, of course, I still am.

This morning, I asked my secretary, who is, I am afraid to say, a Labour voter, about her pension arrangements. She said that she had none, as no one in her family lived longer than the age of 50, and she saw no reason to make any private arrangements. That is a great shame, as I have every confidence, as she seems in the peak of health, that she will live a long time. As my right hon. Friend said, we live increasingly longer, and through several errors of policy the Government have gravely aggravated the pensions position in this country.

When sitting at the feet of my right hon. Friend, I used to write that Britain had the best private pension provision in Europe, which remains true. Unfortunately, however, we seem to be harmonising our position downwards, towards the rest of Europe. Perhaps that is a subtle scheme to approximate us to the rest of the Community, with a view to eventual membership of monetary union, or perhaps there is an agenda that I do not follow. However, I cannot believe that that is so. It seems more likely that errors of public policy, such as FRS 17, to which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) referred, and advance corporation tax, which, as my right hon. Friend said, swindled £5 billion out of the general pensions pot, have contributed to a grave diminution in general available funds.

The question is, what are we going to do now, and how can we respond positively? Having listened to my right hon. Friend, I am delighted to discover that the Lilley plan rides again. We had such difficulty defending it in the 1997 election. The Minister smiles, because she remembers that at the time the Labour party grossly traduced and misrepresented it. It was a good idea, and I understand that my right hon. Friend is now offering a sophisticated variant that would do well and enable the Government to escape some of the mess that they have created.

The Government should think much more creatively about the retirement age. It is ridiculous that a man such as Sir Magdi Yacoub is forced to retire at 65 whereas a journalist such as Bill Deedes can, praise be, go on for ever, like my right hon. Friend's taxi driver. I am anxious to hear the Minister's comments about that, as I do not believe that many people will exculpate the Government for their failures in public policy over pensions. There is a risk that we will oscillate from apathy to panic. I am starting to detect serious panic about pensions. People my age are seriously wondering what is going on, and it is time that the Government did something to allay their fears.

11.44 am

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): As I am sure that you would agree, Miss Begg, my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) may be a journalist, but he is not a mere journalist.

I rise to speak with some hesitation, as I find my own personal pension arrangements immensely difficult to understand. An appropriate metaphor for today, to spare your blushes, Miss Begg, is that I feel like St. George taking on the dragon of the pension industry. The complexity of personal arrangements is difficult. I speak on behalf of my constituents, who tell me all their bewildering concerns—frankly, I often get lost.

Members of Parliament are a species of public servant who seem likely to continue to benefit from a final salary scheme. For those constituents who might criticise me, I would like to place on record that the average length of service in the House is not that long. The benefits of the final salary pension scheme are nowhere near as great as they may appear to the outside world, coupled with which, many of us take a substantial salary decrease to become Members of Parliament, so it is even worse than it looks.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) on securing this debate on an important subject. Over the past year or so, my postbag has reflected a sharp increase in concern, not from the traditional pension lobby of those who rely entirely on state pensions, but from those who have put something away for their retirement and now find that it is under threat. In the past few months, employees of companies that are ending their final salary pension schemes have expressed complaints and concerns to me. The importance of that issue is growing. Politicians sometimes find it difficult to deal with because, typically, those who express their worries are approaching retirement or have actually retired. However, we must urgently focus our attention on it. The term "pension time bomb" was used by my right hon. Friend and by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), in what I thought was a useful and thoughtful contribution, although I am not sure that the Minister would agree. He raised important and serious points.

In opening this important debate, my right hon. Friend took a characteristically emollient tone, and did not seek to score party points. I shall try to follow his example, but I believe that a substantial part of the fault for the problems that we face rests at the door of the Government. My right hon. Friend said that there were only two ways to persuade people to provide for their old age—by persuasion and by compulsion, but it is difficult to persuade people to deal with the issue against the confusing and complex background noise on pensions created by the Government.

Although the debate is primarily about final salary pension schemes, the subject cannot be divorced from the broader pension framework that the Government have sought to establish, the single greatest mistake of which is the growing reliance on means-tested benefit for pensioners. Pensioners have also been badly affected by the increase in council taxes, which is another source of taxation on pensioners that is outside the terms of this debate.

[Mr. Peter Luff]

Thanks to the minimum income guarantee, an impression has been created in the minds of some pensioners that they no longer have to provide for their old age. It may be that the closure of their final salary pension scheme does not concern them as much as it ought to. That worries me.

The Government's failure to move on annuities may also discourage people facing the end of their final salary pension scheme from making appropriate contributions to their own money-purchase scheme. The responsibility rests with the Treasury rather than the Minister's Department, but I urge her to look again carefully at the arguments relating to annuities. Final salary pension schemes appear to be in terminal decline, and there will surely be few private limited companies left with such a scheme within a few years—my right hon. Friend looks surprised, but it is difficult to imagine that any would maintain them. Therefore, the way in which the Government treat money-purchase schemes will become even more important.

The Bill introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) comes before the House again on 10 May. In the context of the demise of final salary pension schemes, I hope that the Government will take a more sympathetic view to that Bill than they have so far. The introduction of other pension arrangements such as stakeholder and second state pensions has made the background noise to the pensions debate immensely more complicated for people such as myself who, frankly, find such things very difficult to understand.

In October last year, the National Association of Pension Funds said that 46 companies had closed their final salary schemes to new members during the previous year, 13 schemes had been switched from final salary to money purchase, 95 per cent. of companies had said that providing an occupational pension took up more company resources compared with five years ago, and 92 per cent. expected that to continue. Fewer than one in 10 companies intended to replace any scheme with a stakeholder one. More than seven out of 10 private sector schemes said that the introduction of stakeholder pensions had had no effect on the benefits that they offered. Worryingly, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland pointed out, more than three quarters of schemes said that the new accounting standard FRS 17 would make it less attractive to employers to offer a final salary scheme. The director general of the National Association of Pension Funds, David Cranston, summarised the situation very neatly when he said:

"Falling investment returns, combined with longer life expectancy undoubtedly account for much of this pressure. But the volume and complexity of red tape has clearly weighed heavily enough with some schemes to drive them away from final salary scheme provision... There is no shortage of evidence that employers want to provide good occupational schemes wherever possible. It is to their credit that many do so. But too often, regulations hinder rather than help. Now, more than ever, is the time to encourage such employers and to strip away unnecessary red tape."

I hope that the Minister can address that issue. It lies within her responsibilities.

The two crucial issues that have been mentioned and cannot be repeated too often are the devastating impact of the Chancellor's raid on pension funds at the beginning of the New Labour Administration, final salary pension schemes—

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend suggests that there was a one-off raid on pension funds and that is often repeated in the press. However, £5 million is extracted from pension funds every year; I hope that that is clearly on the record.

Mr. Luff: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. Like the increase in national insurance contributions announced last week—£9 billion-worth of taxes on incomes, not just one year but year on year—so it is with the raid on pension schemes through the change in advance corporation tax rules.

The accountancy firm Chantrey Vellacourt DFK has calculated that a typical 30-year-old needs to save an extra £200 a year just to pay for the Chancellor's stealth tax. It has also been reported that Tesco has imposed a 15 per cent. increase in contributions to the company's final salary pension scheme as a result of that tax—a 15 per cent. increase that will not boost the final pensions of employees, but will pay the Chancellor's stealth tax. The Chancellor said that the stock market would continue to rise and that the increase in value of pension funds would more than compensate—he said that it would be a direct result of the abolition of the tax, as I recall. Those of us with modest shareholdings and ISAs know how sadly untrue that has proved over the past couple of years.

My right hon. Friend made a powerful case concerning the damage done by FRS 17 to the pensions industry, particularly to final salary pension schemes. He suggested its repeal. I suspect that the damage has now been done—repeal will not undo it, and it cannot be unwound—but I should like to hear the Minister's analysis of the point. Will she put pressure on the Inland Revenue to change the arrangements?

The issue is important, and there are three major Front-Bench speeches to come, so I shall not prolong my remarks unnecessarily. However, the total impact on pension arrangements of what the Government have done is serious. It is estimated that many will need to double their savings rates to provide a decent retirement income. An individual aged between 35 and 45, earning between £17,500 and £35,000 per year currently saves 10 per cent. of annual income for retirement. In order to provide a comfortable retirement, that needs to increase to between 10 and 21 per cent. of income. Those are immense figures. My fear is that, with their final salary pension schemes scrapped, such individuals will see the Government's promises to protect their income under the minimum income guarantee and decide that it is not worth the candle. When the Minister responds to the debate, she must set the demise of final salary pension schemes in a much broader context. This is becoming our most important domestic policy issue: in 20 years' time we shall have to face our constituents and say that we did not speak up soon enough to protect them from the poverty that confronts them.

A low savings rate, confusion caused by the stakeholder pension arrangements, more means testing, the failure to reform annuities, tax increases on pension

schemes through the change in ACT and new Inland Revenue rules are creating a pensions time bomb. I hope that the Minister will address that problem, and will take from the debate a sense of urgency: the cries of pain are beginning now, but we have heard nothing yet.

11.54 am

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) on having secured the debate, and on the way in which he expressed his views. He has a great deal of expertise and interest. I do not always agree with his conclusions, but I do not doubt the genuine expertise that he brings to the subject. My only regret is that my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) cannot be here—he is a member of a Standing Committee that is sitting this morning—as he has more expertise on the subject than I, even with my best efforts, could achieve. Nevertheless, I hope that I can contribute to what has been a good debate.

I congratulate the hon. Members for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), for Henley (Mr. Johnson) and for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on their contributions. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire mentioned the parliamentary pension scheme, which is a serious problem. The idea that the House can vote to enhance its final salary scheme while the rest of the country sees its final salary schemes going by the board is difficult to defend, and I for one am not prepared to defend it. That, however, is a subject that should be addressed elsewhere.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden made a comparison with other countries. He was right to say that, in contrast to many European countries, we are fortunate in having funded schemes. I am glad that he did not follow the path taken by many of his colleagues on so many other subjects by saying that European models are preferable. I find it difficult to reconcile the Conservative party's telling us that health systems in Denmark are preferable to ours with what it says on other subjects. It took the biscuit yesterday when the shadow spokesman for the Home Office said that we should consider policing in Belgium as a model. The mind boggles.

Setting that aside, we are historically lucky that many pensions are provided by funded schemes. Indeed, it is the schemes that are not funded that cause the greatest problems. I recall my time in local government when police authorities had difficulties with non-funded schemes because of the problems of finding the contributions to ensure the recipients a proper rate of return on their pensions, and of dealing with the ever increasing proportion of their revenue that went towards pensions. I am not sure that the answer is to keep hiking up the pensionable age. Doing so has clear attractions, but I am worried that we would start chasing our tails.

I recently heard an interesting exposition by the head of demographics at the United Nations. He was comparing the ratio between those of working age and those of retirement age in various countries, and Britain is by no means the worst in that respect. In order to maintain a steady ratio between those in work and those of pensionable age, some countries, including China, would have to increase the age of retirement into the 90s. People would have to continue working until the age of 90 in order to receive a pension. That is clearly not sustainable, and it worries me that we might end up in some sort of forlorn race.

I shall deal principally with the crisis in funded pension schemes that so many hon. Members have spoken of, particularly that in final salary schemes. It is a hot potato at the moment, and is causing a great deal of concern to many people. Indeed, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland drew attention to it. Clearly, many factors are involved. I have no doubt that the impact of advance corporation tax is a factor—one among several. Many people also point to FRS 17, but I am less convinced by that argument. That change in accounting standards will improve the transparency of the arrangements, but it will not change the value of the funds. It is the triennial valuation of the funds that tells fund managers that they have insufficient funds to meet their commitments, not the way in which they are reported.

Several hon. Members have suggested that the real problem is twofold. First, mortality rates have fallen and longevity has increased; secondly, stock market returns are lower. It is extraordinary that actuaries can glibly pass over their contribution to those eventualities, given that they predicted neither of them in the 1980s, and did not advise pension funds of the need to make provision for them. As a result, many large companies took a contributions holiday at that time, saying that they had a large excess in their pension funds. As we came into this century, however, they were facing deficits, which raises serious questions about the way in which actuarial science was practised in the 1980s.

There are two problems with the way in which companies have behaved. First, they have often used pension schemes to reorganise their structures. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, companies that were disengaging labour, restructuring and downsizing used attractive enhanced pension schemes to move members of the work force into early retirement. Those people are now, of course, the beneficiaries of the schemes.

The other problem relates to contributions holidays, with which I have some difficulty, although I have always defended the concept. It is fair for companies to take contributions holidays from final salary schemes, because they take the investment risk. They may have to put more money in during the bad times, so it is only fair that they should put less in during the good times. The trouble, however, is that they have had no intention of putting more money in during the bad times, even though they have been happy to take it out during the good times. They see schemes as one-way arrangements, or no-lose bets, which is why we now have huge deficits following the performance of the stock market and the inclusion of additional beneficiaries. Companies must tackle their deficits. BT's is an enormous £3 billion, BAE Systems' is £776 million and Unilever's is £647 million. Those big figures must be tackled, but as we heard, many companies have chosen to do so by closing their final salary schemes and pulling out altogether or migrating to money-purchase schemes.

A money-purchase scheme is not intrinsically a worse deal for recipients, and will indeed be better for some. One by-product is that employees have ownership of the

[Mr. David Heath]

fund and surety about what will happen. Companies with a final salary scheme are, however, the guarantors of the investment and are within their rights to say that it is theirs—although that is disputable.

Whatever the scheme, the key is whether the level of company investment is the same as before. Time and again, however, we find that it has gone down. Marks and Spencer migrated from a final salary scheme to a money-purchase scheme, and its contribution fell from 22 per cent under the old scheme to between 6 and 12 per cent under the new scheme. That is the problem: not enough money is going into the system to meet the demands made on it.

The crux of Government policy must be to find ways to stem the reduction in contributions, and, ideally, to enhance them so that schemes have sufficient resources to provide benefits. The Government have announced their review; they are working on it at the moment, and we look forward to the results. What is the basis for that review and the decisions that the Government will then take? Do they want simply to staunch the wounds, or to enhance the contributions made by the corporate sector into the funded pension area? Are they prepared to ensure those levels of contribution by one method or another? Will there be a compulsory minimum contribution, and if so, what mechanism would be used?

Should there be a compulsory employer contribution, to stakeholder pensions if not to company schemes? That might be exactly the spark that is needed to get people to take out stakeholder pensions, because an employer contribution often persuades people to take out such a scheme. Are there changes in regulation or in costs to companies that would make a difference? In the context of the 1 per cent. rise in national insurance, some sort of fiscal incentive might seem attractive to companies.

Is it necessary to revisit FRS 17? It is not the villain of the piece. In terms of reducing the contributions, it is the messenger rather than the protagonist. Nevertheless, if some aspect of it needs to be reviewed, the Government should respond.

The Minister responsible for pensions told us that there would be legislation on the minimum funding regulation. When are we likely to see that, what is it likely to comprise and what is the intention behind it? The Minister is smiling, and I suspect that she may not be able to give me the answer to all those questions, but perhaps she will—who knows?

Is there a case for exploring the concept of insurance against insolvency again, so that there is at least a backstop for companies who find themselves in difficulties? Should we re-examine the fiduciary duties of trustees and companies to existing and future pensioners? It is clear that nothing illegal or improper has been happening in the closure of the schemes, but in terms of the actual effects on pensioners, something profoundly disturbing has been happening. The Government have a role in ensuring that those people's interests are properly protected. They are not necessarily well protected at the moment, and there is a case to answer. I hope that the Minister will be able to respond positively to some of the questions that have been raised.

12.7 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) deserves all our thanks for securing this debate and for the moderate way in which he elucidated his concerns. For those who have any residual doubt about the efficacy of Westminster Hall as a sounding board for matters of policy, this debate justifies the innovation: a former Secretary of State and deputy leader of my party has taken the trouble to share his thoughts and give us his experience on this matter. In fairness to all those who have contributed subsequently, they have responded in kind.

My right hon. Friend drew on his experience and was critical, but not hyper-critical, of Government policy. He expressed concern about the expansion under this Government of unfunded liabilities. He made the point that savings and investment are central not only to the pension issue but to economic performance. He rather trenchantly made the point that persuasion costs money. We all need to remember that. The alternative to persuasion is compulsion, and many of us would not wish to go down that route without good reason.

Finally, he produced a series of specific thoughts built on his earlier thinking, which will repay further consideration. In particular, I welcome his ideas on incremental changes that would have a highly beneficial effect in the medium term, but might not necessarily either take the political trick or produce instant results.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) made a valuable contribution, which was not uncritical of the Government, and considered the issues very much from the employee's perspective. It is right that we should do that—I often think that the trade union input to the pensions debate has not been fully developed in either its practical or its theoretical aspects. He gave us a fascinating statistic about the relative size of the market capitalisation of BT as against its pension fund—twin stars, as it were, with different sizes at different times. That was hugely interesting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) spoke with perspicacity and self-assumed detachment. I especially liked his reference to the danger of oscillation from apathy to panic, which was germane to what my right hon. Friend said. Although there are a lot of reviews in hand, the Government seem to be in apathy mode, but we do not want them suddenly to push the panic button and make a series of dramatic and eye-catching gestures that may not be right for the long term.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) said what I might have said, but eloquently and with a passion that I cannot claim to match—and amen to that, because he put his points very clearly. He rightly said that we must all get to grips with the issue.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) spoke for the Liberal Democrats. His colleague, the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb)—or "the professor", as he is known—is speaking in Committee upstairs. Both the Minister and I should be there as well, so we are two-timing at the moment, but I make no complaint about that, as it is in the nature of the House

that we should be in two places at once. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome made some interesting comments about companies and contributions, to which I may return in the moment.

To summarise my views, this debate is analogous to the debate about the national health service, in that we are at a turning point in our affairs in relation to pension provision. It may be no accident that the NHS and modern pension provision have their roots in the wartime consensus and derive from action taken by the post-war Labour Government. Subsequent Governments have worked on them in various ways, and there is now an interesting difference between the two. Whereas the NHS has continued as a broadly monolithic state and taxpayer-financed provision, the pensions industry quickly moved away from that and took advantage of a mixed economy with a diversity of provision and a high degree of private financing. That may be the reason for the relative success of our system compared with the more state-funded systems on the continent.

That success may now be at risk. The Government's attitude, as shown originally in their Green Paper of 1998, did not so much mis-sell as oversell the Government line. The objectives were not bad—in particular, the aim of reversing the split of 40:60 between private and public provision—but some hon. Members have expressed real doubt today as to whether that split can be achieved. Certainly, to achieve it, the Government must respond briskly to the reviews of Alan Pickering, Ron Sandler and the Inland Revenue that are under way, before going ahead with any changes.

I should remind hon. Members that funded pensions are what they say they are—they are pension funds, generally held in tradable securities. Therefore, the funds reflect the performance of stock markets and other kinds of markets, and whatever a Chancellor does is directly relevant to their success and to the amount that is available to beneficiaries. I cannot help but take notice of the changes to the national insurance contribution, just as I could not overlook the raid of advance corporation tax in the past. I had the privilege of serving under my right hon. Friend on our Treasury team, and we both remembered the impact of previous policies on pensions. We shared our knowledge with the Committee but, however hard we worked, people did not take much notice because they did not realise what could happen when the markets hit a downturn. Now markets have turned down, triggering difficulties for pension funds.

One cannot say that ACT was the sole cause of pension fund problems, but since 1997, perhaps coincidentally, there has been a series of phased retreats in provision by companies with company pension funds. They began by abandoning the pension holiday as finances became tighter and went on to close final salary schemes to new entrants, with the possibility that they might close those schemes to existing beneficiaries and place the arrangements on a new contractual basis.

As has rightly been said, the move from defined-benefit or final salary schemes to defined-contribution or money-purchase schemes is not, of itself, objectionable, but it is usually accompanied not by an extra contribution from the employer to acknowledge the transfer of risk, but by a reduced contribution, which reduces the employer's overall costs. I heard a senior partner, a well known figure in the pensions industry, speaking yesterday, and he said that employers seem to have lost interest in the whole pensions business. That needs to be recorded in the context of this discussion, because if that is happening—because employers do not want highly intrusive, pervasive and expensive pension funds—we must consider self-provision, for which my right hon. Friend and others in the previous Conservative Government established some of the framework for the future. That was not always successful the first time around, but now we are considering private pensions and stakeholders, which need not be objectionable, any more than the growth of self-provision of company cars is objectionable. What matters is how it is achieved and whether, ultimately, the figures are adequate.

Our concerns have been well expressed in the debate, and we want the Minister to answer the points that have been raised. They centre on the targeting of private provision; issues relating to annuities, which were raised so passionately by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire; the adequacy of contracting out rebates in relation to the state second pension; the interaction of the state second pension and the basic pension, both of which are probably still inadequate to reach the guarantee offered under the pension credit—so there may not be an incentive to save—and that certainly will not help individual pensioners who have a partial contributions record; and the awful business of means testing 5.5 million pensioners, which has been referred to by several commentators, including the National Pensioners Convention.

What has come out of today's debate is an acknowledgment that we are all in this together. This is not just a matter for the young or old. The old will come and complain to us, now or in the next few years, and the young will be very critical of us if we let them down in the medium term or do not explain what is necessary to secure their future provision, which must be comparable with what we expect for ourselves. The concerns apply equally to the relatively affluent and to those who live at income support level. People need security in retirement, and it will be a long retirement because of longevity. We hope that people will be able to share in rising prosperity over that time. In addition, the issue should not divide either side of industry. Everyone needs to get together and decide whether provision should be made through a company scheme and, if so, how the burden is to be shared. Above all, the Government need to take the issue seriously and to level with the British people about what is needed and what they can do to assist us in providing for ourselves and our dependants for the future.

12.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): This has been an interesting debate. It is a shame that it cannot continue for a little longer, because it was apparent to me as I listened to the contributions of hon. Members that many of those present wished that they had a little more time to expand on their comments. None the less, we are stuck, as ever, with the time available to us.

First, I join many hon. Members in congratulating the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who obviously retains his interest in the area in

[Maria Eagle]

which he used to control Government policy as Secretary of State, on initiating the debate, and on the way in which he put forward his views, because as everyone in the Chamber is well aware, if we had so chosen we could have had a slanging match. I am in no doubt about that, so I congratulate him also on the tone that he adopted in making his points.

Before trying to deal with some of the many points that have been made, I want briefly to say something about the Government's approach. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned back-of-the-envelope calculations, but although he might be able to do calculations on his specific, technical points—the value of rebates, the rate of accrual for older people contracting out and what the value of pension pots would be if only younger people opted out—on the back of an envelope, I cannot. I do not have any envelopes with me, and I do not have the time or the wherewithal to answer those points in full now. I shall, of course, write to him on them and, as he suggested, ensure that my answers are placed in the Library of the House so that other Members can see them.

The Government's strategy is to try to ensure that those who can afford to save for their retirement do so. I do not think that that is different from the strategy of any previous Government. We want any saving undertaken to be rewarded, not penalised. We want individuals to have the right information to save enough. A theme that has run through this morning's debate is that it is how much people save, rather than the different ways in which they save, that is crucial. I do not think that people have ever saved enough. I am sure that it would be true of most of us here that, if we were to stop and examine our arrangements, we would be shocked to see how poorly we are providing for ourselves.

We must ensure that people have the right information. We must also ensure that regulation on employers and pension providers is proportionate, while providing the safeguards that people expect, and that the right savings products are available.

We have heard less today about those who cannot afford to save for their retirement, but they form a substantial proportion of our population. The Government are committed to developing policies that will enable such pensioners to share in the country's rising prosperity and that tackle pensioner poverty. As a Government, we value the genuine public-private partnership and mix of provision for pensions. That has been true of all Governments; although there have been different views on how to stimulate saving and the most appropriate way of doing that, the value of that genuine public-private partnership has not, I think, ever been questioned.

State provision, and pension policy generally, must seek to maintain a fair balance between the needs of today's pensioners and those of tomorrow's pensioners. We have heard little about that balancing act that Governments must carry out. Such balances are never easy to obtain, and there are bound to be tensions between the requirements of those of working age today, in respect of incentives to save, and the amount of money and basic state provision that we give to today's pensioners. There are trade-offs, and we must ensure that we get those right.

Pensions are a long-term business. We must bear that in mind, no matter how much sound and fury there is about the particular issues of today and the past year or two, although I am not saying that those are unimportant. It would not be sensible for any Government to make panic judgments based on whether the stock market is going up or down, and that could be even more true if, as the right hon. Gentleman argued for, there were a much greater extension of funded provision. It is important to bear in mind that, although in many instances political decisions are a reaction to yesterday's or last week's headline, politicians on either side of the House should not fall into that trap with regard to pensions. I am not accusing anyone of that; I am simply saying that that must be borne in mind when we consider what we ought to do.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he approved of the 60:40 aim for 2050—the aim for more pension provision to come from private savings. He then said that some of our anti-poverty measures, which are aimed at relieving some quite bad poverty among today's pensioners, work against that aim. I do not accept that tackling pensioner poverty is a problem. We must ensure that the need for people today to have a decent retirement is balanced with the disincentive effects that adhere to increasing the basic minimum. Many Opposition Members would argue, and have argued this morning, that such disincentive effects adhere either to the minimum income guarantee or to the reward for saving that the pension credit tries to give. A balance must be struck, because there are those who have not had proper access to pensions in the past.

In the past, the pensions system was not perfect because many people such as carers and those who did not have full work records did not have proper access to it. SERPS was aimed at those who had worked for most of their lives. We have to try gently to move the entire system to benefit those who have not had that benefit in the past. We have to strike a balance between that and creating disincentives for tomorrow's pensioners.

We can argue about whether that balance is correct, but I hope that Government and Opposition Members will accept that the Government are not moving away from perfection. The right hon. Gentleman might believe that he approached perfection when he was in office, but many people were not able to have or to save for proper pensions through no fault of their own. We have to strike a proper balance, and I shall not apologise for trying to deal with pensioner poverty.

The right hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends raised the issue of advance corporation tax credit. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) also raised that point. Those Opposition Members, and even my hon. Friend, do not always mention that a cut in corporation tax at least partially offset the cost of the removal of the credit, which is worth about £3.5 billion a year to companies, and that such company pension schemes also have tax privileges worth £14 billion a year. It was not just an annual removal of £5 billion because there were offsetting issues.

The hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) raised the issue of the national insurance increases in the Budget being an additional burden. If he had read Saturday's *Financial Times*, he would have spotted that employer national insurance contribution increases can

actually encourage private pension provision because they make contributing to occupational pensions, on which one does not pay national insurance, more attractive than pay. It can be argued that that is an incentive effect.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden argued that the state pension scheme is not sustainable with the additions that the Government are putting on to it to alleviate poverty, but we do not accept that. Even after the introduction of the pension credit, which will benefit half of all pensioner households, state spending on pensions will rise by only about 1 per cent. of GDP over a significant period of time. We think that that is sustainable, and so does PricewaterhouseCoopers, which also had a look at sustainability.

The right hon. Gentleman talked in some detail about replacing the basic state pension with funded provision, but one danger is that the state is always the last resort if funded provision goes wrong. It would be difficult for a Government to say, "Here is your rebate for your funded pension. Go and get your own pension pot. If it all goes wrong do not come back to us." There is no doubt that pensioners would come back. It is not possible for the state completely to get out of pensions.

I know that the right hon. Gentleman and others are looking at that, but a man retiring now would have to build up a pension pot of more than £60,000 to get a pension equivalent to the basic state pension, which, it is important to remember, is not all of the state's provision. A woman would need more than £80,000. The rebate for a 16-year-old man would need to be £623 a year. For a woman of that age it would have to be more than £1,000. To fund those rebates would require an increase in national insurance contributions of between 2 and 3 per cent. It seems that the Conservative party is against increasing national insurance contributions at the moment, but it may look at that and think that it is good value for money. There is, however, no cost-free way in which to do that.

Staying contracted into the basic state pension provides the certainty of a particular retirement provision. If people had contracted out in the past two years, for example, and seen the stock market fall as it has, they might have become worried about their basic state pension equivalent. There is a guarantee from the Government at present that one will at least receive the pay-as-you-go provision. If that were contracted out, could the state really say, "Go away, we will let you starve"? I am not sure that it could.

Mr. Lilley: I offered the guarantee that if things went wrong, people could come back to the state. That is what the guarantee means.

Maria Eagle: That would put the cost through the roof. I do not have a figure for it, but if there were a major stock market crash, we might end up with a large bill. I do not have much time to say more.

Miss Anne Begg (in the Chair): Order. In fact, we have no time at all.

Drugs (Sport)

12.30 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise several issues concerning drugs in sport.

Sport has become very big business during the past 20 years, with growing media attention and, crucially, the possibility of growing rewards for the top performers. With those increasing rewards, new ways have been promoted to enhance an athlete's performance.

In my teens, I enjoyed watching Daley Thompson win decathlon after decathlon. I always remember him explaining that he trained on Christmas day because none of his rivals would, which gave him an advantage. For someone of my athletic capabilities, a second trip to the gym a week would undoubtedly enhance my performance, although I fear it would not get me any closer to playing elite-level sport. Others with more feasible aspirations look to coaches and doctors for the extra dietary information or the additional training routine to help them gain that split-second improvement in performance to launch them on to a medal podium.

Sadly, the truth is that a few contemplate artificial improvement in performance by looking to performance-enhancing drugs, such as anabolic steroids which might be used by athletes to increase muscle size, to train harder and for longer, or to increase their competitiveness and aggression. Other examples of drugs that might be considered to raise performance are human growth hormones, which stimulate muscle and tissue growth. Competitors may misuse erythropoietin—EPO—to enhance the body's oxygen-transport capacity and therefore endurance.

As awareness of the use of drugs in sport has risen, so have the demands on sports' governing bodies to do more to keep their sport drug-free and ensure that competitions are not won by drug cheats. Drugs taken to enhance performance can also cause the athlete health problems. Anabolic steroids can stop people growing properly. They can increase the chance of liver failure, heart attack, miscarriage and stillbirth. Large, prolonged doses of human growth hormone can lead to high blood pressure or diabetes, while the misuse of EPO carries severe risks because of thickening of the blood, which can overload the heart and increase the risk of blood clots, strokes, heart attacks, and even death in the very worst cases.

There are good public health reasons, as well as the moral and ethical desire for genuine, fair competitions, for challenging the use of performance-enhancing drugs. Research by the British Medical Association published two weeks ago highlighted evidence from GP and needle-exchange surveys, alongside interviews with anabolic steroid users, suggesting that anabolic steroid use in British gyms is sufficiently commonplace to be considered a genuine public health problem. Further research is needed on the potential adverse impact on the body of anabolic steroid use.

There have been few attempts to quantify the extent of doping in elite-level sport. As far back as 1989, two inquiries by committees in the American and Australian Senates highlighted the use of performance-enhancing drugs by athletes in their respective countries. The

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Canadian Government established their own commission of inquiry in 1990, concluding, sadly, that the problem of the use of performance-enhancing drugs was widespread not only in Canada but throughout the world.

The BMA report went on to note the comments of Anthony Miller, then research director at the Institute of Sports Medicine in Australia, who talked of an epidemic of drugs use in sport, and added that the problem was worsening. A British survey that is worth referring to is one that was carried out by the former Sports Council in 1996, which showed that almost 50 per cent. of British athletes thought that drug use in international competition in their sport was a problem. The figure rose to more than 80 per cent. for track and field athletes.

Fortunately, there have been few cases in the UK of sports people testing positive for performance-enhancing drugs, but we cannot afford to relax our continuing efforts to rid national and international sport of such drugs. It is certainly true that Britain has led the way in tackling the issue. The UK Sport anti-doping unit serves as a model for other countries to build on in their efforts to combat the use of performance-enhancing drugs. The publication and widespread acceptance of a national anti-doping policy, which was strongly backed by Ministers, is extremely positive, as has been the strong Government support for the establishment and operation of the World Anti-Doping Agency.

However, several issues still need to be addressed. There are genuine concerns about the number of drug tests that Britain can fund. The regulation and labelling of supplements is an issue that is worthy of further work. Funding for research into performance-enhancing drugs and legislation governing the role and supply of such drugs by coaches and doctors are required, and there is a continuing need for consistency among governing bodies in responding to positive drugs tests. In addition, the planned testing regime in the run-up to and during the Commonwealth games needs to be reviewed.

UK Sport's capacity for drugs testing has remained largely unchanged since 1991. The number of tests has not significantly increased. Without a substantial increase in funding, the number of drug tests may decrease, given their rising sophistication. For example, blood tests cost £1,000 each, yet they will soon be an accepted and normal procedure for rooting out cheats using EPO in international sport. Such tests are particularly important for endurance events. It was good to see EPO testing during the recent London marathon. The need for such testing was highlighted by the commendable protests of our own Paula Radcliffe at the world athletics championships in August last year.

I recognise that plans are in place for an extensive programme of drug testing, including pre-games testing, but I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to make representations to the Commonwealth Games Federation to provide for a testing regime that includes blood testing for EPO before and during the games. Perhaps additional lottery funding could be released to help close the gap and to make the testing regime even more robust.

Aside from the Commonwealth games, many other countries now undertake a far greater number of drug tests to reinforce their anti-doping rules. For example, I understand that there were 6,100 tests in the UK in 2000. That compares with 8,900 in France, 14,200 in Germany and 11,300 in Italy. In terms of hard cash, the UK spent £1.2 million on its drugs-testing regime in 2000. France spent the equivalent of £1.7 million, Germany £1.4 million and Italy £2.8 million.

The cost of drugs tests at UK and European laboratories has become a concern to many of our national sports bodies, which understandably want to maintain a robust drugs-testing regime but face financial pressures. The danger is that drugs tests will be conducted in laboratories that are significantly distant from the UK. I understand that the laboratory at King's college is the only one in the UK that is able to carry out tests to the level required. Clearly, a further facility is essential if we are to drive down the costs of drugs tests without compromising the process.

In 1999, there was a small but significant increase in the number of drugs tests showing nandrolone use. Reports emerged of a similar pattern from samples collected in other countries. Concern has focused on supplements used by athletes. Several athletes have successfully defended themselves over positive drugs test findings by citing worries about nandrolone in supplements.

A nandrolone review committee, which reported in January 2000 at the behest of UK Sport, gave strong warnings about the dangers of using supplements that may be incorrectly or inadequately labelled. Furthermore, research conducted in Aberdeen under the guidance of Professor Ron Maughan suggested a link between supplements and the presence of nandrolone metabolites. The link was confirmed through an analysis of bottles of supplements at the International Olympic Committee laboratory in Cologne.

The possibility of inadequate labelling or cross-contamination of supplements puts athletes at risk of using prohibited substances unknowingly, and it inevitably makes disciplinary investigations more difficult. Current rules rightly make athletes ultimately responsible for substances found in their urine or bloodstream. That position is crucial if the vast majority of athletes who are honest are to be protected from those who want to cheat by administering banned substances. Nevertheless, it is not impossible to envisage a situation in which an athlete is the innocent victim of a positive drugs test after having used supplements that, unknown to him or her, contained nandrolone metabolites.

Concerns were raised in the UK following the successful prosecution of the food supplements company Maximuscle in October last year for incorrectly labelling one of its supplements. Meetings have been held with the supplements industry, without real positive progress, to try to improve the standard of information available about products, and to achieve a higher standard of quality assurance. The industry does not want to pay for a quality assurance system. Given the level of advertising for food supplements, and the lack of rigour applied to labelling by some companies in the industry—both factors have been cited in recent positive drugs tests—it is entirely right that sports governing bodies should advise against the use of any

supplements. However, given the potential health implications of performance-enhancing drugs, we cannot leave it at that.

I am not a fan of regulating business for its own sake, but the supplements industry must recognise that it needs to change. It is unacceptable that rogue companies continue to peddle products containing banned substances without proper labelling. Action must be taken. Independent verification of labelling and company activity is essential. Perhaps the Food Standards Agency or the Medicines Control Agency could be given responsibility to monitor that area. In its report two weeks ago, the British Medical Association recommended that all dietary supplements should be clearly labelled to prevent sports people from inadvertently ingesting banned substances.

In addition, there needs to be consideration of the role of coaches and doctors in the supply of performance-enhancing drugs to athletes. Their role was thrown into graphic relief by the investigations into widespread drug use during the Tour de France. A French study in the 1997 *British Journal of Sports Medicine* reported that 61 per cent. of those surveyed who were drug-using sports people cited their GP as the source of the drugs. There are several genuine and proper reasons why doctors would prescribe drugs to athletes, but that survey shows that the responsibility for the use of performance-enhancing drugs needs to be widened in some cases.

In Britain, the General Medical Council already has clear guidelines about a doctor's role, but that is not the case for the equivalent bodies among our European neighbours. Perhaps the World Anti-Doping Agency should consider that. Given the importance of the coach and doctor in the team that supports an athlete in elite sports, we must ensure that we have the legislative means to hold to account a coach or doctor who helps, and possibly pressures, an athlete into taking a performance-enhancing drug.

Further consideration must be given to policing the supply of performance-enhancing drugs. A monitoring company, Envisional, has highlighted the easy availability of prescription drugs over the internet. In the UK, the Medicines Control Agency has a responsibility, but the international nature of the internet makes policing more difficult. The easy availability over the internet of banned substances such as EPO has also been highlighted.

Concern has been expressed about the extent to which sport's governing bodies are consistent in how they enforce rules on performance-enhancing drugs. There are inconsistencies between governing bodies about whether the UK governing body or the relevant international federation has jurisdiction to hear the dispute. There are also inconsistencies between sports about the length of penalty imposed for the same breach of the same IOC medical code. There are even inconsistencies within sports between the constitution of the UK governing body and its international federation over the hearing of drugs issues. I commend UK Sport's attempts to link funding to whether a sport's governing body is willing to adopt rules and procedures on performance-enhancing drugs that are consistent throughout the UK. That work needs to be accelerated.

I know that the Government take the issue seriously, and I commend the work of UK Sport's anti-doping unit. Nevertheless, I hope that the Minister will address the need for further action in several of the areas that I highlighted.

12.46 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on having secured this afternoon's debate. It is an important issue. We all recognise that the use of drugs in sport is, ultimately, cheating and undermines that sport's integrity. Indeed, the use of drugs probably tarnishes sport more than any other problem. As my hon. Friend said, the Government, and I as Minister for Sport, are committed to the battle against doping in sport. I congratulate him on the work that he has done before the debate and with which he will continue. We shall join many others to ensure that doping is driven out of sport.

We regard the problem as a worldwide matter and are keen to work at national, European and international levels to combat it. As Minister for Sport, I am committed to ensuring a drugs-free environment in sport and to putting in place appropriate policies and procedures to achieve that, and I take on board my hon. Friend's points.

In the United Kingdom, we are committed to achieving a partnership between sport and the Government to tackle the problem. The UK is recognised as one of those at the forefront of the fight against the use of drugs in sport. Nationally, the Government fund the UK anti-doping agency, UK Sport, to implement the Government's programme to combat the use of drugs in sport.

We spend more than £1.3 million a year on ensuring the programme's quality and comprehensiveness. In 2000–01, UK Sport undertook 5,406 tests, of which only 110, or 2 per cent., showed positive results. The programme included 404 events organised by national governing bodies, and 156 international and European sports federation events.

UK Sport's anti-doping programme includes in and out-of-competition testing of athletes, the development of a national policy framework and provision of education and information services for athletes and sports governing bodies. The anti-doping programme is rightly regarded as one of the best in the world and is something of which we can be proud.

The need to respond to major changes in sport, such as the increasing availability of supplements, to which my hon. Friend referred, the use of blood testing and concerns about the adequacy and inconsistency of disciplinary procedures, recently added fresh urgency to the work of UK Sport in the field. Recent examples include setting up the nandrolone review, the continued development of blood-testing protocols and finalising national anti-doping policy. Earlier this year, I was proud to be present when UK Sport launched the new national anti-doping policy. I join my hon. Friend in thanking the staff of UK Sport for the professional and effective job that they are doing. The organisation is recognised around the world as one of the leaders in the field, and I want to ensure that that continues.

UK Sport has worked with national governing bodies to develop a new policy that promotes greater consistency in procedures and decision making on anti-

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doping across governing bodies and sports federations. It also sets out clear minimum standards that need to be achieved, with clear lines of responsibility for those involved at each stage of the anti-doping process. That includes independent review, disciplinary and appeal procedures. In short, the new policy provides a consistent and transparent system that benefits athletes, governing bodies and sports fans alike.

The national anti-doping policy is not the only new initiative being undertaken by UK Sport. The drug information database is the latest in a range of information tools available to sport. It provides athletes with online up-to-the-minute information about which medications in the UK contain prohibited substances and which contain substances that are allowed under the regulations of sport. It is a very comprehensive and effective user-friendly instrument that can be used by all those involved in sport. Athletes can check the medicine that they are thinking of taking anywhere in the world using the internet. Pharmacists and doctors will be able to help athletes select the right kind of medication to allow them to continue to train and compete without worrying about whether they are likely to fail a test. That is another example of real help that the Government are giving to athletes through UK Sport.

The problem of doping is not only damaging the image and the value of sport; drug misuse can be harmful to an athlete's health, as well as to those close to the athlete—family, friends, colleagues and fellow competitors. Athletes can also be influential role models for young people. If we are not careful, the sporting world will become tarnished, and we will start to lose the potency of that influence with young people. The behaviour of top athletes can have a significant impact on young people as they aspire to emulate their sporting heroes. We need to take action on a number of fronts to address the problem.

Part of UK Sport's anti-doping remit is to ensure the development of extensive information and education programmes for athletes, coaches, officials, administrators and parents on anti-doping. Through these schemes the Government can ensure that, throughout the UK, athletes and people who provide them with support are aware of the dangers involved in drug abuse. Next week, I shall be opening the British Medical Association's conference on drugs in sport. The conference, which aims to build on the excellent work already being undertaken in the UK, will focus on the roles and responsibilities of health care professionals in tackling drug abuse at all levels in sport.

Health care professionals can play a key role in ensuring that sport in the UK takes place in a drug-free environment. By alerting those who work in the medical profession to the risks involved in using drugs in sport, we can also draw attention to the wider public health implications of drug abuse in our society. Under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, the UK has strict control over the supply of substances such as steroids. It is an offence to produce, supply, possess with intent to supply and import or export with intent to supply such substances. Those controls are aimed at suppliers and traffickers who profit from selling and supplying those substances to not only sportsmen and women but others such as bodybuilders.

Lessons learned from sport and the action taken can help to address drug problems faced elsewhere in our society. Indeed, only recently, in response to concerns in sport—similar to those that my hon. Friend raises—and to advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, the Home Office took action to extend the list of substances controlled under the 1971 Act. Those are all substances that are included on the International Olympic Committee list of prohibited substances and include nandrolone-related metabolites.

Of course, many substances prohibited in sport are in use in wider society for perfectly legitimate reasons, including, for example, supplements. That means that it would be impossible to make the supply of all substances regarded as performance-enhancing a criminal offence. Doping in sport is prohibited because it is cheating. Substances are prohibited because they give those who take them an unfair advantage over competitors. The criteria applied to determine what substances are prohibited relate to fairness in competition rather than health or crime. It is important to keep that in perspective when examining what we are trying to achieve. Sometimes, in the international arena, and especially in the European arena, we see the issue of drugs in sport used to make pronouncements about the ills of society. However, we are focused on making sport free of performance-enhancing drugs.

The only practical way of dealing with the use of banned substances is through the action of sport itself. Contravening anti-doping regulations is a case of professional misconduct in sport, and the decision to ban an athlete as a result of a positive drug test is a matter for sport's national governing bodies and international federations. Criminalising what is professional misconduct is not, therefore, an effective option. In the United Kingdom, we favour a non-legislative approach focusing on the standardisation of doping lists, sanctions and procedures within the sporting framework. The national anti-doping policy gives sport the focus to put in place procedures that are consistent, accountable and transparent. Sport itself must continue to own the problem of drug misuse in sport.

Of course, doping is a global rather than national problem that requires co-ordinated action at an international level. The UK has played a role in that action. We proudly achieved ISO certification under the international standard for doping controls in 1997—the first country to do so—and we were one of the first signatories to the international anti-doping agreement.

The Government have been fully supportive of the development of the World Anti-Doping Agency since its inception in 1999. The establishment of WADA has moved international co-operation against doping to a new level and given added impetus to our work. The Government firmly believe that WADA is the appropriate body to promote co-operation in this field.

I recently attended a meeting in Brussels between European Union Ministers, the President of the IOC, Jacques Rogge, and WADA officials, where we discussed how best to move forward the agenda. In informal discussions, the IOC president was keen to ensure that the UK was fully on board in relation to involvement in WADA as well as the IOC because of the expertise and respect that we have in the field. It was pleasing to hear him say that. I can confirm that, along

with other national Governments, the UK will contribute to WADA's core costs in 2002. As my hon. Friend probably knows, there has been some wrangling about that issue. We believed that procrastination on the funding regime was unacceptable, so we took unilateral action. I am pleased to see that many others have now followed in the funding of WADA from Europe.

We regard the development of WADA's anti-doping code as the most appropriate way in which governing bodies and federations can be aligned to internationally agreed standards on anti-doping. The adoption of the code will be a significant step towards collective action and will provide a powerful weapon in the worldwide fight against doping in sport. Without the inconsistency and inability to regulate and set standards internationally, WADA can now move towards development of the code. If it is achieved, a significant step forward will have been taken and we will have a basis on which to start policing cheating and fraud in sport globally. Indeed, the national anti-doping policy has been developed mindful of the international standards and procedures endorsed by WADA . We are one of the first countries to produce a national policy that fully complies with international standards on doping control.

The initiatives serve to highlight the fact that the UK continues to lead the way in the fight against the use of drugs in sport. However, we cannot be complacent and are determined to ensure that the UK anti-doping system, while retaining the respect of competitors, also retains the support of members of the public, who need to be assured that the results that they see in sport are genuine and fair.

I shall write to my hon. Friend on any of the specific points that I might have missed. Final decisions have not been made on the Commonwealth; they rest with the Commonwealth Games Federation, and we shall be talking to those involved. I have no doubt that, in time-honoured fashion, my hon. Friend will challenge us again in written questions. Again, I thank him for bringing to our attention an important subject that needs to be aired from time to time.

Hospital Hygiene

1 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate this subject. The methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus or MRSA problem and the broader matter of hospital hygiene are strongly connected. It is appropriate that, in a week when we have been discussing the substantial and extremely welcome increase in resources for the NHS, we should discuss also how to reduce the great waste of resources—the waste of nursing staff and of beds, and the human and financial costs of infection.

My interest in the subject goes back five years to shortly after I was elected to Parliament. A case was raised with me within weeks of May 1997 by a distressed constituent. She was a middle-aged cancer patient being given chemotherapy at her local general hospital, who contracted MRSA in an outbreak of the infection. Her treatment had to be interrupted, and given the severity of her condition, it could have been a life-threatening problem. I did not then appreciate the fact that infection control in hospitals was a major problem. I was brought up to believe that hospitals were inherently clean places, where antiseptics and disinfectants were widely used. However, as a result of the publicity that resulted from that case, I realised that it was indeed a major problem, both locally and nationally.

I appreciate that a great deal has happened on the policy front during the intervening five years. I do not want to rehearse all the Government intervention and the study since then, but I know of the Public Accounts Committee's report and the Government's response and of the helpful work of the National Audit Office, with its follow-up report. The Government have taken a series of welcome initiatives, including mandatory reporting, the setting of standards for hospital trusts and the introduction of guidelines—and have made the cash available. The tranches of £30 million that have gone to hospitals, including my local hospital, will make a welcome contribution. I acknowledge that, and I am not using this debate as an opportunity for bashing the Government for not doing things. I appreciate that policy has been progressing.

I am prompted to raise the subject again because of local experience and a feeling in local hospitals that the problem remains serious. I have two local district general hospitals in my constituency, the West Middlesex and the Kingston. The latter has a generally good record on infection control, and the preliminary statistics on MRSA show that it is pretty low in the national league tables. However, a few weeks ago I learned from a constituent that his mother, Mrs. Tarrant, had died of MRSA during an outbreak at the Kingston hospital.

The West Middlesex hospital has altogether more serious problems. It was the subject of a scathing report by a Government inspection team on hygiene grounds a few months ago, and almost weekly I hear anecdotes and receive letters describing the problems of hospital infection that derive from bad practice on the wards. I shall describe a couple of cases. In a letter to the hospital

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general manager, one gentleman makes a series of complaints about the hospital. He states:

"You make no comment about the poor level of infection control on the ward that extended to urinals not being emptied, one of which eventually disintegrated, and to soiled dressings being left around the ward, including on beds."

Another local resident, who belongs to the community health council, recently observed, in the course of passing through the hospital, an event that was eloquent testimony in itself. A ward was isolated because of MRSA, with a clear sign saying "Barrier Nursing Do Not Enter". A cleaner promptly walked through the barrier with a cloth and cleaned all the tables in the isolated ward, then took the cloth and used it in other wards. I am reluctant to be too damning and critical about that hospital; it has serious problems and is being rebuilt under the private finance initiative, which I welcome. I hope that a lot of its problems, which stem from antiquated, badly designed fittings will be solved. Nevertheless, I represent two district general hospitals in which bad reports of hygiene, specifically of MRSA, surface weekly. That is what prompted me to seek this debate.

I do not need to rehearse all the arguments about MRSA and hospital hygiene. They have been set out in the NAO reports. Let me just return to the dichotomy between the two issues. MRSA is a distinct problem caused by the overuse of antibiotics and the building up of resistance. It is something that most of us carry around on our skins, not inherently an infection. However, in a hospital it can be very damaging. A great deal more is now known about it. The House of Lords report on resistance to antibiotics has advanced the science considerably and data have emerged revealing the extent to which MRSA is a severe problem, particularly in London. Statistics for the quarter April to June 2001 show that five London hospitals—including some of the most highly regarded such as Guy's and St. Thomas's—had more than 20 incidents of MRSA in that three-month period.

We now know more about MRSA. It is a serious problem in the general area of hospital hygiene. Why is it a problem? First, it is because of its sheer scale. Recent figures have indicated that one in 11 patients acquires an infection in hospital. I believe that statistics are now emerging—partly prompted by the Government's emphasis on monitoring—that suggest that a third of cases have hitherto been undetected, so the real figure is substantially more than one in 11. That translates into about 100,000 cases a year. Some 5,000 deaths a year are directly attributable to hospital-acquired infection. There are bound to be problems of interpretation: one of the complicating factors is that patients are, by definition, vulnerable. However, hospital-acquired infections kill more people a year than, for example, car accidents.

There is a big cost to the NHS as a result of people having long stays in hospital and operations being cancelled. The NAO estimates that it is about £1 billion a year, some of which is unavoidable, because vulnerable people will acquire infections even in conditions of perfect hygiene. However, between 15 and 30 per cent. of that £1 billion could be saved if practice was improved.

I should like to ask three groups of questions about where some of the Government's current initiatives might be leading, and about follow-up. The first is about the system of surveillance and monitoring, the second about how national standards operate and can be improved, and the third about resources.

I appreciate that the Government now require hospital trusts to report on internal infections, and specifically on MRSA. I believe that a surveillance exercise was due to be published this month. Is it now available, and if so, in what form? I have two specific questions about monitoring and surveillance. First, is it now possible to get meaningful and useful data on post-discharge infections, which are an important element of the story? Secondly, is it now possible, as a result of international work on the issue, to make meaningful comparisons between British standards and those overseas? I have heard conflicting views in that regard, and while some people say that British hospitals are the dirtiest in Europe, others suggest that they are about in the middle among developed countries. I have no objective basis on which to judge which of those propositions is true, and it would be helpful to know what analysis is being done and what conclusions are emerging from it.

The Government made a big breakthrough a couple of years ago, when they set national standards and tried to push them through at the hospital level, but I have several questions about that. First, do we have any indication whether some of the basic principles of hygiene are being applied in hospitals? I was shocked by comments in the National Audit Office report, which referred in slightly arch language to "a culture of non-compliance" as regards handwashing. The fact that doctors, in particular, rarely wash their hands struck me as rather shocking, perhaps because I was brought up in a traditional way. Clearly, patients and staff are not following elementary practices, and that is responsible for much cross-infection. It would be interesting to know how far the attitude to such practices is changing.

A more important question under the heading of basic hygiene is what happens under the Government's standards in cases of blatant non-compliance. What would happen if my local general hospital was given a caning by an inspection team? Clearly, it would make an effort to improve, but what sanctions could be put in place? Have any been used, and how does the Minister envisage that happening?

On institutional arrangements, the Government's response to the Public Accounts Committee acknowledges that there has been a big improvement in the involvement of chief executives, for example, in infection-control debates in hospitals, which is clearly an advance. Is there, however, any indication that infection-control teams are much more systematically involved in key decisions in hospitals? I noted from one report that a quarter of all infection-control teams are not allowed to have an input into cleaning and catering contracts, which are the heart of the transmission mechanism.

Is there any indication that the structure and organisation of wards is being changed in the way that the Royal College of Nursing strongly advocated? There is a belief that senior sisters should be unambiguously in charge of all activities on their wards, including

cleaning, that responsibility should not be fragmented and that someone should have overall charge of standards.

Finally, under the general heading of standards, what is the Government's assessment of the utility of screening? I know that it is not a straightforward matter and that costs are involved in screening staff and patients to discover whether they are carrying infections when they come into hospitals. However, is there a potential advantage in terms of cost-effectiveness in extending screening programmes, given the severity of the problem and the associated costs?

My last set of questions relates to resources. I appreciate that more resources are going into the NHS in general and that there has been a specific allocation of funding for infection control, which is welcome. Do the Government have a view on the optimum level of infection-control nursing, and how close are we to achieving it? Will the big new injection of cash into the NHS help with that? Is the issue specifically highlighted, and are the Government trying to achieve a particular target?

On bed occupancy, one reason for the high instance of hospital infection is that beds are being used constantly. There is a rapid turnover in patients with little time for a break. Sheets are changed, but infections can hang around. With less pressure on beds it should be possible to reduce some of the infections associated with intensive use. Have the Government formulated a view on how their big investment programme will affect bed occupancy levels? Is it expected that bed occupancy levels will fall, building some spare capacity into the system? Will the £30 million programme, which has now run for two financial years, continue, and what lessons have been learned from it?

This issue is not politically contentious. I am aware that progress is being made, but it is a matter of real concern. I continue to be shocked, as do many members of the public, to encounter major examples of very poor hygiene and malpractice in public hospitals, and I want to be assured that the Government are on top of the issue.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing this debate and choosing to discuss hospital hygiene and MRSA. I know that he has a long-standing interest in these important issues and has raised them before. I welcome his approach to the debate, and many of his points, and I will try to respond to his questions. Some of them I can respond to now—they concern systems that are already in place—and others concern issues that are currently being considered as part of a programme of developing work. I will try to explain where we are on the matters about which he is concerned.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, hospital-acquired infection in general and MRSA in particular are serious problems for the NHS. These infections associated with health care are difficult and expensive to treat and directly affect patients, causing acute and chronic illness, pain, anxiety, depression, longer stays in hospital—with implications for NHS resources—and sometimes death. They have serious consequences in terms of health care.

For those reasons, we need to tackle this serious problem. There is much ongoing work to improve the current arrangements for surveillance, infection control, monitoring and action to reduce hospital-acquired infection. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the National Audit Office has examined the issue. It estimates that the potential avoidable costs are around £150 million annually. We should treat those figures with caution, because they are based on a study performed in just one hospital and then extrapolated across the NHS, but the issue clearly has a serious impact.

Some hospital-acquired infection is generally viewed as an inevitable consequence of many serious illnesses being treated under one roof and the vulnerability, for different reasons, of patients to infection. However, it is also widely accepted that some of the hospital-acquired infection currently occurring is avoidable and could be prevented through strengthened arrangements. That is what we should aim for.

The hon. Gentleman is right that many people carry the staphylococcus aureus bacterium without any harm being caused. The serious problem arises when methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus—MRSA—spreads rapidly in a hospital environment where patients are seriously ill and susceptible to infection and where the use of catheters and other invasive devices allows the bacterium an easy route of entry.

Also, rates of MRSA vary across different NHS trusts. The statistics can be affected by the nature of the patients and conditions being treated. Trusts with more vulnerable patients and those that undertake more invasive and high-risk specialist care are more susceptible to higher rates of MRSA. However, that does not entirely explain the wide variation in levels of MRSA across the country.

What action needs to be taken about the problem? The hon. Gentleman grouped his concerns around surveillance, national standards and what happens when there is non-compliance. He is right in saying that extensive work is being done on surveillance. We should not underestimate how important good surveillance is for serious action to reduce MRSA and hospital-acquired infection. The fundamental element of any strategy to improve the situation is to collect proper data about the level of MRSA and the surveillance operating throughout the country. Since April last year, we have required all acute trusts to collect data on MRSA bloodstream infections. When the hon. Gentleman referred to information to be published in April 2002, I think that he was referring to those data, which were published in February.

The information allows trusts to identify problem areas for more detailed investigation and allows national monitoring and action to tackle the problem. It also provides a base line against which we can measure improvements in hospital-acquired infection. That is the first phase of a compulsory national surveillance system for a broad range of infections associated with health care. It is more comprehensive than systems used in other developed countries and provides us with important information.

[Yvette Cooper]

The hon. Gentleman referred to international comparisons, which are in place, but the United Kingdom system is the more extensive, and that has an impact on international comparisons. I am willing to write to him further on the subject.

The data need to be interpreted cautiously because the reasons why there are different levels of MRSA can vary. Trusts may import MRSA from other hospitals, and the many patients who move through tertiary centres as they go between hospitals may bring with them MRSA and other problems. That problem may have affected the London teaching hospitals to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

We have established a programme of work to improve the surveillance system, which involves extending compulsory surveillance and carrying out alert organism surveillance to collect information routinely on specified micro-organisms causing MRSA and other infections. We also intend to monitor adverse patient incidents due to infections, such as outbreaks of salmonella food poisoning in hospitals, and link that to the National Patient Safety Agency. Other systems are in an early stage of development for surgical site surveillance in conjunction with orthopaedic surgeons and surveillance of infection occurring after patients are discharged from hospitals. The hon. Gentleman referred to that post-discharge issue, which is complicated and difficult but important to measure. We shall consider, too, levels of MRSA and health care-acquired infection in the community, which is more difficult to measure than the levels in hospitals but represents an important part of the picture.

The hon. Gentleman asked about national standards. There are two relevant sets of standards. First, the controls assurance standard on infection control requires chief executives to ensure that effective policies to tackle hospital-acquired infection are in place and are implemented. The standard requires acute NHS trusts to ensure that people work in a managed environment in which the risk of infection to patients, staff and visitors is minimised. There are 15 supporting criteria for hospital infection control, including the work of infection-control teams and their supervision by local infection-control committees that incorporate local consultants in communicable disease control.

Secondly, all hospitals were required to introduce national standards of cleanliness for the NHS by February and to implement a regular programme of monitoring to ensure that the standards are met. All trusts with in-patients in England received guidelines on implementing the standards, which will be added to the performance assessment framework in July. The NHS plan recognises that hospital cleanliness is a major issue for patients, their families and visitors. That is why the clean hospitals programme was launched. We should recognise that there is not a strict relationship between hospital cleanliness and MRSA. Of course, it is an important consideration, but there are many other complicating factors involved.

To support those standards, extra investment is being put into the NHS. The hon. Gentleman referred in particular to investment to support the clean hospitals programme and to improve the patient environment—£62 million over two years is being provided. Another £200 million is being provided to improve standards of decontamination. In addition, there has been broader investment in the NHS. Substantial additional investment has already been made over the past couple of years, but the extra investment set out in the Budget will provide for an increase in the capacity of the NHS.

The hon. Gentleman asked about capacity. Local flexibility is necessary, because trusts need to be responsive to the nature of the problems that they confront. The capacity that they need will depend, in part, on the level of their problems, but also on the sort of hospital or unit involved. It is important to provide national guidelines on infection control and hospital-acquired infection. Although a considerable number of guidelines are already in place, and work undertaking infection-control audits against standards of national guidelines is being carried out to update local guidelines for hospital infection control, it is important to take stock now of the work that has gone on so far and to consider what further action needs to be taken. That is where much of the work being carried out as part of the chief medical officer's strategy for combating infectious diseases comes in, and I shall say a little more about that in a moment.

The hon. Gentleman also asked what happens in cases of non-compliance, where hospitals are clearly struggling with MRSA or doing badly compared with similar hospitals. Action is already under way, but we need to review that as part of the chief medical officer's strategy. Regional directors of public health play an important role. They have already been instrumental in collecting and collating data from trusts in their regions, and they arrange peer review visits, in conjunction with the regional epidemiologist, regional meetings with infection-control teams and support from regional infection-control nurses. Where MRSA rates give cause for concern, regional directors of public health will work with a trust to review its infection control arrangements.

A range of enhanced initiatives are under way, which include reviewing the adequacy of infection-control resources; raising awareness of health care-associated infections and control measures in hospitals, reinforced by training and education of staff; undertaking infection-control audits; updating local guidelines; reinforcing specific measures, such as handwashing, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned; promoting ward cleanliness initiatives and training; equipping wards for better handwashing and cleaning; and assessing the degree of importation of MRSA from the community. One of the 10 responsibilities of modern matrons is to prevent hospital-acquired infection by ensuring that infection-control measures are properly applied by all staff.

Much work is already being done, but there is an extra enforcement and inspection role to be undertaken by the Commission for Health Improvement and by the new Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection. We have tried independently to review and monitor the uptake of the national controls assurance standards for hospital-acquired infection during the routine reviews of an organisation's system and processes for monitoring and improving services. Obviously, the work done in that inspection process feeds into the national enforcement system and the wider programme.

As I said, there is forward-looking work to be done, as part of the chief medical officer's strategy for combating infectious diseases, "Getting Ahead of the Curve", published in January 2002. The chief medical officer has identified a small number of priority areas including health care-associated infection and antimicrobial resistance, and said that we need particular additional action in those areas. New updated action plans are currently being drawn up for health care-associated infection and three other areas, which will be ready by the end of the year. For each action, they will set out who is responsible, who is to implement it, what the output will be and in what time scale it will happen. That important further action builds on the progress that we have made so far on an important matter that is of concern to people throughout the country.

Regeneration (Great Yarmouth)

1.30 pm

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to raise the effect that some of the Government's regeneration initiatives have had on my constituency, Many colleagues have been genuinely surprised when I have raised in the House some of the problems that Great Yarmouth has faced for several years—high unemployment, high benefit dependency and other indices of an area of deprivation.

Those problems were highlighted by the national index of multiple deprivation drawn up in 1998 and 2000 by the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions. That study examined 8,414 borough council wards in England using the following indicators: income deprivation; employment deprivation; health deprivation; education, schools and training deprivation; housing deprivation and geographical access to services. Great Yarmouth came out as the fifth most deprived in the whole United Kingdom.

In 1996, when I was leader of my local authority, we commissioned a report that highlighted how bad the situation was, based not only on benefit dependency, but on figures that came to light such as average household income—which, at about £8,000 per annum, was about 50 per cent. of the regional average—and our higher than average mortality rate among young and old alike. We knew then that we had to take action, and began the long journey to improve the lives of the people living in and around Great Yarmouth. Recognising the need for a plan of what we had to do to create a more prosperous borough, we decided on a document entitled "2020 Vision" to give us a vision of our borough in the year 2020.

That is just a rough snapshot of where we were five or six years ago. We have come a long way since then, not least because of the way in which everyone has pulled together. The public and private sectors and voluntary and charitable organisations joined in a partnership approach and the Government recognised that something had to be done to eliminate poverty. Regeneration can mean different things to different people. It includes regenerating industries—manufacturing and tourism—regenerating our education system and health service and regenerating in people the hope that they can improve their lives, by giving them opportunities that they have not had before. In Great Yarmouth, we are well on the way to achieving all that, but I stress that we still have a long way to go.

I have mentioned "2020 Vision", our blueprint for the future. It was not long into my first term as a Member of Parliament that our first major project was realised—our new gas-fired power station. That project was first applied for in early 1996, but it was not until late 1997 that the Minister for Energy gave the necessary permission to proceed. On the face of it, that might seem an easy decision but it was not because we were in the period of a gas moratorium. Permission was given because of the problems that we faced. The prospect of the largest single inward investment that we had seen, more than £160 million, with the resulting economic benefits, was enough for the Minister for Energy to accept the need for that investment, despite the moratorium.

[Mr. Anthony D. Wright]

The second major project to aid our regeneration was the reinstatement of [illegible]alling of the A47 Acle straight and an acceptance o[illegible]ed to construct a new road connecting the A47 to the A[illegible]at project had been removed from the previous Admini[illegible]ration's roads programme back in 1996. Although the Government had been persuaded of the need to carry out a study as part of the roads review, the consultants unfortunately came to the conclusion that, on balance, the environmental issues were more important than safety and economic problems. That report had to go to the regional planning body, which, thankfully, agreed with our views and asked for a further study to take the economic case more fully into account. I impress on my hon. Friend the Minister that the overwhelming view of the vast majority of my constituents, both businesses and individuals, is that, on safety and economic grounds, that stretch of the road should be dualled.

The third, and most ambitious, project is a new outer harbour. The project has been around for several years, but since the formation of a new company, Eastport, under the stewardship of Richard Jewson and with support from Great Yarmouth, the county and the region, it has never been closer to coming to fruition. The fact that the regional development agency has agreed to invest in the project, subject to certain conditions being met, has given it a welcome boost.

Another welcome boost came last week, when in a written answer the Minister gave permission to Powergen Renewables to construct a large offshore wind farm just off our coast on Scroby sandbank. Alongside our oil and gas connections, that gives us justification to consider ourselves as the centre for energy in the southern North sea.

Before I move on to the direct Government help that we have received, the final project that I want to mention is our new business park. That project, which started as a vision about 15 years ago, has now been brought to reality by a partnership approach between the East of England Development Agency and many local businesses. The first building, an innovation centre, is due to be opened in May and will be of significant help to both existing and new businesses. It would not have been possible without regional help and will help enormously in our quest to encourage new, high-tech industry to set up in Great Yarmouth.

Everything about which I have just spoken, with the exception of the roads issue, was started under a Labour administration in Great Yarmouth, but equally everything has also received some assistance from Government sources, but only since 1997. As I said earlier, regeneration can come in different ways, and I want to discuss some Government-inspired projects that have been up and running for a little while, as well as some that are just starting.

Because of our social and economic problems, we have had significant help from the Government in the past few years. That help has included single regeneration budget funding, which, when all the schemes are finished, will have brought in about £12 million of Government awards. Those awards will cover areas throughout the borough, but mainly those that needed the regeneration most, such as South Denes, Cobholm and Lichfield. In addition, we have been awarded £4.2 million for our sure start project, and our latest award was from the neighbourhood renewal fund for £4.5 million, with a further £500,000 from the community empowerment fund and the community chest.

Our new education action zone is the largest nationwide, and has been awarded £3.75 million to cover 33 schools. In its first year, we are already seeing a great deal of progress, with improvements in 70 per cent. of the key stages and increased attendance levels with a marked reduction in exclusion. There has been further funding through assisted area status, European Union objective 2 and 3 status, East of England Development Agency investment programmes, English Partnerships investment programmes and lottery support.

The story does not end there because much more is going on. There are two new resource centres, which cost approximately £1 million each. A new museum, which cost £4.25 million, recording Great Yarmouth's fishing industry, has opened at a former fish curing works. A new Nelson museum has opened on our historic quayside, and new community centres are planned for the future.

When I began the debate, I painted a picture that was far from rosy when I, along with Labour, came into office in 1997. Five years on, I have highlighted areas in which the Government have helped in the regeneration of Great Yarmouth after years of neglect. In the few areas that I have covered, the Government have granted more than £30 million of direct or individual help, but there is even more going on with bids from our seafront partnership for European money, which would not be available without the help of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson), who visited Great Yarmouth when she was the Minister responsible for tourism and pushed hard for the inclusion of seaside resorts under the objective 2 review.

Finally, one area that has been extremely helpful to the local authority is the extra Government money in grants to offset council tax. During the final four years of Tory Government, we had an average £50,000 a year increase in our external funding, whereas for the past four years my authority has had on average an extra £250,000 a year. That has allowed the new Tory council, which was elected two years ago, to reap benefits that were not available to the Labour council. The Government have certainly responded to a lot of our needs.

I must also point out to my hon. Friend the Minister that I have received one criticism—there was only one—of the need to form fill and to have checks made on certain funding and spending for, for example, one individual. My colleague states that in the document on community empowered funding grants, the Government said that they must be prepared to take a risk on empowering local partnerships to deliver. His plea to them is to take the risk that they said they would take, and be prepared to empower those who they wanted to empower.

One area that groups in Great Yarmouth are trying to address is the acute skills shortage. If we are to attract inward investment, we need skilled personnel. I know of one scheme at the Oriel high school in Great Yarmouth.

It has applied for engineering status but is still waiting for the response. I have been involved in the education action zone attempts to encourage youngsters in the Great Yarmouth area to gain engineering skills. An organisation called ProTrain is working very hard to attract youngsters—male and female, I hasten to add—to engineering, which is a skill for the future.

I took a great deal of encouragement from a letter that appeared last week in my local paper, the *Great Yarmouth Mercury*. It gives a perception of the Great Yarmouth economy:

"Figures show that unemployment in Great Yarmouth is falling and has been for the last two years. The February figures have again showed a marked improvement with 633 fewer unemployed compared to last year. The future looks bright for further economic development with several projects set to create more full time sustainable employment in the coming year . . . Overall the economic prospects for Yarmouth are very positive and we should be looking to the future with confidence . . . Yarmouth will enjoy a period of invigorated and expanding prosperity leading to even lower unemployment and a continuing reduction in deprivation."

Those comments came from the Conservative economic development member on Great Yarmouth borough council, so I can only take that as a ringing endorsement of the Labour Government's policies.

I have tried to demonstrate the benefits that have resulted from the Government's many regeneration initiatives in Great Yarmouth, which are working well. However, as I said, there is still much more to do. We must create employment opportunities. We in Great Yarmouth are able to deliver. All that we ask is that the Government continue to help our area so that we can enjoy the economic benefits experienced in other parts of the UK.

1.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) on securing the debate. I am aware of the challenges that Great Yarmouth faces. My hon. Friend is an outstanding advocate for his constituency and has left no stone unturned in making sure that the Government understand the challenges, and the success that the area has had in achieving its goals. I am pleased to hear about the most recent developments, particularly the wind farm and the business park. It is also excellent to hear that the funds and programmes that the Government have designed and have targeted at the kind of problems that his area experiences are getting to the communities and making a difference, and it is especially good to hear validation from people who are not normally our political allies.

However, my hon. Friend is right to say that much remains to be done. The index of local deprivation 2000 confirmed that Great Yarmouth is the 43rd most deprived local authority area in England. On intensity and depth of deprivation, the borough scored the fifth highest level in the country. It is the only seaside town in the top 50 disadvantaged boroughs, although we recognise that other seaside towns have difficulties because of the particular economic pressures on them. The index confirmed what we knew before its publication.

Before setting out what the Government are doing for Great Yarmouth and the effect of the initiatives, I want to draw attention to, and commend, what is happening locally. I know that the borough and other partners have long been aware of the issues that had to be addressed. Even before ID 2000, they had established a social strategy, coming under the framework of the "2020 Vision". Its specific aim was to bring a multi-agency response to deprivation. I am pleased that the strategy is not owned by any one agency but is a shared view of local issues signed up to by the statutory and voluntary agencies in the borough. I shall say more later about how the Government are working with and through the arrangements, but shall mention now that the way in which the borough has drawn together all the players and partners to tackle the problems is a model for towns elsewhere.

The borough has benefited considerably from the single regeneration budget. A seven-year round 2 scheme, worth £8.7 million, began in April 1996 and focused on the South Denes area. Projects are increasing the local community's awareness, involvement, and sense of pride in the area and helping to generate employment and training opportunities and to encourage business growth. Those include a nationally respected young mothers project, which enables them to gain skills and qualifications.

A seven-year round 5 local regeneration scheme, worth £2.4 million, began in April 1999 in Cobholm and Lichfield is delivering improvements to education and skills through the colleges, education service and the local Learning and Skills Council. It will also develop business opportunities and the local economy by way of business advice and the establishment of a credit union.

A four-year scheme worth £1.3 million across the whole of Great Yarmouth aims to widen participation in community-based learning, improve vocational skills and enhance employability, empower individuals, invigorate the local economy and ensure the social and cultural regeneration of the community. I am pleased to hear from my hon. Friend that the funding is having good results for his constituents because that is exactly what was intended.

One of the key issues in any regeneration project is crime and community safety. A year ago, the Prime Minister announced a street wardens programme to make streets in villages, towns and neighbourhoods cleaner, safer and better places to be. Great Yarmouth was successful in bidding for a scheme and I was pleased to hear that in the past few days, three wardens began their patrols around the town centre. There was a lot of competitive bidding for the schemes. They were very popular, and the fact that Great Yarmouth was successful was a tribute to the amount of care that went into the preparation of the bid and the quality of the scheme that was put forward. The new wardens will concentrate on preserving the physical appearance of the town centre but their uniformed presence will also help to deter anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime. That is particularly important for an area that is looking to increase its tourism trade.

In the past two years, £591,220 has been allocated for three closed circuit television projects in and around Great Yarmouth. The capital modernisation fund is

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also helping small retailers. Nearly £90,000 has been allocated for the communities against drugs initiative. The Great Yarmouth crime reduction partnership has received funding to increase its capacity to reduce crime. The safer communities initiative is assisting the partnership in tackling crime and disorder to meet national crime reduction targets and other local priorities. A lot is going on in Great Yarmouth to ensure that issues concerning crime and community safety are not acting as a brake on economic regeneration, and that the creation of a safe and secure community is fostered.

In his speech in the February debate, my hon. Friend drew attention to the success of the education action zone in Great Yarmouth. Key stage 3 and 4 results were higher than the national average, attendance levels improved and 80 per cent. of pupils showed measurable progress in reading. It has also been successful in setting up partnerships with a number of local businesses for sponsorship and workplace training. The EAZ has also been awarded an extra £260,000 by the East of England Development Agency for an innovative programme for key stage 4 pupils. From April 2005, the EAZ will become an excellence cluster increasing funding to £1.8 million a year. My hon. Friend is right to highlight the need to improve the skills and education base as an essential part of the economic regeneration of his area.

My hon. Friend mentioned the sure start programme and the success that that has had in Great Yarmouth with its funding of £4.2 million until 2004. A new £500,000 nursery was opened in February. I would particularly like to commend the programme's community parent scheme. Its course has achieved accreditation to the Open college, and it has been adopted as a model of good practice by several other sure start programmes.

Wider economic funding initiatives have also been used to good effect, including for objective 2, the East of England Development Agency investment programme, English Partnerships investment programmes and lottery support.

I have time to refer to only a selection of the major initiatives that address the challenges facing Great Yarmouth. Work is being carried out in the context of the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal, which was launched by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in January 2001. That is a new approach, which attacks the core problems of deprived areas, such as weak economies and poor schools, harnesses the powers of all sectors to work in partnership, explicitly focuses services and resources on deprived areas, and gives local residents and community groups a central role in turning their neighbourhoods round.

To deliver mainstream services better and to involve communities are the two purposes behind local strategic partnerships that bring together residents in the public, private and voluntary sectors to identify local problems and deliver local solutions. We were pleased to announce on 28 February that the Great Yarmouth local strategic partnership—comprising the Great Yarmouth economic, environmental and social forums, overseen by the 2020 forum—has been officially accredited. To achieve that status, it had to fulfil several key criteria. The Great Yarmouth LSP well demonstrated all those characteristics.

As I have said before, we have been struck by the strong partnership working in Great Yarmouth from the outset. The common sense of purpose bodes well for its future development and we believe that it has much to teach other LSPs. As a result, a payment of a further £1.4 million of neighbourhood renewal funding was approved for 2002–03, in addition to almost £1 million approved for 2001–02. A further £1.9 million will be available in 2003. That money can be spent in any way that will tackle deprivation in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Already, community development workers have been introduced into six key areas through the grant.

The involvement of local communities is key to making everything work. We will support, encourage and enable that in several ways, such as the community empowerment fund, the community chest and the community learning chest. Funding is being provided at £115,000 a year for three years. The community chest and community learning chest will provide small grants totalling £375,000 to formal and informal community groups to support community activity and mutual self-help.

The key task of any LSP in the context of neighbourhood renewal is to prepare a local neighbourhood renewal strategy, and Great Yarmouth LSP has submitted a framework for such a strategy. A notable factor, to which my hon. Friend referred, was the strength of input from all sectors of the community, and the fact that they have been able to forge partnerships ahead of time. That stands the town in good stead as regards attracting funding and, more importantly, delivering its strategies.

I shall deal now with specific issues that relate to economic regeneration, and particularly to two schemes, which I suspect are the most pressing for my hon. Friend's town, and on which decisions and actions have yet to be taken. He left me in no doubt, both today and on previous occasions in the House, of the local worry about the development of the Great Yarmouth outer harbour. That debate has been going on for 30 years. I know that Eastport, GO-East and the East of England Development Agency have had exhaustive discussion about bridging the gap between the full project costs and the likely commercial and local government support. It is vital that Eastport takes heed of the advice that it has been given, and, in particular, that it meets all its targets during the early preparatory stages. We cannot take it for granted that approval for any further European funding will be forthcoming, and behind all of that we must be conscious of the rules on state aid, which are becoming an increasing factor in economic regeneration.

Looking at the east coast, we cannot avoid comparison being drawn with Immingham, where Associated British Ports has secured funding on a commercial basis to underpin further expansion in ro-ro. Other ports, not only in the UK, have aspirations to expand in the same way as Great Yarmouth. There is a process to be followed and all cases will be judged on their merits. I am sure that my hon. Friend will assist

and encourage all agencies involved locally to focus on working through the process to meet the various targets required along the way.

My hon. Friend also emphasised the need for the dualling of the Acle Straight, which has been a long-standing issue. The regional planning body has endorsed most of the recommendations of the Norwich to Great Yarmouth roads-based study, and I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as any decision is taken on future investment in that road. Led by the Government office for the east of England, we are committed to strengthening collaborative working between Government Departments to support neighbourhood renewal, thereby assisting the further regeneration of Great Yarmouth.

I congratulate my hon. Friend again on both the persistence with which he has brought up all the issues that relate to Great Yarmouth and the careful presentation that he gave of successful local achievements, the challenges that the town still faces and its strengths in work across different sectors, and the political divide to make sure that its economy delivers a better future for its people.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 24 April 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Alcohol

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

9.30 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the opportunity of speaking first in this debate. The wide representation here from different political parties shows the tremendous interest in the subject of alcohol abuse. I realise that the ten-minute rule Bill introduced yesterday by the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) focuses on England and Wales, but with my background in Northern Ireland, I share the concerns of English and Welsh Members about the problems faced by their constituents and in the country at large as a result of alcohol abuse.

An early-day motion also expresses our concern about the difficulties that alcohol brings to so many; it affects young people, hospital provision, social care and criminal activities, as well as the multitude of accidents on the roads. I shall draw attention to some of the important issues and others will follow.

Our debate arises out of a growing concern about the impact of alcohol abuse from its health aspects right through to the public order consequences, as illustrated by the role of alcohol in the increasing number of attacks on hospital workers and health professionals. This subject is equally relevant to Northern Ireland as to England and Wales. My own constituency houses the Golden Mile, the centre of entertainment. I know how much extra law and order activity is necessary in that area with its large number of bars and clubs; it has drink-related problems every weekend.

Some say that alcohol is not really a problem, but I wonder if they live in the real world. Statistics show that at every level of health care, an increasing number of deaths are directly and indirectly associated with alcohol abuse. Historically, we have tended to blur the impact of alcohol abuse. We used to say that the problem was epitomised in the well-known Glasgow song, "But what's the matter wi' Glasgow/ For it's goin' roun' and roun'!". Nothing is the matter with the drunk in that song; Glasgow is the problem. That is the difficulty with alcohol.

I recall a statistic from years back that suggested that one in 12 people who drank alcohol could end up as alcoholics. To illustrate that level of doubt, I was once asked whether I would go on a plane if one in 10 of the seats were likely to fall out. That is an apt illustration of the concern arising out of recent tragic accidents.

The English statistics quite closely match those reported by the chief medical officer in Northern Ireland, Dr. Campbell, in March this year, according to which 800 people a year die either directly or indirectly through alcohol abuse. Dr. Campbell showed that 150 people die directly from alcohol misuse while another 650 die through disease or injuries related to drink.

According to figures released in August 2001 concerning 15 to 16-year-olds from 71 secondary schools, two thirds of the boys and girls said that they had consumed alcohol in the previous 30 days. Approximately half said that they had been drunk in that period. That tallies with the statistics and information from England and Wales, where children aged 11 to 15 were consuming twice as much alcohol in 2000 as in 1990. More than a quarter of 11 to 16-year-olds—27 per cent.—drink alcohol at least once a month, compared to 23 per cent. in 2000. Drinking is more common in older adolescents, with almost a third of 15 to 16-year-olds drinking at least once a week.

As people develop the habit of drinking, so they tend to imbibe more as they get older. That has a growing impact on industry, our social structure and homes. Those involved with social care reckon that 920,000 children live in homes that are affected by alcohol abuse. We are concerned about the welfare of children, who are our most precious heritage as a nation. There is a demand that, within our structures of care—in health and in society at large—something more positive be done for that group.

When we speak of under-age drinking, which can be characterised by binge drinking rather than the odd glass, it must be said that some of our finest talent has failed to reach its maximum potential because of alcohol abuse. That is particularly evident in Northern Ireland with those sports personalities whom we have exported to Great Britain. I am sure that we can think of other people who began well, but because of alcohol abuse did not finish so well. That is a tragic example to give people. I appeal to those personalities in our society to set a better standard and example, so that young people who look on them as role models will have better models to follow and will not suffer from alcohol abuse as others have.

I remember a young friend, who tragically was murdered by the IRA, saying that he liked to take a glass of wine before he spoke because it helped to relax him. I understood what he was saying and do not criticise that at all. However, many young folk who have begun on that road have found alcohol to be a cruel and demanding master rather than a help.

We must provide assistance early to prevent young people from becoming trapped in a spiral of alcohol abuse. Everyone in society must play their part in fighting the problem, starting with under-age drinking. From personalities and leaders to those who serve alcohol, everyone must be aware that they are setting an example that young people follow.

When we examine this situation, people ask, "What can we do about it?" I welcome the helpful work that has been done in our hospitals, but at times we might need other institutes or alcohol or drug clinics to take a greater lead. An example in my constituency was the Shaftesbury Square hospital, an old hospital that became a unit for the treatment of those with alcohol problems. With the financial entrenchment in our health service, some argued that it should be brought into the mainstream in Belfast City hospital, which has a fine unit—the Windsor unit—dealing with people with other problems, too.

There was great resistance to that, for an interesting reason. We have discovered that in an attempt to save money and to provide the acute health care that is

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

required, there is a tendency to close many beds and wards in some of our hospitals at the weekend. That affected the Windsor unit. Anyone who knows the problem of weekend drinking knows that that is the time when facilities are needed.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I am delighted that we are having this debate this morning because, as vice-chairman of the all-party group on alcohol misuse, I have raised the matter in the Chamber myself. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that many voluntary organisations are also involved in trying to deal with the problems of alcohol misuse, such as that in Hertfordshire where an alcohol advisory group, manned by volunteers, does a fantastic job? Does he also agree that the funding that is available for these groups is always uncertain? Is it not important that these people are given some sort of security to carry out their work at a very reasonable cost, rather than being a burden on government funding. Their work is much appreciated, not just in Hertfordshire, but in a wider area, as they provide examples for others.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the hon. Lady's intervention. I was about to say that the Shaftesbury Square unit was kept open because it was so needed. I share her position completely. I am aware of the voluntary bodies, which do a lot of work. The tragedy is that even the Government admit in their statistics that it is difficult to say how much money is being used in health care to deal with alcohol misuse. Through funding voluntary groups at the moment, we do far more project funding than core funding, and core funding is vital for consistent work. On the other hand, I should have thought that any Government aware of what was happening in society would realise that projects need to be funded to give continuity of care to those who need it.

There is a need for greater co-operation within society between the various agencies. I speak not only of the voluntary bodies, but of the police, health workers and social services. An interesting experiment has developed in my constituency and is going on in other parts of north Belfast—the "get home safe" campaign. It is a perfect example of the police, council, university and licensees working in partnership. I do not know how far the situation has developed here but some publicans in Northern Ireland have been ahead of the Government. I have long argued for the introduction of an ID card for 16-year-olds, which would be available right across society. Civil libertarians are not too happy, although the Americans do not seem to have problems with it.

Publicans in Northern Ireland have begun to issue their own cards so that they are not caught out by someone looking much older than they are. That is an old excuse. There is a place for such co-operation to develop. We can then provide the services from the beginning, backing up families and especially women who may be involved in secret drinking because of pressures at home. We must get a clearer message across that the law dealt with the serving, not the selling, of alcohol to under-age people. That has been glossed over time and time again.

The time has come for the Government to give a stronger lead, and not only in funding. Tragically, that may start with taking money away from front-line services to provide greater security to health professionals in the accident and emergency departments of our hospitals, where staff are attacked regularly by people who have been drinking. The Government can also stretch across society to help the young and old. I often wonder whether there could be more dramatic advertisements to penetrate the conscience of men and women, young and old, to warn them that their own stupidity is grieving them, harming industry and costing the nation billions of pounds. The tax that the Chancellor draws from the alcohol industry hardly meets the costs of caring for those who abuse themselves and others through the misuse of alcohol.

9.47 am

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on starting the debate. I also thank those present, and all those who were not able to attend the debate, for their support for my ten-minute Bill, which I introduced yesterday. I apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins), the chairman of the all-party alcohol misuse group, who could not be here this morning. He has a pressing constituency engagement. The hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) wanted to attend the debate, but also had a pressing engagement. I also want to highlight the work done by the charity Alcohol Concern, which has been a trailblazer in drawing attention to the problem of alcohol abuse, and has produced several practical solutions to the problem.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I apologise to my hon. and learned Friend for intervening so early. I endorse his praise for Alcohol Concern, as I was lucky enough to have a two-day secondment with the organisation through the voluntary sector's equivalent of the Industry and Parliament Trust. In advocating a national strategy to tackle alcohol misuse, Alcohol Concern has consistently referred to the high incidence—more than 80 per cent. at times—of people admitted to accident and emergency departments with alcohol in their bloodstreams.

Ross Cranston: That is certainly the case. My hon. Friend has drawn attention to the impact of alcohol abuse on health. I want to draw attention to the impact on the criminal justice system. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary recently highlighted the involvement of alcohol in youth offending. I want to expand on that. The victims of alcohol-related crime are most noticeable in three categories: first, violent crimes in public places; secondly, individuals killed or injured through drink-driving offences; and, thirdly, family members who are subjected to violence or abuse in the home. I came across the first category when sitting as a recorder. At my level, I tend to get cases of Friday or Saturday night fights. Sometimes, they are simply affrays, but often the cases are much more serious; I have tried cases involving serious glassings, in which the victims were scarred as a result of fights fuelled by alcohol. I shall return to the link between alcohol-induced aggression and violent crime in a moment. In Dudley, in my constituency, the

figures show that violence against the person is highest over the weekend and this year's community safety audit suggests a definite relationship between the higher alcohol intake on those days and violence.

I mentioned three categories, but there are other aspects of criminal behaviour associated with alcohol. Recently, Stephen Wooler, the chief inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service, published an excellent joint thematic report with Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on rape, which validates the work of the chief inspector—I was associated with the establishment of the office—and Stephen Wooler and his team are to be congratulated on their work.

The report addressed the issue of drug-assisted rape, about which there is much publicity. Despite that publicity, paragraph 6.11 states:

"There was a much higher finding that alcohol was present ... when the question asked was 'is there evidence of alcohol being used by either suspect or victim?' 51 per cent. of cases reported alcohol was present either in the victim, the offender or both. The use of alcohol may clearly increase a victim's vulnerability to sexual assault and may influence the actions of the offender. It may also shape the initial police response to a victim."

That may mean that cases are not properly investigated, as they should be given the seriousness of the offence.

Ann Deehan published a report for the Home Office in 1999 entitled "Alcohol and Crime: Taking Stock". She collected statistics that suggested that alcohol misuse contributes to an estimated 40 per cent. of violent crime, 78 per cent. of assaults and 88 per cent. of criminal damage cases. Other studies underline the association between alcohol and criminality.

It is important, however, not to think that there is a direct causal link; researchers caution against the assumption that because there is a correlation, there is direct causation. Other factors must be considered, for example, personality traits. Alcohol consumption by stressed individuals can predispose them to violence and individuals' defence mechanism for dealing with anxiety and so on may be lowered by alcohol. There is not necessarily a direct, causative link. Ann Deehan's study states:

"The fact that situational cultural variables can affect the relationship between alcohol and aggression suggests that there is not a direct pharmacological link between alcohol and violent behaviour. Instead, it is more likely that alcohol increases aggression by influencing the social and cognitive processes."

The centre for health economics in York advanced another aspect of measuring the impact of alcohol misuse on the criminal justice system. It tried to measure the cost involved and came up with an estimate, in 1994, that the social cost of criminal activities was approximately £55 million. The House of Commons Library gave me useful figures that build on that estimate. Although it is a guesstimate, it suggests that we are dealing with a serious problem.

Alcohol Concern, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) and I referred, suggested several ways in which we can address the problem, one of which it calls "designing out drink disorder". The strategy includes national standards on managing the environment in and around drinking locations, toughened glass requirements—as I mentioned, one often comes across tragic incidents of glassing—enhancing the role of public transport in preventing alcohol-related disorder, and diversionary options.

There are therefore several practical ways of addressing the violent offending in the first category, and the drink driving in the second category. I am disappointed that we still have the 80 mg limit in this country. I am sure that we could do more to promote responsible drinking by conducting national public health campaigns. The campaign against driving when one is tired has had an impact, and I am sure that a similar campaign to promote responsible drinking would do the same.

Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the local crime partnership in my constituency of Dudley has included alcohol in its strategy. The Home Office does not require that, but the partnership has made alcohol misuse and its reduction one of its four key aims. I hope that other community safety partnerships can do the same. I pay tribute to the dedication of what was the Dudley Priority Health NHS trust for putting alcohol at the centre of its agenda, and I pay special tribute to the work of Richard Rogerson.

As a result of the strategy, there are several innovative programmes in Dudley, including a pilot for an arrest referral scheme. Under the scheme, arrest referral workers based in the custody suites of the main police stations have access to cells, and the custody sergeant informs the arrested person of the scheme. If that person volunteers to go on a limited programme, they are confronted with the results of alcohol abuse. It is too early for an evaluative study of the programme, but it appears that people are referring themselves to it and to other longer programmes.

In the long run, including alcohol abuse in the strategy will have a beneficial effect. However, this is not universal; it is not a requirement that a crime and disorder partnership includes alcohol in its auditing and planning process. I hope that as a result of my ten-minute Bill, all local crime partnerships will take alcohol seriously.

I hope that as a result of this debate, the messages will go out that the problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption are as great as or even greater than those associated with illegal drugs and that much more needs to be done.

9.59 am

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on giving us the opportunity to debate such an important issue. Cynics might say, "Fancy having a debate on alcohol abuse in the House of Commons." All I would say to that is that I think we are greatly maligned.

I pay tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston), who did the House a great service yesterday by introducing his ten-minute Bill. I hope that, when the Minister responds to the debate, we shall hear that that Bill is to become law in some sense. We would be well advised to listen carefully to what the hon. and learned Gentleman says. As a recorder, he sees what happens in the courts as a result of alcohol abuse. If the public regard Members of Parliament increasingly cynically as not being responsible legislators, we would be foolish not to take action.

Unlike the hon. Member for Belfast, South and the Speaker of the House of Commons, I enjoy a drink. Thinking about my past, I believe that I might have

[Mr. David Amess]

knowingly had too much to drink on two occasions. The first was when I went abroad for the first time, and had too much sangria. I was going one way round the room and the bed was going the other. That taught me a lesson. The second occasion was on my stag night. I do not know whether people still have stag nights, but my crowd of supporters thought that it would be a laugh to spike the glasses of champagne. I was very ill as a result and my bride-to-be was not at all amused. I learned two very hard lessons as a result of alcohol abuse.

Why do people drink? I suppose that they drink to relax, to drown their sorrows because they have some private problem or as a result of habit. In my experience, drinking too much has two effects: first, it makes people very happy and ultimately very silly—my goodness, what a bore it is to be in the company of someone who is very silly and a little too happy; and, secondly, it makes people violent, which is a very serious matter. All Members of Parliament can see the results of such violence, especially among young people, and I am sure that the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North can testify to that. We have all seen at football matches the result of youngsters drinking too much. Thank goodness, that is now being dealt with.

I went to the House of Commons Library, which I regard as the purveyor of truth so far as statistics are concerned. Its statistics on drinking are truly shocking. On hazardous drinking, men are more likely than women to have scores in the hazardous range—the score is 35 per cent. of men and 15.5 per cent. of women. Hazardous drinking patterns tend to decline with age. Nearly 42 per cent. of 16 to 24-year-olds scored more than eight, but only 12 per cent. of those aged 65 to 74 were in the same category. However, I am ashamed to say that a greater proportion of men than women drink at a dangerous level, even with advancing years.

My second set of figures is for dependence. Again, dependence is more marked in men. Some 11 per cent. of men were in higher categories, whereas fewer than 3 per cent. of women met higher dependency criteria. High dependence levels, too, are associated with younger people.

The third set of statistics that I got from the Library concern alcohol consumption among pupils, to which the hon. Member for Belfast, South referred. Overall, mean alcohol consumption for pupils aged 11 to 15 doubled from 0.8 units in 1990 to 1.6 units in 1998. That is a huge increase and, frankly, we are barking mad to free up the licensing laws in this country. For those aged 15, consumption rose from 2.1 units to 4.4 units in the same period. Historically, consumption by boys has led, by a considerable margin, that by girls.

The final statistics relate to deaths. There is a clear increase in deaths from alcohol-dependent syndrome. Some 144 deaths were recorded in 1998, but by 1999 the figure had more than doubled to 325. Again, male deaths were much higher than those for ladies. The number of deaths from chronic liver disease or cirrhosis is considerably higher, registering at 4,718 in 1999.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Is it not tragic that more young men are dying of cirrhosis of the liver than ever before, and that the number is growing?

Mr. Amess: How right the hon. Gentleman is.

Those figures are shocking, and Members of Parliament should be able to do something. I have a briefing from Alcohol Concern, to which I am grateful. It does magnificent work, and worries that services are shrinking in number, that most services have static or declining funding and that they face rising levels of client need. It advised me that the present funding sources are not secure, alcohol care services are patchy, and that there is a postcode lottery of availability and a huge range in quality.

There is a haemorrhage of skilled staff for drug agencies. It is wonderful that people help such agencies, but it is worrying that they are leaving the area of alcohol abuse. The Government have given greater funding priority to expansion in the drugs services sector, and the area of alcohol is losing out as a result because other organisations offer better paid training, accreditation and qualifications. Alcohol Concern has advised me that there are high levels of unmet need, especially for early intervention and preventive services. That is shown by the high number of alcohol-related admissions to accident and emergency units. I spent some time in an A and E unit and saw the nonsense from drunks that staff must put up with.

The Government have not published their long-awaited alcohol strategy, which was promised four years ago. Nor have they suggested that alcohol health care and alcohol public health targets are priorities. I believe that primary care trusts are unwilling to invest heavily until they receive a firm steer from Government. Primary care trusts can shift from block to spot purchasing on a case-by-case basis, and buy services for shorter periods—that will not help the overall situation. Local authorities are not prioritising alcohol issues in their community strategies, local public service agreements or crime reduction strategies—again, due to the lack of pressure from Government.

Four years ago, the Government announced that they would publish a strategy; two years ago, they said that they would implement the strategy in 2004. There is still no strategy, and if the Government do not act now, more services will close and the remaining ones will be of a preventive nature, which is not the whole answer. The lack of availability in rural areas will worsen, as will the fragile position of specialist services for people from black and Asian communities. Finally, the bills for the taxpayer will show up elsewhere in public services, such as in acute and chronic health care.

Much must be done. Given that the House has approved the extra £6 billion that the Government announced they are investing in the health service—the Minister had the pleasure of listening to my rant on the Budget yesterday—I hope that the comments of the hon. Member for Belfast, South and the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North will not only be heard but acted on.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), I say to hon. Members who hope to catch my eye that we anticipate starting the winding-up speeches at 10.30, and the three Members who wish to contribute should bear in mind that that will give them about seven minutes each.

10.9 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Thank you, Mr. Atkinson. I have taken careful note of what you have said and I shall try to keep my remarks to about five minutes.

I welcome the debate secured by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). It comes on the back of the ten-minute Bill of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston). Both of those are important matters in their own right. The House of Commons is at its best when it addresses an issue such as alcohol. People might say that that has little to do with real politics, but one has only to be on the streets on a Friday to see that, for many people, that is what life is about. They are involved with alcohol, fearful of it or trying to control it, and we must do something about that.

My plea to my hon. Friend the Minister is nothing new because a number of us involved with the all-party group, which is excellent, have been calling for some time for the publication of a strategy. It is time for the Government to put their money where their mouth is. Now they have got the money, perhaps they should try to solidify their policies and come up with a degree of consistency, which seems to be the biggest problem across the board with the provision of alcohol services.

Given that nobody else has done this, I shall start with a little anecdote, because Members of Parliament all have anecdotes about people who have been to see them in their surgeries. About two years ago, a lady came to see me to talk about watching her partner die as a result of alcohol-related illness. She has written a play, which is in the public domain, about that, but for obvious reasons I shall not mention her or him by name. He was a musical performer, and alcohol became part of his performance. The sad thing was that his very close friends accepted the fact that, more often than not, he was really drunk on stage, and they bought him drinks to get him going. That was seen to be part of his lifestyle, and his friends responded to it. With the benefit of hindsight, many of them will think sadly about their roles. I do not seek to ascribe blame, but people should think about the fun person, the one who drinks too much, because it may not be as harmless as it first appears.

The second problem was the oblivious nature of the medical services to what was a cry for help. Although some help was available, the medical services appeared to believe that, because the problem was alcohol related, it could be coped with and was not as serious as it appeared—the man eventually died from something related to cirrhosis. Nevertheless, he lost his life and I am sure that there are other such cases to which hon. Members can refer.

I know that some hon. Members would passionately disagree—hopefully not violently—with this, but alcohol can tell us something about the problems of either decriminalising or legalising drugs. People claim that that is one way to overcome the problems of crime and hiding addiction. They think that by waving a magic wand, things will become dramatically better. Alcohol teaches us that when a legal substance is abused, one has just the same problems of criminal behaviour and medical incapability as when an illegal substance is abused. I urge caution on those who see simple solutions as being the way forward on drugs.

We know that alcohol is a growing problem, and we all worry about young people drinking alcopops and strong alcohol. Producers must take a degree of responsibility, whether or not that is through the Portland Group, to make sure that we really grapple with the problem. My main argument is that we must take the matter seriously. We need a strategy in place. A lot of good work is taking place on the ground; in Gloucestershire, we have a very good drug action team, under Colin Hassall. The Gloucestershire drugs and alcohol service does a lot of commissioning, and those organisations work closely together. We also have some rehabilitation centres, such as Nelson house in my constituency. It is an abstinence-based centre run by a Christian organisation, which I have visited on several occasions, and it takes in people who need to end their addiction to drugs and alcohol.

One problem that I would ask my hon. Friend to bear in mind, which is not his responsibility but is linked to the issue, is that when people move away for rehabilitation it is often a signal that they need to start a new life. The last thing that they want is to be forced back whence they came. That puts pressure on places that have such centres to house and support individuals. That is where we need joined-up policy. It should not be just a medical model; it should be associated with a social model, which includes housing of individuals. If a single man in his 50s is trying to rebuild his life, we should not put him through expensive rehabilitation provision and then tell him that there is no housing for him because he is not a priority. Although the new homelessness legislation can make such people priorities, that was not the case until comparatively recently. They have no family, are not elderly, and if they are to be pushed back to where they came from, the whole process is a waste of time financially, let alone for the individual. However, that also means that such people could end up in the streets in the area that they have come to, which is totally unacceptable.

There are social as well as medical arguments, and there is an individual aspect to responsibility. One of the problems with alcohol is that everyone can handle it until they cannot. I hope that, through education—partly because we have now begun to improve drugs education—we can show people directly the effects that drugs have and what they do to people's lives. We must do the same with alcohol, which affects many young people more—they probably already drink. That needs to be done in our schools.

All these things must come together. I hope that the strategy will achieve that, and I look forward to hearing some good news from the Minister.

10.17 am

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I too would like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on initiating the debate. May I give my apologies in advance, Mr. Atkinson, if I am not here for the wind-ups as my Select Committee starts shortly? I apologise to my hon. Friend and the Minister for that.

It is important to put on record that we are not killjoys. We recognise that sensible consumption of alcohol is enjoyed by many people without harmful effects. If we read the articles of the medical

[Andrew Selous]

correspondent for *The Times*, Dr. Stuttaford, we find that he would have us living on red wine, aspirin and very little else as far as I can see. I think that it is important to put the matter in context.

However, alcohol abuse, as we have heard graphically this morning, costs our nation dear in many ways. It causes ill-health, such as cirrhosis of the liver, and we heard that about 4,700 deaths are recorded annually due to that. It can also contribute to cancers and heart disease. Injuries are caused through alcohol abuse. Alcohol-related crime is of great concern to the wider community. Road accidents are caused, as is economic loss. Most significantly, alcohol abuse can lead to domestic violence, unemployment, homelessness—often people lose their homes because they cannot maintain their jobs—and family breakdown. How many wives have lost husbands through alcohol abuse? How many children are cheated of a parent because alcohol has driven them out of the family home?

We also heard this morning that there are about 920,000 children in homes where alcohol abuse is a feature as far as their parents are concerned. Alcohol Concern has estimated that adding all those costs together, the total cost to our nation is about £10 billion. I hope that the Minister might factor in some sort of cost-benefit analysis detailing what the Government spend on the problem so that we can examine the benefits as we reduce the cost of alcohol abuse.

Alcohol is an addictive drug. We know from "The Health of the Nation" report produced by the previous Government in 1992 that targets were set to decrease alcohol abuse. Sadly, they not being achieved. Indeed, the figures are going in the wrong direction in respect of those targets. There has been an increase in the number of women and young men drinking over sensible alcohol limits. In addition to those with a heavy alcohol dependency, about 20 per cent. of the population regularly drink more than sensible amounts. Most worryingly, there has been an increase in the frequency of children drinking and the amount that they drink. We have heard statistics on that.

Some 10 Government Departments are involved in an alcohol strategy. There is a real case for one senior Minister to give a lead co-ordination to the Government's efforts and be the focal point for action in that area. The good news on alcohol abuse is that we know that social attitudes can be changed. Attitudes to drink driving are a prime example. It used to be more or less socially acceptable to drink and drive but, thank goodness, it no longer is. That should give us hope.

We must have a more balanced approach to the advertising of alcohol in the media. We see lifestyle advertising on our television screens that portrays association with certain drinks as very attractive, bringing friends and entry to a golden lifestyle. We need much more balance there. It seems curious that there are such severe restrictions on tobacco advertising but very limited ones on the advertising of alcohol. That needs to be examined.

On public education, we must redouble our efforts in schools. We need more role models who are advocates of a low-alcohol or no-alcohol lifestyle, or who can tell young people about the effects of alcohol abuse and what it has done to their lives. Younger people could then have a more balanced picture and be encouraged to drink sensibly.

On licensing, Alcohol Concern has proposed that there should be a licence related to both the premises and the individual licensee—a dual-licensing mandate. That should be heeded. A study on the sale of alcohol to young persons commissioned by psychologists from the universities of Wales, Leeds and Reading in conjunction with Thames Valley police, which is on the website of the Institute of Alcohol Studies, found that in September 2000 there was very easy availability of alcohol to young people. The figures are deeply worrying. At the age of 16, 88 per cent. of girls and 77 per cent. of boys were able to purchase alcohol. Even at the age of 13, 41.6 per cent. of girls were able to purchase alcohol, although the figure was somewhat lower for boys.

We must redouble our efforts in terms of the penalties that licensees face for selling alcohol to underage people in off-licenses and licensed premises. The current penalties seem not to be viewed as a disincentive to do that. In only 12 per cent. of cases was a demand made for an identity card from those young people. I want to emphasise the success of the voluntary citizen's card scheme, which has had an effect in some cases. In counties where there is a partnership agreement with secondary schools, there is good take-up. In Surrey, about 4,133 young people have that card, whereas in my county, Bedfordshire, which does not have that partnership agreement with schools, there are only 730 cardholders. There are strong arguments for encouraging such partnership schemes. We need much tougher action to ensure that licensees of premises do not get away with selling alcohol to underage drinkers.

10.24 am

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on securing the debate and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) on introducing his private Member's Bill yesterday. In introducing that, he made the point that alcohol care services throughout the country are under severe pressure, as we heard again this morning. Regrettably, that service provision is shrinking, and the unfortunate position of a lottery of availability and the range and quality of the services provided in many areas are matters of deep concern.

The issue of drugs and illegal substances is at the forefront of the minds of communities throughout the UK. We heard this morning and yesterday about that. Alcohol Concern has described the haemorrhage of skilled staff, who are moving away from working with people with alcohol problems to work for drug agencies, which are being given greater priority.

We must ask how serious the problem is, how seriously we as politicians take it and how seriously it is taken in our communities and by GPs. The frightening statistics from Alcohol Concern show that about one in four adults drinks to excess. Those are the figures for England, but I believe that they are mirrored throughout the UK. If those figures are correct, I am sure that we all know of a household that contains someone who drinks to excess.

Regrettably, such people are a danger to others. We heard again this morning about people drinking and driving, and they are a danger on the road. They are a

danger in the workplace, too. I sometimes worry about employers who see an employee with an alcohol problem and merely brush it aside and tell them to get their act together when what is needed is a helping hand to get them out of it. We are all aware of the number of days lost to industry and of what has been known for many years as the missing Monday syndrome. Some people never manage to turn up to their work on a Monday. That can last only so long.

Some time ago, I read about how people were paid. Weekly pay for industrial workers was an important issue. Several years ago, there was a step change from people being paid on a Friday to their being paid on a Thursday. The figures suddenly began to stack up to show that people were beginning to miss work on a Friday, too. When people have money, they do what is regarded as socially acceptable, and go out to drink.

Problems are created in the home, including physical violence. Those of us who have had contact with women's aid projects find the figures frightening. It is also upsetting for children. We sometimes witness the terrible cycle whereby children trapped in such circumstances themselves turn to alcohol. We all know of stories about children as young as eight, nine or 10 drinking. As time progresses, they move to secondary school and do not attend it because they themselves have ended up in the downward spiral.

There are also law and order problems and the associated extreme violence, on Friday and Saturday evenings in particular. People have been scarred for life when someone has used a bottle or a glass. Some responsibility lies at the door of licensees. Almost 10 years ago, I was on holiday and witnessed a young man in a bar to which my wife and I had gone for a meal. He could barely stand, but the licensee was still prepared to sell him alcohol. I asked, "Don't you think that this young man has had too much?" He brushed it aside and had nothing to do with me. Half an hour later, that young man collapsed across a table and spoiled the evening for a family that had been sitting there. I remember the look that I got from the barman, but it was too late.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South made a point about sportsmen wasting their lives. There is no greater example of a life and talent wasted than the Belfast boy himself, George Best. I have taken part in sport over the years, although perhaps hon. Members would not think so to see me now. I played amateur football. I have seen youngsters in their early teens being taken on board by local clubs, but, again, talent and potential were wasted, because they were mixing with older teenagers and those in their 20s, and drinking was the thing to do after a game. They were influenced so easily. They were wasting their talent and ending up on the scrapheap.

I should like to give an example of the roles of general practitioners and their attitudes. Two years ago, a lady came to me desperately worried. Her husband was a professional gentleman seeking help. I encouraged her to go to her GP with her husband to talk the issue through. Assistance was given. However, I was horrified some four or five months later to find that the same GP had turned away a woman and her son when they were seeking assistance. GPs may help professionals, but there is a belief that those who come from less well-off households do not have a medical problem; they have a social problem. GPs need to stop differentiating between the two.

I tabled a question for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on the use of laser treatment. There is a business in my area that offers laser therapy for smoking cessation. The figures stack up to show that laser therapy has a 46 per cent. success rate, whereas nicotine patches have only a 20 per cent. success rate. We need to consider treatments available for smoking cessation. The laser treatment also works for alcohol, and for those like me who have a craving for chocolate on occasion. No study on such therapy has been carried out in my area. The lady who runs the centre told me that she took on board four professional people who desperately wanted to stop drinking. She had a 100 per cent. success rate with the treatment and back-up service that she was able to offer them. However, four people do not make a widespread study. The therapy can work, and we must consider that.

We need a multi-agency approach involving police, educational and social services, licensing authorities and the health service. Resources have dwindled in recent years, as has been pointed out by Alcohol Concern. That must be reversed. After last week's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer of additional funding for the health service, I hope that some of that money will go back to assisting people and families who desperately need help.

10.33 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): We owe a debt of gratitude to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) for securing the debate, just as we have in the past owed debts to the hon. Members for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) and for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman), and my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes). They have all raised the matter in recent years in Adjournment debates, presumably in order to get some response—not just words but action—from the Government. Most recently, a commendable ten-minute Bill was introduced yesterday by the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston).

The Government have failed to produce the strategy that was promised four years ago. It is hard to run away from that fact, because when it is recognised that a strategy is required but it is not produced on time, there is a suspension of action. It allows people to say, "Well, there's a strategy coming. We'd better not make plans and provisions because they may all be overturned by the publication of the strategy."

Effectively therefore, there is a blight not only in financial terms—which may finally have been addressed by the recent Budget—but in a willingness to think strategically.

The Government must do better on public health issues. Exactly the same problem occurred with the sexual health strategy, which was promised and postponed four times. After three years, it finally emerged and even then was not complete in terms of the public education campaign.

The problem is major. Public health issues affect entire populations. They are not always visible, because one sees only the tip of the iceberg in the accident and

[Dr. Evan Harris]

emergency departments and police cells. The problem of alcohol abuse needs a national strategy. The term joined-up government is overused, but there is clearly a need for links between the Home Office, which deals with crime resulting from alcohol problems, the Department of Trade and Industry to deal with the drinks industry and the Department of Health. The problem is urgent. Indeed, it was urgent when Labour gained power in 1997—a year before they promised a strategy.

Multiple problems are associated with drinking. A culture of binge drinking is emerging, especially among young women. Anti-social behaviour is often the result, which causes fear among local residents who are exposed to such behaviour as well as damage to property. Older people often live in fear of younger people who are drunk and rowdy.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) mentioned the numbers of people suffering cirrhosis and the severe illness suffered by those with chronic alcohol addiction. The end-stage liver failure that results requires a liver transplant, and not enough livers are available. Patients under treatment for liver failure continue to drink because of their addiction and make multiple admissions to hospital, as I remember when I worked on a liver ward a few years ago.

Emotional as well as physical violence is associated with alcohol. The result is family arguments and sometimes rape, as the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North mentioned, especially in cases when the attacker is known to the victim.

Clearly, there are opportunities to make widespread savings through investment, although they may not be immediately obvious within the budget in which the investment is taking place. Greater investment in services would obviously improve matters, socially and financially, and the Government should be making calculations across budgets.

The lack of youth provision is another factor. Young people gather together, often grabbing cheap bottles of strong cider or lager to drink in shopping centres and on street corners because of a lack of youth provision. There is insufficient time to talk about the problems facing the youth service, but as everything else is prioritised and local authorities have inadequate resources, it is often non-statutory or discretionary provision—those things that people are not forced to do even though they see a need for them—that suffers.

The Government have, in a sense, accepted the problem of priorities as a reason for why their strategy has not emerged. In an Adjournment debate on 31 October last year, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), said:

"It is particularly valuable for Members to bring to these debates not just a sense of overarching strategy but"—

I thought that she would go on to say "an actual strategy", but she continued—

"personal experience of services on the ground."

Rather than talking about the Government's failure to produce a strategy, she said that the hon. Member for Broxbourne

"rightly highlighted the Government's commitment to formulate and produce a national alcohol strategy. The original timescale was ambitious, and I acknowledge that the strategy has been slow to emerge. However, we must examine that in the context of the Government's specific clinical priorities for early action relating to coronary heart disease, mental health and cancer. Obviously, those matters compete for Government time and development by the Department of Health, and resources must be available in order to make a real impact."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 31 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 315-16WH.]

That is the problem: over-prioritisation in some sectors without recognition—except in that paragraph—that that necessarily means deprioritising others. When certain issues are chosen for political reasons, the less glamorous Cinderella services are often deprioritised.

The Government's view of alcohol differs from their view of drugs. We know that alcohol causes far more problems than cannabis. It is not a simple matter, but opposing outright any decriminalisation of cannabis while failing to tackle alcohol problems is bizarre. We recognise the lack of an evidence base for assessing the best strategies for prevention. The Government should have invested in that by now.

We have heard helpful contributions from all hon. Members who have spoken and I am sorry that I do not have time to respond to them all in detail. The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) argued that people who are far too young are still buying alcohol. We license premises to sell alcohol, so why can we not improve enforcement? I am not opposed to more sting operations; the fear of being caught will affect the attitude and approach of licensees.

I agree with the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) that serious questions remain about whether GPs have the time or interest to deal with alcohol as a health issue, particularly among non-professionals. Individual cases must be brought to the attention of the authorities. We return to the problem of the absence of a proper strategy and the resulting blight. A lack of priority will mean defunding the Cinderella services, as people leave for the glory areas that are well funded. That is sad for those who work and face such pressure in those services, as well as for the victims.

10.41 am

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I, too, pay tribute to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) for sharing with us his experiences in Northern Ireland, which are similar to those of Members in other constituencies throughout the UK. I also pay tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) for presenting a timely ten-minute Bill yesterday. I add my thanks to Alcohol Concern for its work and the material that it contributed to many Members' speeches today.

Alcohol abuse is a bigger problem than many other health-related issues that we regularly debate in this Chamber. It seems, however, to merit rather less attention and urgency from the Government. Problems are not limited to health. As hon. Members have explained, alcohol has implications for crime, the yob culture, road traffic accidents, family break-ups, domestic violence and the environment. It affects the quality of life of many people whose peace is disturbed late at night by drunks coming out of pubs. It has public order consequences, effects on employment and business through absenteeism, and its impact on impressionable young people is particularly harmful. For today's debate, however, it is viewed as a health problem.

I saw many of the consequences of drinking problems as a member of the Wandsworth alcohol group when I was a representative on the Wandsworth community health council. I saw the health impact on heavy drinkers and their families. I would not like anyone to have to go through those experiences. As constituency MPs, we have all seen them at first hand. As the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) rightly said, all the problems that I have listed are the stuff of real politics and it is up to politicians to address them head-on.

We have heard many statistics today. According to Alcohol Concern, alcohol misuse costs the NHS at least £3 billion a year, and a further £3 billion cost to society arises from sickness and absenteeism at work, premature deaths, accidents and alcohol-related crime. One in six people attending A and E departments does so for alcohol-related injuries or problems, and that rises to eight out of 10 at peak times. I witnessed it at first hand when I spent a night in an A and E department in Whitechapel. Fortunately, it was a relatively quiet night. A young woman came into A and E and within minutes collapsed in the waiting room. She was rushed to "resus" and within a matter of seconds, 15 health professionals were around her bed: the consultant, the registrars and the nurses. She had a series of X-rays in a deeply comatose state, and a magnetic resonance imaging scan. Everything that could possibly be done for her was done.

Intensive health care was given to that woman. Fortunately, no one else required attention at the time. It turned out, when the blood sample came back half an hour later, that her blood alcohol level was in excess of 360 mg per 100 ml of blood, compared with the safe-to-drive level of 80 mg. She was highly intoxicated, unnecessarily. The cost to the NHS in that A and E department was enormous, but the potential cost of the lack of treatment that would have been available for other emergencies was unforgivable.

Those are the consequences of irresponsible drinking that we see night in night out in casualty departments around the country. The effects on the family are considerable. As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) said, an estimated 920,000 children live in a home where one or both parents misuse alcohol, and 23 per cent of child neglect cases identified by telephone calls involve parental alcohol misuse. As the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North pointed out, the implications for crime are enormous too.

What have the Government done about it? In their paper "A Healthier Nation" published in 1998, just one paragraph was devoted to alcohol problems. It identified the urgency of the problem and stated:

"It has been estimated that up to 40,000 deaths could be alcohol related and in 1996 15 per cent. of fatal road accidents involved alcohol."

That paragraph revealed other disturbing statistics, yet four years on there has still been no action.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), admitted that the Government's targets for the original timescale had been ambitious. The Government are talking about implementing a national strategy for tackling alcohol misuse, but not until 2004. The consultation for that strategy, we are told, will draw in contributions from the Government, local organisations, the voluntary sector and the drinks industry; review progress to date; and outline a programme for the future. That is great, but when on earth will we get it? People are suffering the effects of a lack of a co-ordinated alcohol strategy now. A criticism of the Government that has been shown in recent MORI polls is that there are no official targets for reducing young people's alcohol consumption as there are for drugs and smoking. Over 80 per cent. of the public agree that the Government do not do enough to highlight the risks of drinking alcohol.

The absence of the long-awaited Government strategy on alcohol is causing planning blight locally, too. A hot issue in my constituency is the proliferation of wine bars that are open until late at night. One wine bar in Worthing recently won permission to stay open until midnight every night of the week, against the wishes of local people, the council and the police. Fortunately, Worthing council has set aside £40,000 to fight that decision and to give people who live in the centre of Worthing some peace and quiet late at night, because their lives are being ruined by people coming out of wine bars drunk and unruly. That is unfair to all concerned.

The Government do not even know how much money goes on tackling alcohol abuse now. When the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) asked how much central Government funding was specifically allocated for preventive and curative work in relation to drug, alcohol and tobacco dependency, the former Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), replied:

"It is not always possible to distinguish between preventive and curative work in relation to substance misuse. Interventions may be undertaken with people who have some substance misuse problems but have not, or would not, necessarily develop dependency."

She went on to give details of all the money being spent on drug misuse, such as £59 million on a special allocation to health authorities, £25 million additional funding in relation to drug misuse, and £7.5 million for preventive activity. A lot of money was allocated to smoking, yet there was only

"£0.6 million for preventive health promotion in relation to alcohol"

and a

"£0.5 million local grants scheme promoting development of primary care led alcohol services."—[*Official Report*, 6 April 2001; Vol. 366, c. 354W.]

I do not say that drugs and tobacco problems do not need the attention, but alcohol abuse does not receive a fair slice of the cake, although it is a deeply important and increasingly worrying problem.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) has highlighted in Adjournment debates that she has initiated, another problem is that existing funding arrangements are coming to an end as health and welfare services move towards the new primary care trust arrangements that are designed to meet central targets and priorities. The lack of priority given to alcohol services and the dominance of the drugs agenda are destabilising services. Indeed, we have heard about the haemorrhaging of skilled staff as they move to deal with drugs rather than alcohol cases.

[Tim Loughton]

The effect on young people is getting worse all the time. Among 16 to 24-year-olds, 37 per cent. of men and 23 per cent. of women regularly drink twice the recommended safe levels of alcohol. Cirrhosis of the liver now kills 1,600 women a year, compared with 1,200 seven years ago. It kills more women than cervical cancer, yet how much do we hear, quite rightly, about cervical smears and all the attention and resources that go into that problem? We could also talk about teenage binge drinking.

Much more needs to be said, but we also need much more Government action. What progress is being made with the alcohol strategy and exactly how high a priority is it for the Government? In the proposals for a national alcohol strategy in a 1999 paper, we were told about a high-profile ministerial lead. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire mentioned, it is still fragmented across 10 Departments. What work have local authorities done and what progress has been made with the voluntary citizen card and other schemes?

It is about time that the Government put their money where their mouth has been for too long and we saw serious action in many sectors of society to ensure that proper attention is given to a problem that is getting worse. The Government appear not to treat it as a priority.

10.51 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I congratulate all hon. Members who have spoken on the quality and succinctness of their comments. We are all concerned about the issues that have been raised. Whether we draw on experiences in our own families or our constituency work, there cannot be one hon. Member who is not aware of the seriousness of alcohol misuse. I congratulate in particular the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on giving us an opportunity to discuss these issues.

We heard a great deal about the statistics associated with alcohol misuse. Indeed, I think that all hon. Members who spoke used them. However, I hope that they will forgive me if I do not parade another list of statistics before them, because the danger with that form of presentation is that we lose sight of what is happening.

We are talking about people rather than numbers, and by any calculation the statistics paint a particularly grim picture. It is not only of wasted life opportunities, although I guess that that is our principal concern; the effect of alcohol misuse on society as a whole and on crime in particular goes much wider and deeper than that. Many hon. Members spoke about the wider connotations and the wider background to today's discussion. Alcohol misuse has a profound effect, not only in terms of wrecked lives, but on the quality of family life and on crime.

In particular, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) spoke about the effect on the national health service. He has been fortunate in seeing some of the excellent work that is done in our accident and emergency departments day in, day out. I do not want to slip into partisan mode, because we should avoid that on these occasions, but that was the first time that I had heard a Conservative Front-Bench health spokesman talk about the good quality of work in A and E departments.

Tim Loughton: Rubbish.

Mr. Hutton: It was the first time, but I think that most of us benefited from hearing the hon. Gentleman praise the NHS staff in A and E departments.

There is a clear effect on the NHS. I am sure that we have all seen drunk people attending A and E departments in our constituencies who are violent and abuse not only the staff—public servants who are there to help patients—but other patients. That is completely unacceptable.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Government have taken a number of measures to try to improve the safety and security of patients and staff in those departments. That will continue to be an important issue for us. I think that the hon. Gentleman ended his remarks by calling on the Government to set new national targets and to devote more resources to alcohol services. I was struck by the inconsistency of his approach. In the Chamber, he and his hon. Friends spent most of their time saying that we had too many national targets, but yesterday they voted against extra resources for the NHS. The hon. Gentleman needs a new script if his arguments are to carry more weight.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) is not present, as he made several very good points; two, especially, struck a chord with me. He expressed his concerns about the licensing laws, although he may have misunderstood some of the proposals that were floated. I shall draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

The hon. Gentleman and the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham made a good point about the need for consistency throughout government in considering the structures in place to deal with these issues. At least 10 Government Departments are involved in tackling alcohol misuse. It is not only an issue for the NHS, although it brings an expertise to bear on the problem. My Department will reflect on the suggestions made by the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members about how better to co-ordinate our work on those issues throughout government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) made a good speech, as he always does on these issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) rightly drew attention to resources, which I accept is the most important matter, and to consistency. My hon. Friend and others referred to the post-code lottery in respect of alcohol services, which is unacceptable. The national strategy will have to address that matter, and the issue of consistency, and I shall say something about it in a moment. About £95 million is spent in the NHS on issues related to alcohol treatment and services, which is a substantial investment. We have been asked to devote more resources to it, and that will be considered when allocations to health services are made later this year and beyond, as we move to a longer-term financial planning framework for the NHS. When we

can predict the future requirements with some certainty at local level, some of the funding difficulties can be tackled.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) made a good speech drawing upon his experience as a recorder, which was of great benefit to the debate. I pay tribute to him for his impressive record of service and for his excellent work on these issues when he was Solicitor-General.

Several hon. Members mentioned the Government's commitment to a strategy. "Where is it?" was their question. I reconfirm what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said: we remain committed to implementing the national strategy on alcohol misuse by 2004. We need a wide-ranging partnership to build that effective strategy, and that is what we have been working to achieve. I understand that the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham fell into temptation in asking where was the strategy and why we do not have one; a little bit of humility might be in order for Conservative Members. We all have painful memories of the experience, but the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends were running the country for 18 years. Unless I missed it, I do not remember a Conservative health Minister making a commitment to a national strategy. Now they want the strategy, and we are committed to it.

As many hon. Members have said, it is not only an issue for the Department of Health; other Departments are involved and there are wide-ranging and more general issues to be considered. The strategy must be based on two key pillars: prevention and effective treatment. We have been doing, and will continue to do, various work, including focusing on education and ensuring that young people in particular are properly educated about the risks of alcohol misuse. I hope that the hon. Member for Belfast, South will at least be pleased to know that, over the past three years in England, we have put another £29.5 million into education on substance misuse, which includes alcohol. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman that I do not have the figures for Northern Ireland.

London Underground

11 am

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I thank you for granting the debate on the funding and management of the London Underground, Mr. Stevenson. This is my third debate in six months on this important matter.

The London Underground is important not only to Londoners, but to the national economy. The current proposals still contain many unsatisfactory or unresolved aspects. I welcome the Government's commitment to £16 billion funding for the tube over the next 15 years, although I suspect that that is not enough. However, we should compare that with the lack of a similar commitment from the Opposition parties. The Tories presided over the serious decline of the network, and although they say that they could support the Mayor's solution or full privatisation, there is no doubt that if they were in power they would support the latter.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Harry Cohen: Let me finish my point. The Liberal Democrats are swept along by the prevailing winds. The London Underground would be disregarded while they committed themselves to other priorities, and their policy on it would not be coherent or consistent.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I am not here to defend the Liberal Democrats. However, it must be said that with devolved government and the Mayor of London and Bob Kiley—his expertise brought over at great expense from the United States—in place, the Opposition made it clear that they are firmly in favour of ensuring that local government in London means something and, more importantly, that we allow local decisions to be made for the good of all Londoners. That should unite us all across the political divide who are London politicians.

Harry Cohen: The hon. Gentleman has made his point, but Londoners know that the Conservatives are wedded to privatisation, and that is likely to be the order of the day.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): It is clear that the hon. Gentleman has been got at by the Labour Whips. Far from being swept along with the wind, the Liberal Democrats have been advocating the bond issue, which Bob Kiley supports, for the past five years. The wind has therefore been blowing in the same direction for the past five years.

Harry Cohen: The hon. Gentleman makes his point, and will have other opportunities to do that. As I said, I welcome the Government's financial commitment, and I asked the Library what was in the Budget and the Red Book about the London Underground so that I could add praise. I was disturbed that there appeared to be nothing specific. It may be incorporated in other Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions totals, but it implies that the public-private partnership is a done deal. There is no clear indication of what the Government are contributing over the next period, which gives a bad impression. The London

[Harry Cohen]

Underground does as much as the rest of the rail network, and is as important to the national economy, yet it is considered too small to be included in the Budget or the Red Book. Does that also mean that transport Ministers did not fight their corner for the London Underground? I look forward to the Minister's comments.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the concept of the public-private partnership. However, the partnership for the London Underground is potentially disastrous. It does not seem to give value for money, and the delivery from it is far less than was originally envisaged, or is needed. Four stations in my constituency are on the Central line: Leyton, Leytonstone, Wanstead and Snaresbrook. Transport for London's analysis of the public-private partnership shows that there will be no new or refurbished trains on the central line until 2016. The line's upgrade is due in 2005, but nothing is promised for the rest of the 30-year period. I do not know the details of the upgrade, but if it is not thorough, it will be inadequate for the following 30 to 40 years.

The PPP allows for a worsening of train frequency by three minutes compared with what is envisaged in the invitation to tender. In that invitation, Leyton station was to be modernised in 2003, Leytonstone and Snaresbrook in 2004, and Wanstead in 2003. By February this year, however, no modernisation date was offered for the first three stations, and the new date for Wanstead was 2012. That is deeply unsatisfactory for my constituents. All four stations require early modernisation, easier access and better arrangements to minimise opportunities for crime.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): My hon. Friend and I represent the same borough of Redbridge. We have 10 stations between us, including eight for my residents and another that might be used extensively if a racecourse is built nearby. Is my hon. Friend aware of the press release by Transport for London, in which plans for upgrading and modernising those stations are shown to have been shelved under the PPP? Does he agree that our residents need these services improved as soon as possible?

Harry Cohen: That is a very good point—the same as I am making—and I hope that the Minister will respond and give a commitment to put the improvement of those stations back up high on the agenda.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I told the hon. Gentleman that 217 modernisations were originally envisaged under PPP between now and 2009. That figure has now been reduced to 61; and 129 modernisations have been eliminated entirely for the whole 30-year period.

Harry Cohen: I am aware of that and shall return to it later.

The PPP consultation process is over, but the contracts have not yet been finalised. They have been altered dramatically in the contractor's favour since the invitation to tender. Will the Minister tell us whether they are being altered even now? The consultation was inevitably generalised. Will the Minister give us an early indication of the responses? I suspect that few independent transport experts are in favour. I have submitted my representations, which concentrated on the poor value for money, low performance and fractured management that PPP is likely to produce.

Transport for London's response is important because it is the institution to be responsible for the system in due course. It has statutory responsibility for this key public sector asset and for paying PPP bills. TfL is scathing. It calls PPP "fundamentally and fatally flawed" for five reasons, which I am using as the framework for my speech.

The first is safety. There is a "wheel from steel" split of operation—of the trains from the maintenance of the track—which is a key failing of the national rail network. The existence and involvement of four separate organisations creates more safety boundaries, which increases the risk of things going wrong at the interfaces that affect safety. Specific responsibility for tube assets has not been clearly assigned. Not even an inventory has been produced. Instead, we have a policy of "minimum ambiguity" on who is responsible for what. That is just not good enough in a safety context. As the Parsons Brinkerhoff report indicated, endless haggling over secondary safety standards is likely. Procrastination over, rather than fulfilling, those standards will be the order of the day.

Where are the published reports of the health and safety inspectorate and the railway inspectorate? The consultation process proceeded without them. Earlier, the Health and Safety Executive had pointed out 52 safety issues of outstanding concern, including inadequate technical standards to govern the work done by the private sector infrastructure companies and unclear lines of responsibility relating to many of the tube's assets. However, the Health and Safety Executive has yet to confirm whether it has matched what is claimed by the PPP safety case to what is said in the PPP contracts. When will that happen?

As a unified system under central command and control, the London underground system has a fine safety record for a mass transit system. An untested, fragmented management model puts that at risk.

In respect of value for money, Ernst & Young called that subjective, which is not much of an endorsement. The costs assigned to the public sector in the comparator, which compared the public sector to PPP, were, without explanation, increased by 33 per cent. over the past two years, while the amount of notional work to be paid for materially decreased over the same period. The public sector was also penalised by a social costs adjuster of £1.4 billion, although even Ernst & Young said that it had never seen such an adjuster used in value-for-money analyses.

Public Finance magazine reports that the method of analysis benefited PPP by 5 per cent. Mr. Martin Blaiklock, a project finance consultant, told the Transport Sub-Committee that using the social costs adjuster was highly unusual. He said:

"I cannot recall seeing an occasion when it has been used to assess a bid, and I have worked in this field for 25 years."

The infracos are likely to be in a near monopoly position at the seven-and-a-half-year contract intervals. At that time, the public sector will be over a barrel, having to pay huge sums to renew its contracts, or still higher sums to buy them out. The Government have failed to clarify the options at those seven-and-a-half-year renegotiation periods. No financial guarantees from government have been given. Will the Government guarantee to put right the infracos' debt or future charges? If they do not, the impact on fare payers and London council taxpayers could be severe.

Last month, *Capital Transport Bulletin* stated:

"Early versions of the PPP relied on there being a substantial surplus of revenue from fares which would provide a revenue stream to pay for making improvements to the infrastructure. The fare box surplus has turned into a fare box shortfall".

It went on to quote the Transport Sub-Committee:

"The Government must commit to funding any resultant financial shortfall and by so doing ensure that it neither compromises the investment plan nor creates pressure for above inflationary fare increases".

I have seen a TfL document that is part of the consultation process. It states:

"The Lenders to the private sector will have the right to 'put' the £4.3 billion in debt to LUL, i.e. apparently to require that LUL pay off this £4.3 billion in full. This 'put' right is nothing less than a guarantee by LUL of private sector debt, a guarantee which the Government is approving and standing behind by virtue of the Comfort Letter, the latest version of which expressly refers to this 'put agreement'. Should the Government not honour the implied commitments of the Comfort Letters, then it is TfL that must foot the bill, by raising fares or depriving other modes of transport of much needed resources, or by looking to the Greater London Authority to raise London council taxes."

Will the Minister, on behalf of the Government, show good faith and give a commitment that all significant debt arising from PPP will be covered by the Government?

There is also the matter of the rate of return for infracos. The excellent magazine, *Socialist Campaign Group News*—I advise hon. Members to read it—reports:

"The eight construction and maintenance companies that make up Metronet and Tubelines consortia are expected to receive over £4 billion on their £500 million investments"

over the 30 years. I ask the Minister whether that is true.

TfL says:

"If the Infracos were to successfully exploit all the financial avenues open to them and convert the £1 billion contingency fund into profit, they could make annual rates of return on their equity of anywhere between 37 per cent. and 58 per cent."

Again, I ask the Minister whether that is true because it impacts on the value-for-money issue.

The third matter is risk transfer. Tube service availability can deteriorate by up to 5 per cent. below current availability levels, and the infracos will still be paid bonuses from public funds. With the concessions made to the private sector, TfL maintains that

"no real risk is being assumed by the private sector".

For the seven-and-a-half-year period, the private sector could incur up to £50 million of cost overruns, but only after it has used up the £1 billion contingency fund for the same period. There are several other wheezes to get out of liability for cost overruns too. For example, the liability for the new signalling that is being put in will remain with London Underground Ltd.

Fourthly, the scope of the work to be undertaken has been markedly reduced since the invitation to tender only two years ago. The invitation to tender promised capacity improvements of 15 to 20 per cent. in the first seven-and-a-half-year period. That seems unlikely to be achieved. Apparently, only one tube line is now required for modernisation within that time scale.

TfL says that total station modernisations between now and 2009 have been reduced from 217 to 61. That point was also made by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) in an intervention. Train information, security monitoring and emergency help facilities have all been deferred from the first period to 2012 and well beyond. The outside date to have all assets in a reasonable state of repair has been deferred from 2017 to 2025, and 135 station modernisation programmes have been dropped completely—including three in my constituency—over the course of the PPP, and will not now happen in the next 30 years.

TfL also makes the point that the difference in years between what was previously promised and what is in the contracts now reveals that 318 years have been added to the much-reduced station modernisation programme. Very few capital improvements seem likely to be implemented in the first seven-and-a-half-year period. The performance that has been promised is unsatisfactory, and it is not what was previously promised.

The fifth point concerns stable and long-term funding. The concern is that no firm Treasury commitment is in place. London Transport's vice-chair, Brian Appleton, admitted to the Transport Sub-Committee on 27 February that government funding proposals presently extend only to 2010. TfL's concern is that London Underground Ltd. could be left owing a lot of money to existing PFI contractors due to the activities of the infracos, and it will not have a right to reimbursement from them. That could result in a lot of money being paid out by the public sector. There is also the risk that should the infracos exercise their right to unwind the PPP contracts at the first seven-and-a-half-year review point, TfL could be left with a financial burden in excess of £5 billion.

On the PPP, transport commissioner Bob Kiley states that

"it is potentially unsafe and incapable of delivering the renewed and rehabilitated Tube that London needs. Worst of all, it could easily leave TfL and London with a bill for over £5.4 billion—that's nearly £1,700 for every London household—which the bidders and their lenders will pocket even when the contracts have failed ... If the Government pushes ahead with the Tube PPP, London's farepayers and taxpayers could end up financing billions of pounds of private sector profit without seeing even a fraction of the improvements to the Underground the Government is promising. To proceed with the PPP would be both premature and irresponsible."

The private part of the PPP will not generate any more money for the tube than the public sector is inserting, and it will not deliver the high levels of performance, improvement and modernisation that such a large investment should deliver. There is a huge level of dissatisfaction with it and a lack of confidence in it. We should not commit to it but abandon it. A better policy would be to hand the whole investment over to the Mayor and TfL but say to them that they must set up a PPP, in a form of their choosing, and that the Government will closely monitor and audit how the public money is utilised.

[Harry Cohen]

Otherwise, when the PPP is handed over to the Mayor and TfL—I ask the Minister when that will happen; perhaps we could have some information about it—it will be a fait accompli. When it unravels, no one will take responsibility but everyone will blame someone else. The Government have had many warnings about that in the consultation and in the Chamber so, if chaos ensues, the blame will actually be theirs.

I do not want that. I know that the intentions are well-meaning. I want the Government to get credit for significant improvement to the London Underground. To do that, it would be best to say goodbye to the existing PPP and require the Mayor to introduce one that will work.

11.22 am

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on securing the debate and—unusually for me, a Conservative Member—on a very thoughtful and insightful speech. I wholeheartedly agreed with the vast majority of his speech, but differ with him on a matter of history. He looked back to the time of the previous Conservative Government and implied that they had given no support to London Underground. I simply remind him that the Conservative Government built the Jubilee line extension and introduced new trains on the Northern and Central lines. By contrast, not a single new carriage has been introduced to the underground in the past five years. Five years after the Government first started the PPP process, nothing has happened. I wait with bated breath for something to happen, but the weeks and months fly by.

Three months have passed since the Secretary of State made a statement to the House of Commons about the way forward for the underground, but nothing has happened. There is no sign of a handover to Transport for London. There is no sign that work is starting. Indeed, we are still waiting for several of the key pieces of the jigsaw puzzle to be slotted into place before the scheme can start. I wonder how long the travelling public in London will have to wait. Will it be another six months, a year, two years? We are five years into a Labour Government, and nothing has happened.

The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the weaknesses in the scheme—it has fundamental weaknesses. For a variety of reasons, it is the wrong project to meet the needs of London. We heard extensive evidence about capacity during the Select Committee inquiry. I am a member of the Transport Sub-Committee that produced the report to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The Government now admit the reality in written answers and London Underground certainly acknowledged it in evidence. The PPP proposals will just about keep pace with the capacity increases necessary for the projected growth in passenger numbers during the next 20 years. That means that people who travel to work today on a crowded tube train will carry on doing that for the next decade or more. That is very bad news for the travelling public in London.

However, if one looks at the small print in the background document for the Government's 10-year transport plan, one sees that it is worse than that. The document clearly says that, without a major congestion-relieving scheme such as the crossrail project—which, as we know, is not included in the plans for the next 10 years of the Government or the Strategic Rail Authority—congestion and overcrowding on the east-west underground lines will get worse, not better, during the period of the 10-year plan. There are problems not just for today; they will be much worse for future passengers.

It is clear that the PPP scheme has set out the wrong priorities. The evidence that Bob Kiley gave the Committee on that was compelling. The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead referred to the fact that a station modernisation programme is at the heart of the PPP project. I have every desire to see spanking new modern stations across the London underground, but Bob Kiley's evidence—that the real priority in turning round the underground is replacing the rolling stock, not tarting up the stations—is inescapable. That is what he did in New York and in Boston. The Kiley plan involves the total replacement or refurbishment of the entire London underground stock in the first seven years of the contract. The reality is that the PPP scheme will deliver a handful of new carriages in that period. Is it right to focus on giving stations a new coat of paint rather than replacing the elderly trains that so often break down and develop technical difficulties, congesting the service all the way down the line? It is not scruffy stations that make trains run late, but trains that are not working up to scratch.

The scheme is over-engineered. It cannot be compared to the principles involved in creating Railtrack. When Railtrack was created, there was an expectation that several operators would provide a service for passengers travelling from point A to point B on one route. That is seen, for example, on the Gatwick Express route. However, different operators will not be running alternative trains on the Bakerloo line. In this case, the separation of track and train makes no sense whatever. All it will do is create contractual and managerial complexity.

I received a letter last week from a London Underground employee, saying that the company is already operating the new managerial systems that will exist in the future on the underground. He said that the systems are a nightmare, with more time being spent dealing with process and complexity than actually working on the lines, trying to sort out the problems that passengers and train drivers face. The scheme is far too complex, contractual and detailed. It makes no sense to try to over-engineer a solution to the problems of London's transport and our underground.

The scheme is not just the wrong project; it is the wrong structure. The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead made several important points on the scheme's weaknesses, and I shall pick up on some. One is risk transfer. It is extremely unclear exactly who will bear the risks for the project. If there is one lesson that we have all learned from experiences on the mainline railway in the past few years, it is that a lack of knowledge of the condition of assets leads to huge cost uncertainties when major projects are embarked on. There is no question but that there is uncertainty about the actual condition of London Underground's assets. London Underground says that it knows its assets very well, but the Select Committee took evidence that that was far from the case.

London Underground might think that it knows its assets well, but in such a major project there are bound to be hidden nasties, problems that emerge during the course of the project. I cannot think of a project of that kind that has taken place without cost overruns. Who will take the risks? Are we saying to the private companies, "Go in there, do it, and if you find something unpleasant that none of us knew about, it's your fault?" I doubt very much that they will sign up to that. The real issues about who is carrying the risk are exacerbated by the Government's desire to get their pet scheme off the shelf and into action very hurriedly, and by their willingness to issue to the bidders letters of comfort that effectively significantly reduce the risk that they will carry, as the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead said.

Another issue is the Treasury's involvement in the scheme and the way in which it has required the scheme's financial structure to be set out. Evidence taken in the Select Committee clearly showed that many of the improvements that are needed sooner rather than later will happen later rather than sooner because of the Treasury. The Treasury has been instrumental in encouraging London Underground to push projects out beyond the first 15 years of the contract. We took evidence from the board of London Underground to the effect that those projects will be started after 15 years, not before. We heard clear evidence from people who have been involved with several bidders that that is taking place at the Treasury's instigation.

It is reprehensible that the Treasury has consistently failed to provide proper answers about its involvement in the project. It refused to appear before the Select Committee and refuses to answer questions, batting them off to other Departments. It wants its fingers in every pie, but is not willing to be accountable for its decision making, ideas and influence on such projects. That is simply unacceptable.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): On Treasury involvement and responsibility, does my hon. Friend agree that a particular part of the London underground has been let down badly—the Epping to Ongar line? The Minister's predecessor but one, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), promised that the land on which that line used to run would be preserved as railway land in perpetuity. Yet the contract entered into, presumably with Treasury backing—the point that my hon. Friend makes—failed to protect that land, and we are now on the verge of losing it for ever and thus being unable to resurrect a railway there. The Government say that they are committed to expanding public transport, yet in this case they have diminished it.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend's comments speak for themselves. Given the current expansion of demand for transport, it is foolhardy to give up existing corridors that may need to be reopened for passenger traffic. It is beholden on the Government to consider the assets that they hold and to protect them, given the enormous pressures on our transport infrastructure.

The last issue, which relates to financial structure, lies in the Ernst & Young report on the comparison between the public and private sector options available to the Government. The report is simply a whitewash for the Government's approach. That is no fault of Ernst & Young, which did the job that it was asked to do. It was asked to check that the sums added up; it was not asked to check whether the figures originally used were accurate. It is rather like my saying, "I have three sweets in this pocket, and three sweets in that pocket. I think that I've got six. Can you tell me whether I am right?" Someone could use a calculator, find that three plus three equals six, and say, "Yes, congratulations. You are right." However, they would have no idea whether I know how to count. I might have four in one pocket, and two in the other. They do not know. They would be giving me a bill of health on figures that are my assumptions and about which they know nothing. The executive summary in the Ernst & Young report makes it clear that that is what happened. There is, therefore, no certainty as a result of the Ernst & Young work that the scheme is value for money.

The value-for-money question is even more doubtful when we consider the use of the social cost adjustment, to which the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead referred, which effectively means that the difference in value for money between the two schemes is an accounting illusion. The private sector option presents no cash difference or saving to the Government. The cash saving is an accounting illusion based on an assessment that London Underground has chosen to use of the social cost benefit of its approach, rather than the alternative. As the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead said, when we took evidence in the Select Committee, we did not hear one person from outside of London Underground say, "This is a valid accounting approach, which is used sensibly elsewhere and creates a real sense of the benefits of one option versus another." In an issue as fundamentally important as this, that is not acceptable.

As always, the Government exaggerate the financial side of their approach. We hear regularly from the Secretary of State that the Government are investing £15 billion in the biggest modernisation programme that the underground has ever seen. That is not so. They have taken the annual maintenance budget for the underground, which has always existed and which is spent to replace minor equipment each year, upgrade track or put new track bed in place regularly. They have accounted for that over 15 years, added it up and come up with a big, impressive figure. In addition, they have added a rather smaller sum—the new investment going into the underground.

The figure is an accounting illusion. It reflects another of the Government's habits of exaggerating hugely the sum being invested. Broadly speaking, the cash being invested in London Underground is comparable to what was spent in the early 1990s, when the Jubilee line was built. It is not some radical departure that will transform the tube. It is welcome cash—there is no doubt about that—but the Government exaggerate the contribution that it makes to the tube.

We heard in the Select Committee that there is a tangible alternative. Bob Kiley set out in considerable detail how he would take the underground forward and how he would finance that. He set out the improvements that we could expect within the first seven years. Under the PPP scheme, it is far from clear what improvements we will get in the first seven years. As the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead says, the goalposts hop around all the time. The scheme is over-engineered and,

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by the admission of the Secretary of State and London Underground, it will not deliver an improvement to the congestion that we experience on today's underground.

PPP is the wrong project. It ignores the fact that London should be given the right to take responsibility for its transport system according to the principle of devolution that the Labour Government set in place. We have brought in from the United States one of the world's leading experts on modernisation of underground systems, and we are ignoring his advice. I do not understand why the Government are still doing that. It is not too late for them to change their mind, although much time has been wasted shilly-shallying. I hope that the Minister will tell his Department, "Let's change our mind and just crack on with it. Let's take the Kiley option and get the tube modernised properly."

11.35 am

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am here because I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee, and we were involved in some of the negotiations on the letters of comfort. I wish to speak on the issue of whether they are appropriate in this case. I do not pretend to speak on behalf of the PAC; I am simply a member of it who has been involved in the subject.

The issue first came to our attention when the Secretary of State wrote a letter to the Chairman of our Committee to explain that he was putting a minute before Parliament, announcing that letters of comfort would be issued to the contractors if they took up the bid. He had to do that because of the Government accounting rules, which are pretty explicit on how letters of comfort should be handled.

First, the rules say that a letter of comfort may be issued only if it is acknowledged that it may impose a moral obligation on the Government. The regulations say that a public sector body is unlikely to be able to issue a letter of comfort without effectively committing the Government to meet any obligation that arises. Secondly, they state that the total liability should be restricted by carefully specifying the amount and the length of time during which the Government are at risk of having to pay out that amount. Clearly, that was not done in the minute.

Thirdly, the rules note that Departments should approach any request for a letter of comfort with a strong predisposition to reject it. Proposals to issue a letter of comfort should therefore be exceptional. That alone should have been enough to show that the letters of comfort should never have been issued, and that the project should have been brought to a halt as soon as it became clear to the Secretary of State that he would need to issue a letter of comfort in order to get the lenders to go ahead with their lending. There was an alternative, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) made clear, has been on the table for a long time. Many people have been talking about it, not least my party, the Liberal Democrats. That alternative is to issue some sort of bond.

Fourthly, the accounting rules say that the potential liability mentioned in the minute must be accurately quantified; if that is not possible, an estimate should be given. The minute to Parliament did not give any estimate of the amount, nor was a quantified estimate given in further letters. The Government have merely said what sort of figure might be expected for the total sum involved, but they have not said how long that sum will last, and how quickly the amount at risk is expected to reduce.

Fifthly, the rules specify that 14 days' notice, excluding weekends, must be given when the minute is laid before the House of Commons before letters of comfort can be issued. The minute was laid on Wednesday 20 March, four days before the Easter recess. The letters of comfort were due to be issued two days after we returned. The regulations say that every effort should be made to ensure that the full waiting period elapses when Parliament is in session, but there was a 13-day Easter recess four days after the minute was laid.

In cases of special urgency, the reasons for less notice being given should be explained in the minute. However, the reasons were insufficient and badly explained in the minute, especially as the minute could have been laid at any time after 7 February, when the decision to go ahead was originally announced. There is no reason for the short notice. I am delighted that, as a result of pressure by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington, the Government were forced to back down on the notice period and allow a longer one after the Easter recess had finished.

The Secretary of State has ridden a coach and horses through his own financial regulations; they were agreed in 2000, so he cannot blame the previous Conservative Government for setting impossible accounting regulations.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): My hon. Friend has made telling points about how the Government have behaved exceedingly shabbily over their accounting rules. Does he agree that such behaviour is especially inappropriate given the length of the contract, and the size of the investment and liabilities that we are considering? The financial regulations and the letters of comfort regime were designed for completely different projects. The magnitude of the project means that the device and its shabby use are especially inappropriate.

Mr. Rendel: My hon. Friend's interest in London Underground is probably even greater than my own, although I use it a great deal. He makes a powerful case. He is right to say that the letters of comfort were used entirely inappropriately.

The Secretary of State's treatment of his own regulations brings to mind another organisation that treated its accounting rules in a similar way, putting lots of funds at risk and, sadly, ended up in a real mess; Enron. When good accounting rules are established, it is very dangerous to ignore them, as the Secretary of State has done. I would have thought that, having seen what happened to Enron, he would take more notice of the dangers involved.

Mr. Pickles: When the Public Accounts Committee examined procedural points, was an opinion formed about the letters of comfort and whether they fell within the European Union rules on state aid?

Mr. Rendel: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but the only discussion that took place

about that matter in Committee was in private, and I am not able to reveal the details. I apologise if that is a difficulty. His basic point is a good one.

The contents of the letters of comfort are interesting, and include the information that if London Underground cannot meet its financial obligations under the PPP contracts, the Secretary of State regards as untenable the proposition that he would not consider either adjusting the transport grant or paying a special grant to the Greater London Assembly, that he would not take into account the sums owed to the providers of finance, and that he would stand by and do nothing. In other words, if the project goes wrong, in the end the taxpayer will bail out the company.

The whole point of the private finance initiative is to pass the risk of things going wrong across to the private sector. If one borrows money from the private sector, a higher rate of interest is inevitably charged than if the public sector was doing the borrowing. In return for that higher rate of interest, paid by the taxpayer, one expects the risk of the project going wrong to be passed across to the private sector, so that the public sector—the taxpayer—does not have to bail out the company. By offering the letters of comfort, the Secretary of State effectively admits that the Government would bail out the lenders should the scheme fail. The risk remains with taxpayers, who must pay the higher rate of interest on the project as well as retaining the risk. We lose out both ways.

A huge hole has been blown in the Secretary of State's justification for the PPP. Frankly, it is no surprise that he tried to sneak through the letters of comfort without the normal 14-day consultation period, and it is good news that he was, in the end, stopped from doing so. The Secretary of Sate has shown himself, once again, to be unfit to run a bus, let alone a transport company.

11.45 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on securing a repeat performance for this debate. He does the House a service by drawing attention to the subject, because it is the most important issue of the day for many Londoners. The current state of the London underground system causes great annoyance and discomfort. The Government seem to want to keep the matter underground. However, as I know from my own constituency, the underground sometimes comes out from the dark to be brought into the light. The hon. Gentleman does us all a service by raising the issue.

I have used the underground all my life and I rather like it. It is not always bad and, on a good day, offers a good service. I congratulate the staff. They increasingly have to endure complaints from the public about the poor service that results from more frequent cancellations and so forth. Speaking as someone who has served on the front line behind a counter—if there is such a thing—taking the rap for other people's decisions is not the easiest thing to do. The public, rightly, are angry about what is happening to their underground.

It would be unfair to say that the underground is all bad. Although we are sometimes disappointed about cancellations, the Metropolitan and Piccadilly lines that serve my constituency can often offer a service that is all we would hope it to be. However, it is deteriorating; there is no doubt about that. Public dissatisfaction is increasing to a large degree.

The PPP put forward by the Government is immensely disappointing and there is consensus that something must be done about it. My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), and the hon. Members for Leyton and Wanstead and for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) put forward powerful arguments about why the flaws are there and why the project should be re-examined. However, from my previous existence as a salesman, I know that, no matter what they try to do, if the product is not right, the Government will not be able to sell it to the London public. They may feel that the project is the best option available; most would disagree. It is impossible to sell, and will be a millstone around the Government's neck in perpetuity if they persist with it.

The absence of Labour Members from these debates is not a reflection of their lack of interest; they are interested, but what they want to say is not necessarily what the Government want them to say. Discretion being the better part of valour, they leave the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead isolated.

However, as the Minister is present, I shall make a few points, including some about the underground system in my constituency. Safety has already been mentioned, and it will always be our prime worry. However, other issues must be considered, such as access for disabled people. Two years ago, a new station was built at Hillingdon. It won all sorts of awards, which worried me. There is a lift for disabled people, although it does not always work. But what is the point of a lift to get disabled people into an underground system in which there are very few stations at which they can get out the other end? It might work on the Circle line, as someone could get on and go round in a circle and come up from the same station into which he went down. That must be considered.

I am worried about the upkeep of not only the lines but some of the property that London Transport and London Underground own. A constituent who rents arches for a business on the District line is having great problems trying to find out who will do repairs. He has constant arguments. The management of London Underground does not seem to want to take responsibility for its tenants.

The constituency of the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead is at one end of the Central line. The other is at West Ruislip, which just about squeaks into my constituency. A subject that is dear to my heart and which I have discussed with Ministers—indeed, one of the first things that I did when I entered the House was to plead for it—is an extension of the Central line to Uxbridge. Anyone who knows the area well will know that the sidings that come out of Ruislip Gardens, on the Central line, stop a few feet away from the Piccadilly line to Uxbridge. I have always been disappointed in that.

When I entered the House, I raised the matter with the Deputy Prime Minister, who had responsibility for such matters. He told me flatly that when they came to office in 1997, the Government had considered the plan and decided that it was not an option. Further questioning eventually led to a letter from the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), who was then in charge of such

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matters, to say that they had not actually considered the matter, but, had they done so, they would have rejected it. That possibly sums up how such matters are sometimes considered. Such an extension would be of great import to not only Uxbridge but all those who live along the Central line in west London, who would have an opportunity to access the job market in Uxbridge.

Another bone of contention—I am sure that London Underground will read the debate—is that, with the introduction of congestion charging in London, parking in suburban London for the underground will become even more acute. Charges in London Underground car parks are way above those for other local parking. If London Underground were to put its car park charges in line with those of the local authority, more people would be encouraged to use the underground. I ask London Underground to take note of that.

We return to the problem of what will happen if we get more people on the underground. My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell discussed capacity. I cannot envisage how it is possible to run more trains into London at peak times. Trains come regularly. There is the odd cancellation, which makes life hugely difficult, but on a good day, Metropolitan line trains leaving Uxbridge and coming from Watford, and Jubilee line trains, which I pick up at Finchley Road to come here, come every minute or so. It is a good service. However, the trains are crowded, and we shall have to consider other methods. The Government must proceed with the Crossrail project.

With regard to capacity, I feel that we should be a little more imaginative about charges. We all know that there are off-peak tickets after 9.30 am. There is scope to introduce a cheaper early-bird fare before a certain time in the morning. That is not an entirely new idea; there used to be a workers' fare. My predecessor, the first Member of Parliament for Uxbridge, was working on a Bill on that subject in the early 1900s. Governments sometimes move slowly, but it is about time those issues were considered.

I want to allow the Front Benchers time to respond, but first I make a plea to the Government; do not stick to the dogma. They must understand that there is real opposition from both sides, and that it is not opposition for opposition's sake, but is based on sound facts. The Government will have an impossible job selling the idea to the public. There is very little support for the idea. I hope that they realise that having a good underground in London is important not just for Londoners, but for the whole country. It is a good advertisement for all those who come to visit our capital city.

11.56 am

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I shall be brief, partly because I have spoken on the subject so many times in the past three or four years and have used the arguments in so many ways that it is difficult to find new ways of doing that. Hon. Members of all parties have joined the campaign to persuade the Government to think again. The Government are trying to tough it out, but I think that they will come to regret their decision. There will be many London Labour Members of Parliament who in a few years will wish that the Government had never gone down that track.

Among the arguments that have been rehearsed many times, there is a fundamental one to which we keep coming back, and to which Ministers, in their weaker moments, actually allude. The sole reason for the scheme is that the Government do not trust London Underground management—public sector management—to make the investments in the next few years. They believe that only private sector management has the know-how, the incentive and the ability to drive forward the investment programme to modernise the tube. One would think that they had learned their lesson from the railways.

That attitude is a real insult to London Underground, because its management have performed very well when they have been given the tools to do the job. Another option is to improve that management and bring in outsiders such as Bob Kiley to enhance its capacity and competence. However, the Government have shut their mind to that. They have simply said, "We don't trust London Underground management to do the job properly, so we're going to make sure that a private contractor does it." One of the serious flaws in the argument is that the Government have trusted London Underground management to negotiate the contract. Although they have no trust in the management, they have entrusted them to negotiate a contract lasting many years.

The logic of the Government's position is impossible. It just does not make sense. I ask them to consider the core reasoning behind their approach, and to think again about whether they could find a way of building up London Underground management, which has been enhanced by the Mayor of London. The Government should allow them to do the job, and save the London taxpayer billions of pounds in the process.

11.58 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): These debates are rather like the Circle line: we go round and round and keep going through the same stations, with hold-ups and unexplained delays along the way. I was going to start by congratulating the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on securing a 100 per cent. increase in the attendance of Labour Back Benchers here, but unfortunately, his hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) left shortly after the beginning of the debate.

I want to focus on the issue of comfort letters, because it highlights the fact that the main purpose of PPP has been demolished. The risk transfer has simply not happened. There was much uncertainty about whether the comfort letters were going to be issued. They are called comfort letters because they provide a guaranteed protection from the Government. There was uncertainty because it is unusual for them to be issued for any amount over £100,000.

Following a parliamentary question asked by a Liberal Democrat peer, the draft letter was finally flushed out—it had to be dragged out of the Secretary of State, kicking and screaming. The letter was placed in the House of Lords Library on 20 March. In his covering letter, the Secretary of State wrote:

"I cannot and must not fetter my discretion, and so the comfort letters do not create binding obligations."

That is very strange because everyone in the business world thinks that they do. The Secretary of State went on to say—my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) has referred to some of these points—that he has made it clear that he would intervene

"in the event that London Underground was unable to meet its financial obligations".

He would think it untenable to not consider whether it was appropriate to give more grant money. He would think it untenable to stand by and do nothing. That directly contradicts his statement that binding obligations are not created.

The Minister will be aware that it is customary to provide a statutory period of consultation in respect of the comfort letters, under Government accounting rules. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury has said, the period started immediately before the Easter recess, and it looked as if the Government were going to railroad the process through, leaving that recess as the only considerable chunk of time that Members would have to consider it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury has said that an explanation is required if there is a real reason why the 14-day period has to be truncated. I understand that the explanation given to the National Audit Office for rushing things through was that there were delays that could cause problems because European officials would be on holiday at an inappropriate time. That does not sound like a valid excuse or explanation to me. It was also argued that the signing of the share purchase agreements much later than 10 April would risk losing momentum on the PPP competitions—but those had been going on for years. We are talking about a delay of several days in a process that had been going on for four years, yet the Government were seeking to truncate the period of parliamentary scrutiny.

Harry Cohen: The Government could give more grant as a follow-up to those comfort letters, were debt incurred, but could they not also say that the public sector should pick it up, which would mean Transport for London? It may not be the Treasury that picks up debt from the comfort letters, but fare payers and council tax payers.

Tom Brake: That was a very useful intervention. I hope that the Minister has listened very carefully, and will give some guarantees that the fare-paying passenger will not end up picking up the tab.

We have heard about the exchange of correspondence between the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and the Secretary of State. I do not want to requote what was said in the letter, apart from the following:

"a public sector body is unlikely to be able to issue such a document without effectively committing Government credit and having to meet the obligation should it materialise".

That does away with the main justification for PPP. In his letter of 11 April, the Secretary of State said that the "customary notification period will be provided".

That was extended to 23 April—yesterday. Will the Minister tell us whether the comfort letters are now available—not in draft but in final form—for us to see?

I am disappointed that creating an environment in which the matter can be debated has been left to the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). That seems a cursory way of allowing consideration of such an important matter.

Mr. Edward Davey: I congratulate my hon. Friend, who tried hard to get the Secretary of State to allow a debate in Government time on the issue. He also helped to draw up an early-day motion. What response did he have from the Government to his perfectly reasonable request?

Tom Brake: My hon. Friend will know that the Government's scrutiny of and responses on PPP have lacked content. None the less, we hope that the Minister will explain why so little time has been made available to discuss this important matter. Perhaps he will use the opportunity to say that the Secretary of State will come to the House and allow a full and open debate with a free vote at the end, so that all Members of Parliament can express their views in an open and unwhipped way. We could flush out the views of the absent Labour Back Benchers and give them an opportunity to express themselves openly in a situation in which they feel safe.

We have had a considerable amount of debate about comfort letters, so I shall move on to accountability. The way in which Members of Parliament and Transport for London have been treated over the comfort letters is symptomatic of the way in which the PPP has been handled. Unfortunately, MPs have been treated with a degree of contempt. Before Christmas the Secretary of State told the Transport Committee that he would hold a full consultation with all interested parties—I would suggest that MPs are interested parties—but that came to nothing. His initial statement to Parliament that he intended to go ahead with PPP did not give MPs time to examine the relevant report. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton said, hon. Members, including me, have subsequently called for an open debate, but again, those calls have been ignored. It has been left to individual MPs to facilitate the debate on this important subject—but now a proper statement must be made to Parliament.

We have heard about the delays that TfL experienced in obtaining the necessary documents. Unfortunately, it had to contact me to obtain a copy of the draft comfort letter. I am pleased that it did, but it seems strange that it should be down to Opposition Members to provide information to TfL, an organisation that is clearly engaged and interested in the issue. The information should have been made available to TfL—if not before, at least at the same time as it was made available to MPs.

TfL raised strenuous objections to the scheme, and many serious points that require detailed scrutiny, which has not been available. It argues that PPP will fail to deliver value for money and will fail to transfer risk from the public sector. Many hon. Members have clearly demonstrated that that will be the case. PPP will separate maintenance from operations. The Government argue that it is not privatisation, but because of the way in which assets will be handed over using various long-term lease arrangements, one could argue that it is partial privatisation. Those are serious accusations that deserve scrutiny, but they will not be getting any. They cannot be addressed through Westminster Hall debates with a Minister who may be well practised in responding to Adjournment debates, but who is not at the heart of the matter.

[Tom Brake]

If I had time, I would focus on the management of London Underground, which was the subject of the second half of today's debate. There is no time to go into my worries in detail, but I can tell the Minister that from discussion with those who work for London Underground, I know that they are alarmed about the fact that breaking up the infrastructure has meant that four people do a job that one used to do: one person does it at London Underground, and three do it in the different infracos. The number of people who work in different posts is mushrooming, which is not a cost-effective way to manage limited resources. I wonder whether the Minister has considered that. Something else that I do not have enough time to consider today is the lack of ambition in the Government's plans—with regard to the extension from Morden to Sutton, for example, which has long been campaigned for, or the Hackney to Chelsea line, for which I actively campaigned in 1984.

If the Government genuinely believe that their case for PPP is watertight, they have nothing to fear from a full debate and vote, and the Secretary of State has nothing to fear from questions in the House. If the Minister answers only one question from today's debate, I hope that it will be to tell us when the full debate will happen.

12.11 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I hope that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) forgives me for not mentioning his speech, but as he overran, I have no time to say all the nice things that I had planned. However, I congratulate the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen).

Many hon. Members have had their own monuments. Mr. Belisha has his beacons and Mr. Kenneth Baker has his days. Now we have the Harry days for the London underground. He is to be congratulated on his persistence, although he spoilt it slightly by being unpleasant about the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats. He then moved on to the real enemy: the Minister. I shall long remember him asking the Minister to show good faith, as though it were exceptional behaviour.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) rightly said that to bring Bob Kiley all this way and ignore him is ridiculous. He is a noted expert who has forgotten more things about running an underground than the rest of us know.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) referred to the Epping to Ongar railway, in which I have an interest because the Ongar railway lands in my patch. Were she still in the Chamber, she would press the Minister for a meeting, along with the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), to discuss the problem.

We have the largest single PPP, and the largest single letter of comfort issued in the history of this fine nation. So, what do we know about the situation? We know that in the lifetime of the contract for an initial investment by the infracos of £530 million, Metronet and Tubelines will make a cool £2.7 billion in profit. We know that banks are demanding huge margins because of Railtrack, and that the Government are about to sign a guarantee of £4 billion. It is therefore reasonable for us to ask, what will the contract deliver? There will be little or no capital works before 31 March 2009, which, as the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead said, is the only period in which private finance is agreed and assured. We know that projects such as station modernisation, tracks, tunnels and bridges have all been pushed back, and many such projects have been abandoned. Under the PPP, changes to the rolling stock were originally going to be modest, but they have been further cut back.

The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead read out several examples. He talked about the number of cancellations of station modernisation and the fact that the trains to replace the ageing fleet will not be ready before 2011. Perhaps the worst thing is that of the 13 capability upgrades projected by the PPP over the next 18 years, only four are due before 2011. There is no agreed pricing or firm commitment of finance for any of the other nine upgrades due to be completed in the 30-year period.

It is little wonder that Mr. Kiley is unhappy. The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead quoted extensively from Mr. Kiley's recent speech, but I shall quote the paragraph that he left out:

"The Government has long argued that one of the reasons for pushing ahead with a PPP for the Tube was to transfer the risk of expenditure cost overruns, such as happened on the Jubilee Line Extension, to the private sector. But now, it will be TfL and London that will carry the can if completely unproven signalling technology fails. It is clear that the foundations on which this PPP was built have collapsed, and that alone should mean the end for this entirely discredited scheme."

A number of my hon. Friends, notably my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell, talked about the transfer of risk. The entire purpose of the venture was a risk transfer, but that is non-existent. The Government have set down a guarantee of £5 billion, but, as the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) said, that looks increasingly like an Enron deal. Mike Warburton, the senior tax partner at accountants Grant Thornton, said that the issue raises serious questions and that

"in the current post-Enron climate people have got to be a lot more careful about how they are accounting for their debt obligations . . . a company would no longer be allowed to get away with it."

The Government seek a financial practice that they have outlawed in this country and which is illegal in other countries of the European Union.

The PPP final assessment report prepared for London Underground and London Transport told the Government that the

"Infracos will genuinely suffer the consequences for failing to deliver".

Since those words were put down in the final assessment report, many things have happened. We now know that a number of concessions were made to the infracos since the report was published, and that there is no more risk than that in a standard construction contract. It is fair comment to say that the PPP is little more than a glorified cost plus maintenance contract. Either the Government or London Underground will pick up the risk. There is no commitment from the Treasury for state funding beyond 2010, which is, of course, when the majority of the problems are to be dealt with.

In the minute that remains, let me outline a couple of problems that we need the Minister to address. I raised with the hon. Member for Newbury the question of whether the PPP is covered in the EU treaty. Articles 87 and 88 clearly prohibit the state lending state money to a business where there has been no transparent contract, and articles 81 and 82 prohibit unfair competition. I am worried that we do not know whether the services provided by the infracos will be open to transparent competition. We already know that they have decided to sell off several of their maintenance contracts to some of their junior companies within the consortium. That seems to fall foul of the European rules. When the Minister replies to the debate, the fundamental question that we want answered is, where does the risk lie and has it been transferred? Moreover, does the letter of comfort comply with our obligations under the European Union treaty?

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on securing the debate. Perhaps in later life he will help and instruct other Members on how one secures debates so regularly. He must have a good line of contact with the Speaker. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) talked about Mr. Belisha's beacon. Hore-Belisha was a very distinguished predecessor of mine in my constituency of Plymouth, Devonport, although he was a National Liberal. Perhaps at some point in the future we shall call the debates "the Cohen memorial debates". I congratulate him on the way in which he has approached the debate today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead approached the debate in his usual forensic manner. I like the fact that he always speaks sincerely on behalf of his constituents. I am pleased to say that there are two matters on which he and I would be in total agreement. First, we want good value for money for taxpayers and passengers. Secondly, in his early remarks, he said that the tube is important to the country and the economy. I reinforce that most strongly.

To follow a point made by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), who took a measured approach to the debate, there is a lot that is good about our tube. I say that as someone who travels regularly on the tube. It is not perfect, but much is good about it. When I have used it frequently, I have found the service good and the people on it helpful and friendly. That needs to be said because sometimes people who work for the underground must think that we in this House have nothing but criticism for the work that they do. I think that the contrary is the case.

Let me pick up a couple of points mentioned by the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead about trains and station improvements. Transport for London has criticised plans for station improvement schemes, despite the fact that it argued that less priority should be given to stations. It is true that fewer stations will be modernised in the early years, but the fact remains that the PPP offers greater improvements than any previous alternative. All stations would benefit from a number of considerable improvements during the seven-year period of the contract.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) spoke about improvements to stations, which are important. He seemed to think that the issue was all about rolling stock. It is not; the quality of the stations and the line is very important in running a successful rail system. I very much agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead on that point.

The Central line already has good, modern trains and there will be no need to replace those in the immediate future. The PPP is designed to ensure that better maintenance of track, trains and signals will reduce delays. I know that the people travelling from my hon. Friend's area want that reduction. The *Socialist Campaign Group News* is not on my regular reading list, although it seemed at one stage to be bedside reading for some Conservative Members. I can, however, assure my hon. Friend that the figures mentioned for the return for shareholders are hugely exaggerated. The whole point of the contract is that if the infracos meet the terms of their contract, there will be a return for shareholders, but if they do not, the returns will diminish substantially.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell, who I am delighted to see back in this Chamber, sounded like the authentic voice of Ken Livingstone at one stage in the debate.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jamieson: No, because my hon. Friend has only just come into the debate and I want to pick up on some of the points that have already been made.

The hon. Gentleman said that one great success of the Conservative Government was the Jubilee line extension. I think that I understood that correctly. Was he talking about the same Jubilee line extension that went 67 per cent. over budget and was not months but years overdue? If the hon. Gentleman is holding that up as a shining example of the way in which the Tories would run the tube system, Conservative Members need to have a rethink; it is hardly a good prospectus for the tube. He went on to say that there should be no separation of track and train. That will not happen under our proposals, so the hon. Gentleman only made a swathing criticism of the Tory privatisation of the railways.

I shall outline the progress that we have made since the last debate on this matter and then respond to some of the important points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead. As some hon. Members will be aware, the board of London Transport announced on 7 February that, following a thorough re-evaluation, it was minded to proceed with the modernisation plans. There has since been extensive consultation between London Transport, the Mayor and Transport for London. A considerable amount of noise has surrounded that process, with suggestions that TfL was denied access to documents that it had the right to see. Indeed, the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell made similar comments last time. However, although that noise was loud, it did not ring true.

My hon. Friend talked about value for money. I think that everyone agrees that achieving value for money should be the Government's key objective, whether in

[Mr. Jamieson]

relation to the tens of billions of pounds that we are providing for the national health service or the billions of pounds for the tube. The modernisation plans represent the most extensively examined public-private partnership ever. The London Underground analysis and the independent review by Ernst & Young are available for everyone to examine the evidence. On the basis of that evidence and analysis, the Government are satisfied that the plans will provide value for money.

A number of hon. Members spoke about fragmentation and privatisation, and now we come to some of the wildest allegations about the modernisation plans: claims that the tube will be privatised and that the plans will create the sort of fragmentation that took place when the Conservatives privatised the national rail system. *[Interruption.]* I do not know whether renationalisation is Conservative policy, but perhaps the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar can tell us on another occasion.

I simply do not understand how anyone can claim that a structure in which there will be a single body, publicly owned and publicly run, operating all the trains, signals and stations in a unified network amounts to privatisation or fragmentation. Manifestly, it does not. There is no comparison between our plans for the tube, and the privatisation of the rail system.

Harry Cohen: What is my hon. Friend's latest information about the time of the complete handover to the Mayor and Transport for London?

Mr. Jamieson: That will be a matter for London Underground, Transport for London and the others involved. I hope that it will not be much longer before the decision is made, but my hon. Friend will appreciate that other issues have to be addressed in the meantime.

In the brief time remaining let me turn to the comfort letters. If I do not cover all the points that were made, I shall write to my hon. Friend about this. The Government propose to support the PPP through a long-term commitment of grant funding for Transport for London. That is set out in the so-called "comfort letter", which also describes the Secretary of State's intended approach if London Underground were confronted by large liabilities under the PPP contracts—

Mr. George Stephenson (in the Chair): Order. Time is up.

Policing (East Anglia)

12.30 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Norfolk and, indeed, the whole country was shaken by the Tony Martin case, which brought into sharp focus the issue of policing in remote rural areas. Tony Martin had been the victim of a number of burglaries and thefts. By the time of the burglary that resulted in the tragic death of one of the intruders, he had virtually lost confidence in the local police. Time and again he had reported crimes to the local constabulary, yet he did not feel that due note was being taken of his reports and concerns. Most people in Norfolk were dismayed when he was charged with murder and even more dismayed when he was convicted. I am pleased that the Court of Appeal reduced his conviction to one of manslaughter and I hope that he will be out of prison soon and can return a free man to his farm, Bleak House, at Emneth Hungate.

I want to examine how Norfolk constabulary has reacted to the challenges thrown up not just by the Martin case, but as a result of ongoing appraisals by our excellent chief constable, Kenneth Williams. I shall then look at what still needs to be done and try to put some of those changes into the national context.

I have nothing but praise for our local police. They are excellent, incredibly hard-working and conscientious. I should like to praise in particular chief superintendent Alan Hayes, who is in charge of the division in King's Lynn, and his operations superintendent Tony Charrington. They have always been extremely professional and responsive whenever I have contacted them, and they are held in high regard by their officers throughout that part of Norfolk.

Norfolk has had a pattern of under-investment in policing, and police officer strength is well below the national average. Norfolk is bottom but one of the 43 forces in terms of the officer-population ratio. That is completely unacceptable in a county that is geographically one of the largest in England, has a rapidly growing population and is visited by 4 million tourists a year. Although Norfolk may appear to be quite prosperous, it has pockets of social deprivation and many isolated villages and rural areas that increase the difficulties of providing the reassurance and police visibility that the public rightly demand.

The current settlement, as the Minister knows, allows for a welcome increase of 100 officers for Norfolk's constabulary, up to a target figure of 1,500 by March next year. However, numbers will only return to where they were in 1997. There are currently 1,470. Across the country, there are 600 fewer police officers than there were in 1997, so we have a significant way to go. I am concerned about the number of officers leaving the police forces up and down the country and the number of officers leaving Norfolk's constabulary in particular. Indeed, in some parts of the country, the numbers leaving are outstripping new recruits, which is creating a problem for police morale.

The Norfolk constabulary has proposed several initiatives that have directly benefited my constituents. A beat station was established in Terrington St. John, which is a small village in the west of my constituency in the middle of an area known as Marshland. The area is

remotely populated, and people have a sense of distance from Norwich, the county capital. Parts of Marshland are 45, 50 or 60 miles from Norwich. The establishment of the beat station has done a great deal to convince local people that the constabulary is taking seriously their concerns about visible policing and the need to have more police officers on the ground.

I am also pleased that Chief Constable Ken Williams recently launched several mobile police stations in Norfolk: one is in west Norfolk, another is part of the Fenland initiative, which I shall discuss later. Each vehicle will be staffed by a police officer and, in some cases, support staff. The vehicles have been designed specially for the Norfolk constabulary. They will all have telephones, radios, fax connections to police force networks, disabled access, and a folding pedal cycle for the police officer to use on patrol while the vehicle is parked visibly in a rural community. Each will follow a published route and timetable for visiting villages. From now on, two vehicles will operate in my constituency, which is welcome.

I also want to praise the community contact vehicles initiative, which is another of Ken Williams's initiatives. As the Minister probably knows, Norfolk has been split into three areas and 16 inspector-led sectors for policing purposes. I praise the Government for the rural policing fund, which enabled the purchase of 15 Ford Galaxy people carriers—the sort that the Prime Minister and his family use. Each sector will have one of the people carriers, which have been modified to permit use as a mobile office and include a folding table at the rear.

The idea behind the community contact vehicles is that police officers will be able to carry out a substantial amount of paperwork in them. All too often in the past, police officers went out to a small hamlet or a community in their patrol car, and had to return to the police station to complete the paperwork. We all know that the weight of paperwork on police officers is increasing all the time. The vehicles will be parked prominently in the community.

I also praise the chief constable for the excellent Fenland project, which is a policing initiative that the Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire constabularies set up. The idea is to try to co-ordinate police operations and intelligence sharing between those forces. As the Minister knows only too well, criminals do not respect county boundaries. One of Norfolk's biggest problems was that the western part of the county is close to Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. Burglary, theft and vehicle crime are, of course, serious to the individual, but unless the crime was murder or involved grievous bodily harm, the Norfolk constabulary would send someone to the scene, which could take up to half an hour. If a patrol car belonged to Cambridgeshire or Lincolnshire, it could not cross the county boundary. Under the initiative, however, a pooling of resources and a more common-sense approach to policing across county boundaries will develop, which I welcome. Undoubtedly, the project has been a significant success. It covers 500 square miles and encompasses 72 parishes in the three counties, and it went live in August 2001.

As the chief constable pointed out to Norfolk MPs in a recent memorandum, the aims are to reduce the disproportionate fear of crime and to provide high-profile policing to reassure the public and restore confidence. The initiative will focus on three key areas: repeat victimisation, an increased rate of scene attendance and greater attention to cross-border crime and intelligence.

I am worried that the Fens project does not have guaranteed Government funding beyond 31 December this year. It is vital to renew the funding commitment. The project has been a significant success, but without renewed funding it could well fold. Crime has increased in other parts of the country: press reports today show that people are more likely to be attacked, mugged or murdered in some parts of London than in Harlem. That is an appalling indictment of what is happening in this country and the Opposition are right to draw the public's attention to such problems.

Norfolk, however, compares well with other parts of the country. In west Norfolk, violent crime, burglaries and robberies are down. The only category that has increased slightly from last year is vehicle crime. Norfolk is doing well in the battle against crime. We cannot be complacent, but we are making good progress. I submit to the Minister that the Fenland project has played a key role in getting on top of crime in this part of the county. It is vital that she reinforces success by ensuring the continuation of funding.

As to the future, there are no grounds for complacency, as I said. We still need more officers on the ground. About a year ago, the Minister announced 100 extra police officers—the aim was to build up to 1,500 officers by March next year—but they are spread across a large county. Of course they are welcome, but there is a long way to go. Norfolk is second bottom in the league of police officers per head of population, so we still need many more officers.

More closed-circuit television is vital for my constituency. This debate is about policing, not CCTV, but I want to flag up its success in the battle against crime. The Minister is pro-CCTV and she will know that King's Lynn was one of the pioneer local authorities to install it about 12 years ago. We now need the CCTV scheme rolled out in Hunstanton, in other parts of King's Lynn, and particularly on the Saddlebow travellers' site on the edge of King's Lynn. It will play a significant part in the battle against crime.

We need to retain police officers and ensure that police morale is as high as possible. Police officers presently feel under valued and uncertain about their future. Now is not the time for the Home Secretary to proceed with his comprehensive review of pay and conditions. The Minister will know that on 6 February a police ballot showed a 91 per cent. vote—84,205 officers—in favour of rejecting the proposals. Their main concern was the Home Secretary's plan to reduce overtime payments from time and a third to time and a fifth. If it goes through, thousands of police officers will be worse off. There will be times in the future when it is correct and well judged to introduce reforms to pay and conditions—perhaps when police morale is high and there is progress in the fight against crime.

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Order. I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to morale in the police service in East Anglia?

Mr. Bellingham: I certainly am, Mr. Stevenson.

Unless there is high morale and police officers feel that they are being properly rewarded for the job done, their morale will suffer. The police in East Anglia cannot

[Mr. Bellingham]

function without overtime because of historic under-resourcing and the nature of the job. My clear message is that the Government cannot manage overtime by making it cheaper, as it will lead to demoralisation and to retention problems. Furthermore, last week's Budget announcements will mean many officers in my constituency and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) paying more tax. They will be £25 or £30 a month worse off. If they lose their overtime on top of that, there will be serious problems with retention and morale.

Many officers came to lobby Parliament on 13 March. They were not hotheads who wanted to cause a disturbance or to riot in the streets; thoroughly decent officers from Norfolk came here quietly to put their point of view. They want a constructive dialogue and a positive partnership with the Government. If the police in Norfolk do not have that positive partnership, they will be unable to make headway in the battle against crime.

I hope that the Minister will take note of what I have said. I look forward to her reply and hope that she can give us some comfort that our success in the battle against crime will be able to continue.

12.46 pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) and to the Minister for the opportunity to intervene briefly in the debate.

Crime is a big issue in my constituency, too. Twelve months ago, our survey on the issue found that 29 per cent. of people rated it the most significant issue, followed by education at 22 per cent. Last Saturday, we did another survey on crime in South Norfolk and had the tremendous response of some 600 replies on the day in the four market towns of Wymondham, Diss, Loddon and Harleston. My agent told me this morning that we had about 900 replies in total, and I shall share some of the results with the House.

Of those who replied, 17 per cent. said that they had been victims of crime in the last year; a further 15 per cent. said that they knew someone who had been a victim of crime in the same period. Thirty per cent. believed that crime had risen in the past five years; 92 per cent. believed that a strong police presence was required locally; 65 per cent. believed that the Government should spend more on policing; 72 per cent. were against early release schemes; and some 92 per cent. believed that sentences handed down by the courts are not in line with public opinion.

I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk said; the question is, if everything is so rosy in the garden, why did thousands of policemen and women march on Parliament? Inspector Andrew Taylor from Wymondham police station in my constituency invited me to accompany him in the police patrol car so that I could see at first hand what happened in the area, and I was glad to accept. Things are not all rosy in the garden.

I appreciate that the Minister has a difficult task and there is much more to do, but the reforms that the Government are considering, especially those on police pay and conditions, are almost the worst possible way of going about it.

12.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) on securing the debate. As well as being a welcome opportunity for him to express his views, it enables me to put on the record how seriously the Government take the issues of rural crime and rural policing, and what we intend to do to address them. His remarks acknowledged the seriousness with which we approach the issues, perhaps the first time that any Government have done so in such a distinct way.

We recognise the widely held concern about the need for police forces to put more resources into rural areas and to look at the distinct issues that arise in policing crime in rural areas. Let me put that in context. It is clear and generally accepted from the valid studies of the British crime survey that both the fear of crime and the general level of crime are significantly lower in rural areas than in urban or inner-city areas. That does not mean that we are complacent or that we do not need to listen to what people are saying. We do, but we must start from an understanding of that context.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) talked about his survey, but the last two British crime surveys, which I hope he will accept are much more rigorous and fundamental, are repeated regularly and reveal valid trends. They show that crime levels have fallen consistently in rural areas. That also applies to categories of crime that are recorded by the crime survey, such as vehicle crime, violent crime and burglary. The British crime survey also reports that people in rural areas feel that they have a better quality of life. They suffer fewer social problems and are less fearful of crime; they are less likely to think that they will be victims of crime and are more positive about the way that crime is being dealt with locally.

Having said that, I do not suggest that there are not problems in rural areas or that we do not need to listen to the people who live there. I accept that there are distinct issues about policing in rural areas that must be taken seriously. Overall, the figures show that East Anglia is a safe place in which to live. The overall picture is that there is a lower incidence of crime, that crime is falling faster in that area than the national average and that police clear-up rates are higher. That gives us some sense that, while we have to respond to problems, things are going in the right direction.

Mr. Bacon: What would the Minister say to my constituent, Mrs. Maureen Loveless, who told me at an election meeting last year that she had been burgled five times? Only a few weeks ago, she told me that she had been burgled six times in the five years of this Government.

Beverley Hughes: I would express my sincere sympathies to the hon. Gentleman's constituent. One issue that we have learned in recent years by looking in detail for evidence of patterns of crime is that, unfortunately, like most things in society, crime is not distributed equally. We take the phenomenon of repeat victimisation seriously. We are putting a lot of effort into identifying how we can specifically help repeat victims. I would also say to her that, had the

Government not taken the measures that we have in relation to rural crime over the last few years, her experiences might have been even more serious.

Overall, the picture in East Anglia is one of lower incidence of crime and higher clear-up rates. The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk talked about the need for resources to be translated into higher numbers of police officers, and so on. He will know that this year Cambridgeshire set a final budget on the back of Government grants that shows an increase of more than 10 per cent. In Norfolk, there was an increase of 8.4 per cent., and Suffolk set a final budget with an increase of just under 7 per cent. from last year. Those are substantial increases in resources, which I am sure the chief constable and his officers will use to good effect.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk made a point about the relevance of resources and police numbers. The national picture is that in the first six months of 2001–02, police numbers increased by more than 1,500 to nearly 128,000. Figures provided by the 43 police forces in England and Wales and the four main organisations staffed by seconded police officers show that police strength is at record levels. It took some time to increase the number of officers after 1997, but that was largely because there was a drop in police officers between 1993 and 1997. However, police numbers at the end of January were up nearly 1,600 from March 1997. That disputes the hon. Gentleman's claim that we had not yet made up the gap. We have more than made it up, and we did so more quickly than we anticipated.

Police numbers are an important part of a comprehensive package of measures drawn up to ensure a modern and efficient police service. That issue is as important in rural areas as it is in urban areas. The upward trend in police numbers in East Anglia is important and encouraging. There is a record number of police officers in Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, and there is a sustained increase in the number of police officers in Suffolk.

Another extremely important ingredient for the longer term is the issue of pay and modernisation, which was raised by both the hon. Members for South Norfolk and for North-West Norfolk. As the Home Secretary made clear, we want a dialogue with the police to make sure that we get the matter right for both parties. We are continuing that dialogue through the police negotiation board, which includes officers from Norfolk.

It is important that the system of police pay is not excluded from the modernisation that must take place if we are to take police practices and the way that we reward police officers into the 21st century. We must tackle some of those issues. Not all police officers' jobs are the same, and we should reward the jobs on the front line that tackle the difficult aspects of policing. That, in part, is what the review and the modernisation of police pay are about.

On rural policing, I shall mention three Government innovations that are particularly relevant to the point that the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk made. First, it is the crime fighting fund as much as the general increase in police resources that is responsible for the record numbers of police officers. The fund is a mechanism that ensures that money for police officers goes towards employing officers. Before the Government instituted the crime fighting fund, with the intention of using it to employ more police officers, some of the increases in the settlement were not being used for that purpose. By providing a ring-fenced pot of money that is available to all police services, the crime fighting fund has ensured that some resources are translated into additional police officers. In the past two years, we have begun to see that through.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman mentioned the importance of closed-circuit television. I share his view that that has been an important development for both rural and urban areas. Almost £2.5 million has been allocated on eight CCTV projects across Norfolk in the past two years as a result of another innovation, the crime reduction programme, some of which centred on King's Lynn. I hear that parts of that area would like extensions of the scheme, and I welcome that. Certainly, there is a great deal of demand. We shall have to see how that goes.

The third innovation, which is very important, is the rural policing fund. The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to mention the fens project, which has been made possible, along with other projects that he mentioned, because of that fund. The project is being evaluated, and I look forward to reading the proposal about its needs, which will be submitted to the Home Office after the end of the year.

Rape Trials

1 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar): The crime of rape is suffused with myths. The first relates to the true nature of rape: the rapist is a stranger, lying in wait in a mask on a dark footpath in the dead of night. That is "real" rape.

Such incidents are few. The truth about rape is that in 21st-century Britain, one in four women is either raped or suffers an attempt at some stage in her life, and 90 per cent. of those are perpetrated by partners, ex-partners or men they know.

The space between the myth and the truth contributes to a further myth—that if a man a woman knows, as one High Court judge put it to me, goes a bit too far when she does not want it, that may be misbehaviour but it is not a serious crime. As a result of that myth, the sympathy in a rape trial between parties who know each other will be with the defendant. He faces a serious charge intended for the prosecution of "real rape", of the masked and dark night sort, but is regarded as only technically at fault, in a possibly understandable way, in an existing relationship.

Much research has been done on the impact of rape on women, which all points to it being just as traumatic to be raped by someone a woman knows as by a stranger. Some such women find it harder to deal with. They feel betrayed not only by the men but by their own judgment. They suffer shock, self-blame, anger, depression and fear of being alone. The effects are generally long term: 97 per cent.. of women sampled had lasting emotional harm; 90 per cent. had ongoing family or relationship problems; and 54 per cent. reported that their education or employment had suffered. Rape, even by a man known to the woman, and contrary to the second myth, is an extremely serious and damaging crime.

On 8 April, the inspectorates of constabulary and of the Crown Prosecution Service published a report on the investigation and prosecution of rape. They agreed. The report states:

"There are few offences that impact so severely on the victim".

Yet rape is vastly under-reported. A literature review for the inspectors by Professor Liz Kelly of the university of North London shows that about 90 per cent. of raped women make no complaint. When rape is reported, fewer than half the cases even start as prosecutions. One in five reaches trial, and fewer than half those result in a conviction. All these drop-out rates are far higher than for any other crime. The conviction rate for those who report is just 7.35 per cent.

Why do women not report rape? Research shows that many believe that the police and the courts will not think that rape by someone the woman knows is "real rape". They fear that they will be blamed or disbelieved and that they will not be supported. In particular, they fear that a further myth—that a woman who has had sex with A and B is more likely to have had sex consensually with C—will persuade a court to allow C to bring up her previous sexual history in public to embarrass and discredit her. The admission of such evidence causes great distress to rape complainants, and has been known for many years to deter women from reporting rape.

The inspectors' report suggests that all those reasons for not reporting are fully justified. When investigating rape by men known to the woman, police do not follow up inquiries that might support the complaint. Police statements about previous heterosexual history show that

"victims are being subjected to embarrassment without good cause."

In deciding whether to prosecute, both the police and Crown prosecutors make

"value judgments on the credibility of the victim as a witness".

The literature review points out:

"At each stage of the legal process stereotypes and prejudices play a part in decision-making."

Of course, the decision-making process is also influenced throughout by the prospect of success at the next stage and, ultimately, by the likelihood of a guilty verdict at trial. It is clear that police and prosecutors, in making negative decisions based on those stereotypes, are giving unwitting testimony that the courts are also subject to those stereotypes. The inspectors' report makes clear reference to similar problems in the trial process. After 25 years at the criminal bar, I can tell the House that rape myths certainly operate in trials all the time.

In an attempt to tackle the myth that previous sexual experience makes it more likely that the complainant has consented, the Government passed sections 41 to 43 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 to prevent questioning about a woman's sexual history if the object is to show that she consented. That exclusion is very important.

The Canadian researcher Catton has shown that where jurors hear evidence of previous sexual history, their view of the guilt of the accused diminishes in proportion to the amount of material heard. That is so even if the complainant denies all the material alleged. In other words, sexual history evidence contributes to wrongful acquittals. Therefore, the Government tried to rule that out.

The offence of rape is committed if a man has sex with a woman, knowing that she is not consenting or being reckless over whether she is consenting. It follows that if he honestly believes that she is consenting, even if she is not, he is not guilty. Although section 41 of the 1999 Act prevents questions about previous sexual history to show consent, it does not exclude them if the aim is to show that the accused believed that the woman consented. As a consequence, the defence of belief in consent is run in almost every case. Previous sexual history can then be, and is, allowed in. Once that subject is in the trial, it impacts on the issue of her consent just as much as on that of his belief. All the humiliation, the effect of deterring women from complaining and all the effects that the Canadian researcher noted fall into place, despite the Government's good intentions.

Judges rarely stop a defendant from running belief in consent as a defence even when, for example, the complainant says that she struggled but the defendant says that she happily consented. In that situation, there is no room for belief in consent unless the defendant is bravely arguing that he thought that the complainant's struggles showed her consent. Either she struggled or she did not—there is no room for him to make a mistake. Here is a further myth, or perhaps just a

prejudice. What a man hears or knows about a woman's sexual history can make him believe that she is consenting. He might hear or know things that make him think that she might consent if he makes an approach, but how she actually behaves when he does so is a different matter, on which her previous history can have little effect. The issue can surely be evidenced on by her conduct at the time.

The inability of predominantly male judges to exclude their own gender bias and follow the logic of these not especially difficult arguments means that they habitually allow the defence of belief in consent and, consequently, previous sexual history. The sexism of many judges who hear criminal cases could not be better exemplified than by the recent case of the Crown *v.* A. That was about a woman's previous sexual history with the defendant. The defendant said that they had had sex before and she denied it. No one doubted that, under current law, his assertion was admissible to show belief in consent, but the question was whether, despite section 41 of the 1999 Act, it could also be admitted via the Human Rights Act 1998 to be official evidence of her consent.

The trial judge felt that his assertion could not be admitted in that way, but he sent the case to appeal "enthusiastically", saying that if previous sexual history were not to be admitted to show consent, no jury could be entitled to know whether any complainant were a prostitute or a nun. That utterance amply demonstrates the operation of myths at trial. It is a damning condemnation of the low level of understanding that the judiciary has of the society that it is intended to serve that a judge at the Old Bailey could, with utter lack of awareness, say such a thing today.

The case of A went to the Court of Appeal, where matters did not improve. Lord Justice Rose and Mr. Justice Hooper gave a judgment in which they found that it was common sense that a woman was more likely of having consented on the disputed occasion if she had had sex with a man before. Any woman judge—supposing there were many of them—or any woman or any judge properly trained in gender awareness could have told them that any number of factors might have made her less likely to repeat the experience and, equally, there may have been factors that made it more likely. Common sense does not point only one way.

Court of Appeal judges are very senior and set precedents that trial judges must follow. Those two judges involved are not old fogeys. They are middle aged and clever. It is a dreadful indicator of how steeped in gender prejudice the higher judiciary and that branch of the law are that the substantial intelligence of those two men was insufficient to allow them to rise above it. Such sexist attitudes mean that the defence of belief in consent can be and is used to sidestep section 41, introduce material likely to generate wrongful acquittals and contribute to women's continued reluctance to complain.

There is a possible solution. Prior to 1975, a defendant could not defend on belief in consent unless his belief were reasonable. Many pressure groups think that that position should be restored. In terms of legal precedent and principle, it is right that no one should be convicted of an offence if he makes an honest mistake, even though it is unreasonable. The report of the Home Office review team on sexual offences, "Setting the Boundaries," recommended in July 2000 that the Canadian law on the matter should be introduced in this country. The Canadian law says:

> "It is not a defence to rape that the accused believed that the complainant consented, where the accused did not take reasonable steps to ascertain that the complainant was consenting."

That law focuses attention firmly on the events at the time, which must, logically, determine or, at the very least, dominate the defendant's belief. What the man believed on the basis of rumours about the woman would, rightly, be pushed to the margins and would usually be completely excluded. However, previous sexual history would be admitted if, somehow, it had influenced him. In 1995, the Law Commission also thought that that approach was right. I ask the Government whether they intend to follow those recommendations and close the loophole that gives rise to wide-ranging injustice and, if so, when. I appreciate that, in a debate of this sort, all that I can ask for is an indication from the Government.

While I am on the subject of things that can give rise to injustice, I turn once more to the judiciary. I appreciate that it does not fall under my hon. Friend's Department, but I understand that an interdepartmental working party will be set up to act on the inspectors' report. It is plain that rape myths have force throughout the criminal justice system, from top to bottom, and that the training that the inspectors recommend at their end, as it were, must also be applied to the judiciary. Will my hon. Friend urgently press for such training and for the swift recruitment of more women judges, so that male myths can be combated where they start by the achievement of a critical mass of women on the bench?

A year ago, I had a conversation with a famous female broadcaster—almost a household name—and the director of a prominent female equality lobby group. We three, confident middle-class women, decided that, if we were raped by someone we knew, we would be unlikely to report it. Now that I have read the inspectors' report and the case of the Crown *v.* A, it seems even less likely that any of us would report the offence. The abject long-term failure of the criminal justice system to protect women from rape must stop now.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) on securing the debate and on making an excellent speech. I warmly commend the work that she has been doing not only today, but over a period of time, both to raise awareness of those issues and to suggest some ways forward.

My hon. and learned Friend knows that I share the concerns that she raised about the level of convictions, the way in which women are treated and the issue of previous sexual history, which can mitigate against women feeling confident about bringing such experiences into the criminal justice system.

My hon. and learned Friend referred to the joint inspectors report published earlier this month. We certainly share her concern, and that expressed in the

[Beverley Hughes]

report, at the small proportion of rapes recorded by the police that result in a conviction. As she and the report said, there are few offences that impact so severely on a victim and, as with other aspects of personal crime—child sexual abuse would be another example—there is undoubtedly substantial under-reporting.

It is against that background that the Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary have undertaken a joint inspection into the investigation and prosecution of cases involving allegations of rape. As my hon. and learned Friend said, we are presently considering how best to take the project forward following that report, and there will be an interdepartmental working group. I have no doubt that as the process of work unfolds, some of the issues in the report for which she has called to be examined will be at the forefront of recommendations for training people throughout the criminal justice system.

As has been acknowledged in the debate, the Government took steps in the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 to try to ensure that victims of rape were provided with protection if the case reached court, where they should be facilitated and enabled by the court process. Since September 2000, there has been a ban on defendants without legal representation cross-examining rape victims personally. That has put an end to rape victims being put through the appalling situation of the accused sometimes reliving his crime in court when he questions the victim. Under that provision, only a lawyer can question rape victims. If an unrepresented defendant refuses to instruct a lawyer, the court has the power to appoint one to conduct the cross-examination on his behalf.

My hon. and learned Friend mentioned section 41 of the 1999 Act, which relates to previous sexual history. It limits the questions that a rape victim can be asked under cross-examination about their previous sexual history in order that they do not have to go through the distressing and unnecessary ordeal of being cross-examined about their history. One of the difficult issues relating to that section is the balance that has to be struck between protecting alleged victims and ensuring that the defendant has a fair trial. I was a member of the Committee that considered the 1999 Act, and the intention behind that provision was to ensure that the number of cases allowing the introduction of previous sexual history was kept to an absolute minimum. It was specifically designed to eradicate the practice of impugning a victim's credibility as a witness by introducing such evidence.

As my hon. and learned Friend pointed out, the House of Lords judgment on Crown *v.* A has had a bearing on the way in which the courts are now interpreting the legislation. The case involved a challenge to the compatibility of the section 41 provisions with article 6 of the European convention on human rights, the right to a fair trial. As my hon. and learned Friend said, the judgment was delivered in May last year.

At its core were the strict limits that section 41 places on admissibility of previous sexual history evidence, and particularly on previous sexual contact between the defendant and the complainant. I am pleased to say that the House of Lords acknowledged that women who alleged that they had been raped should not be harassed unfairly, or at all, by questions about their previous sexual experience. It was felt that assumptions had too often been made that a woman who has had sex with one man is more likely to consent to sex with other men, or that she is less worthy of belief. The judgment also accepted that sexual behaviour between the complainant and other men could only in the rarest of cases have any relevance, and that section 41 deals sensibly and fairly with questioning and evidence about a complainant's sexual experience with third parties.

However, the House of Lords was not prepared to accept that the blanket exclusion of evidence of prior sexual history between the complainant and the accused, subject to certain exceptions, was a proportionate response. Contrary to the apparent intention of the legislation, the court took the view that as a matter of common sense, a prior sexual relationship between the complainant and the accused may, depending on circumstances, be relevant to the issue of actual consent, or belief in consent. The judgment left it to trial judges to draw the line between cases in which previous sexual experience between a complainant and an accused would be irrelevant, and those in which relevant sexual experience of that kind might be admitted under section 41. In leaving the judgment to trial judges, the House of Lords judgment has altered the structured way in which it was envisaged the section would be implemented by the courts.

Section 41 is a relatively new provision, and has needed time to bed down. I accept my hon. and learned Friend's view of the way in which decisions have generally been made under the provision. The inspection report says that there are different views on how well the provision is working; there will be few surprises about the different constituencies of opinion. Such concerns need to be examined, and we are planning a study, in light of the report from the inspectors and the House of Lords judgment, to evaluate the impact of section 41.

The overall aim of the research will be to examine the impact of section 41 on the prosecution of sex offence cases and the handling of such cases by the courts. We are finalising the details of how the research will be conducted, and we will consult key interest groups about our plans. The research will specifically examine the question of attrition, and involve interviews with participants in the process, including victims and victims groups. It will also consider a sample of cases, and examine issues such as the effect of the values and attitudes of decision makers at points along the criminal justice process. We expect the evaluation to start this summer and to report next year. Following the evaluation we shall consider whether any further changes to legislation are necessary.

Another important element in the 1999 Act includes special measures to help vulnerable or intimidated witnesses to give evidence more effectively in court, such as by having screens in court and live TV links. The national implementation of those measures starts in July this year in Crown and magistrate courts. That more sympathetic court environment will also be of great assistance to victims of rape.

My hon. and learned Friend also referred to the sex offences review. All sexual crimes are truly dreadful crimes that deeply affect the lives of victims and their families and, sometimes, whole communities. The review was set up in January 1999, with a view to introducing modernised and strengthened legislation that reflects today's world.

What is needed is a clear and comprehensive range of offences that provide for the adequate protection of all victims of sexual offences, especially children and the more vulnerable members of our society, underpinned by a schedule of penalties that enables the appropriate punishment of abusers. The general principle being applied in the review process is the need to increase the protection offered by the law, whilst ensuring fairness to the defendant. The question of consent is arguably one of the most difficult issues a jury is asked to consider. One of the proposals made by the independent review body is that a clear statement on the key principles of the meaning of consent should be incorporated into legislation.

We are currently analysing all the recommendations made by the review. My hon. and learned Friend asked several questions in relation to that. Ministers are going through the recommendations in great detail, considering how the sex offence laws should be changed and the issue of penalties. I am not in a position to say what our thinking is on her questions because we are not in a position to make it public. We need further time to consider matters. We are taking those issues, and the views expressed by the groups she mentioned, very seriously. We intend to legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The whole context of the perspective and experience of victims in the criminal justice system is extremely important. The Home Secretary is working hard to bring that to the fore right across the board. Last October, we gave many victims the opportunity to make a personal statement about how crime has affected their lives. That will ensure that they can be given the right level of protection and support, and that their needs are taken into account at every stage of the process. Later this year, we will be announcing our detailed plans for a bill of rights for victims, and possibly a victims' commissioner. We are considering those ideas in relation to the proposed White Paper on criminal justice. That entire White Paper will be written from the starting point of understanding the needs of victims and witnesses better. We must ensure that the whole of the criminal justice system is re-geared to place those issues at the fore at every stage of the way in which the justice system works.

I welcome my hon. and learned Friend's contribution to an important issue. I have heard keenly what she has had to say, and I can assure her that the issues are under active consideration and are being taken seriously by the Government.

Knutsford Crown Court

1.28 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise directly with the Government in Parliament an issue of the most pressing concern to my constituents, those of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) and those of other hon. Members. I want to try to get some answers.

Two weeks ago, out of the blue, I received a letter from the court service, informing me that the Lord Chancellor's Department intended to close Knutsford Crown court and end 700 years of history of the administration of royal justice in the town. No forewarning was given of the decision, although the Government have clearly been planning it for some time. The Government have explicitly denied in the past that closure was imminent on several occasions.

When a reporter from the local newspaper, the *Knutsford Guardian*, asked the Lord Chancellor's Department last month about rumours that it was planning to close the court, he was told by its press officer:

"There has been no date or discussions about a public consultation for closing Knutsford Crown Court. I do not think it is something that will happen in the near future. I'm sure I would have heard about it".

What the Department said was, charitably put, a lie. A fortnight later—the near future by anyone's standards—a "public consultation" on the closure of the court was announced and it became immediately clear that the Department had been working on those plans for some time.

"Public consultation" is the phrase used by the Lord Chancellor, but there is no real consultation with the public. Only one option is offered; closing the Crown court and moving all cases 20 miles away to Chester. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton correctly describes that approach in her submission to the Court Service as

"making a mockery of the so-called consultation process".

I am grateful for her support today.

Only one argument has been advanced, which is that the courthouse needs expensive refurbishment. I note, in passing, that that argument is a little rich coming from our present Lord Chancellor. Only one month has been given for responses; one month to preserve seven centuries of tradition. The consultation document gives no estimate of the cost of converting one of the Chester magistrates courts into a Crown court. It makes no assessment of the impact of moving the court 20 miles away on getting witnesses to appear, on getting people from east and mid-Cheshire to do jury service or on access for disabled people. It gives no answer to the question of how people from Congleton are supposed to get to the Chester court, when the Court Service itself admits that there are no public transport links. It provides no breakdown of the suspiciously high estimate of £4.9 million that has been put on the cost of refurbishing the Knutsford court and no explanation of why the Lord Chancellor's Department has allowed the court fall into such a state of disrepair.

[Mr. George Osborne]

Not a word is said of what shall become of the magnificent 19th-century courthouse once the Crown court leaves. That landmark has dominated Knutsford since it was built and its future use is a hugely sensitive issue for people who live in the town. The Court Service has made virtually no attempt to let the public know that they are being consulted. Unless one happened to be a local MP, a local judge or a manager of Group 4, or had by chance seen the notice pinned up in the courthouse itself, one would not have been aware that a consultation process was under way.

Thanks to the efforts of the local media and Knutsford's elected representatives—I pay particular tribute to the town council and the mayor, George Walton—the public now know that a consultation process is under way. During the last seven days, more than 1,000 people have signed a petition urging the Lord Chancellor not to close the court. I hope to present that petition to the House next week.

The only argument so far advanced by the Court Service for closing the court is that it will cost too much to refurbish the courthouse. Forced to choose between abandoning a 700-year history of local justice and repairing the roof, it has chosen to abandon our history. How tragically short-sighted.

There has been a court in Knutsford since 1294. Quarter sessions were held in the town from 1575 until 30 years ago. The imposing sessions house that is home to the Crown court today was built 200 years ago. All that history, all that tradition, is being thrown away because the roof needs repairing, the wiring has to be replaced and the building could do with redecoration. Can one imagine our forebears, who invested so much in building the sessions house two centuries ago, coming to the same decision?

Saving Knutsford's Crown court is about much more than respecting the history of our country and my county. It is about the future of our present criminal justice system. The Crown court is in use day in, day out. Last year, it sat for 268 days, which, allowing for weekends, was almost every working day of the year. This year, according to the Government's figures, some 280 cases will have been received for trial, 60 more cases than two years ago. In short, it is a hard-working court. The Court Service thinks all that activity and work can simply be transferred 20 miles away to a converted magistrates court without cost to local justice. I must say to the Minister that the professional users of the court do not agree.

The chairman of the Macclesfield bench has written to me, and says:

"I argue against the closure of the Knutsford court. Not because it is a listed building or that I have any feeling of sentimentality, but because it served a 'local need'. Knutsford is more easily accessible from more major centres of population in the county than any other Crown Court".

The secretary of the Chester and North Wales Law Society says:

"I cannot see the advantage of moving the Crown Court. Where are the estimates for the costs of creating a new court in Chester? We were promised justice at a local level and this will not be justice at a local level. This is all being done for the convenience of the Court Service."

A constituent of mine, Joan Birchall, who works for the witness service, sent me an e-mail that said:

"I come into daily contact with witnesses who have had to borrow money from family/friends in order to make the necessary journey to Court from say Macclesfield or Wilmslow. They have attended with great reluctance because of cost and time involved. Has anyone taken these sort of problems into context? These kinds of witnesses will not be prepared to travel further to Chester."

That is what professional users of the court are telling me. I see no evidence that anyone in the Lord Chancellor's Department or the Court Service has answers to those concerns and others.

We are already half way through the consultation period, and this is the only chance that I foresee to challenge the Government's case directly. I am not trying to make a party political point. I imagine that the administrative decision has been passed up to the Minister from the Court Service, and I note that the number of Crown courts in the country has remained remarkably steady for many years. I simply ask him to use his ministerial discretion, and to do what he is there to do, which is to sometimes reinterpret what is put in front of him. He should consider the decision made by the Court Service.

I ask the Minister to provide me with the answers to eight simple questions. First, when did the Lord Chancellor's Department start preparing the proposals for the closure of Knutsford Crown court? Secondly, may we see a copy of the feasibility study that puts the cost of refurbishing the courthouse at £4.9 million? Thirdly, how much of that refurbishment is regarded as absolutely necessary for the proper functioning of the Crown court, and how much is for things that the Court Service would like to do if it had the money? The Court Service says that it would need to improve access to the courthouse in Knutsford for disabled people. That is one of the arguments in the consultation paper. How is moving the court 20 miles away supposed to improve access to justice for disabled people?

Fourthly, what is the estimated cost of converting the magistrates court in Chester into a Crown court, and what is the estimated total extra cost of relocation, including reimbursing the travel and accommodation of jurors, witnesses and some local members of the legal profession? Until we see those figures, we cannot make a judgment on how much money will be saved by closing the court. Fifthly, how will people from Congleton and other areas with no public transport links to Chester be expected to get to the new court if they do not have access to a car?

Sixthly, what assessment has been made of the impact that moving the court will have on jury service, and on persuading witnesses to appear? Will that make it more difficult to secure convictions? Seventhly, what is the Court Service planning to do with the historic Knutsford courthouse when the Crown court moves? Eighthly, and most importantly, if the response to the public consultation is overwhelmingly in favour of keeping the Crown court, will the Department listen, or is the consultation just a charade? If that is so, will the Minister please say so before we jump through all the hoops, organise a petition, try to get a local campaign going and try to secure further such debates? Please will the Minister be honest about how far down the line we are with the decision.

If the Minister cannot answer all eight questions instantly, will he assure me that I will receive written answers from his officials as soon as possible, preferably by tomorrow? They are not particularly difficult questions, and I should like to have the answers. The thinking behind the decision to close the court is painfully weak and wholly misguided. Faced with a repair bill to a building that it has failed to maintain, the Lord Chancellor's Department thinks that it has a good excuse to move the Crown court to Chester, which is much more convenient for court staff.

I am sure that the Minister agrees that justice is about more than convenience and cost. It must not only be done, but be seen to be done. Closing Knutsford Crown court removes yet another link between local people and our justice system. It makes the laws of the land even more remote from people. It undermines a powerful deterrent to criminal behaviour; the fear not only of being caught and tried, but of being caught and tried before the eyes of the community.

In places such as Knutsford 30 years ago, law and order was rooted in the community. The local policeman on the beat knew everyone, and everyone knew him, because they were neighbours. When wrongdoers were caught, they were hauled before the town's magistrates court and tried by magistrates who were themselves local people. If the crime was serious, they were sent to the Crown court, a stone's throw away. Those convicted could be sure that it would be all over the local newspaper, because local reporters would be sitting in the public gallery. If a person committed crimes locally, everyone knew about it.

In the past, justice was done, and seen to be done. Over the past 30 years, under Governments of all political persuasions, that has changed. The police operate out of squad cars and live anywhere. Local magistrates courts have shut, and everyone in my constituency, for example, must now go to Macclesfield. As the head of the Macclesfield bench told me when I recently visited the court, it is much more difficult to recruit magistrates who live in my constituency to serve in the magistrates court in Macclesfield.

Local newspapers cannot afford to send a reporter to the local magistrates court, so local criminals have a good chance of keeping their names out of the press. Now the Crown court will be moved to the other side of the county. The only connection that most of my constituents will have with the criminal justice system is when they watch soap operas. The major trials of "Coronation Street" characters Jim McDonald, Terry Duckworth and Jez Quigley all took place in Knutsford Crown court, and even that connection will have gone. Indeed, I am relying on that crucial "Coronation Street" connection to whip up a mass public campaign throughout the country.

Is it any wonder that people's respect for the law is declining and that fear of crime is increasing when the criminal justice system no longer seems to have any connection with local communities? Closing Knutsford Crown court would be a tragedy for Cheshire. Instead of the great principle that the justice system should come to the people, the people will have to go to the justice system. Seven hundred years of tradition is being thrown away because of the cost of repairing a courthouse roof. I urge the Lord Chancellor and his Ministers to listen to the public, use their ministerial discretion, preserve access to local justice and save this Crown court.

1.42 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I am delighted to be able briefly to contribute in support of my hon. and young Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) and the excellent and strong case that he presented about the retention of the court facilities at Knutsford. He mentioned the long history that has gone before and the good modern reasons why these facilities should be not only retained but enhanced.

In the almost 19 years that I have represented Congleton, there has been a tremendous diminution in the local administration of justice. Before I was first elected, I attended the magistrates court in Congleton—not, I hasten to add, because I was up before the magistrates, but because I wanted to become a magistrate. I sat in and listened and met court staff and magistrates. Since then, Congleton magistrates court has closed, as has the one at Sandbach, an important town in my constituency. The south Cheshire bench is now at Crewe, although some of my constituents still go to Macclesfield.

Knutsford Crown court has been extremely important in the administration of local justice. If the Minister examines a map of Cheshire, he will see the distances involved in travelling from the east of the county from the constituencies of Congleton and, indeed, Macclesfield, to Chester.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton pointed out the difficulties of public transport. Although many people own cars, from Congleton, no practical public transport is available. From Sandbach, Macclesfield and Poynton, there is a train, but at times it is almost impossible to get to those trains. I wonder whether the indications are accurate and that the trains run at a time convenient to get people to Chester in time for the beginning of court proceedings.

We feel that the closure, which is happening so quickly that it is almost being bounced through, is all down to cost. The Court Service has owned the premises since 1993. The case has not been presented properly, as my hon. Friend said, because we have been given only half of it—we do not have the costings of any alternatives in Chester, and no local alternatives have been presented.

It does not say much for the court system if it is now believed—I would like to see the estimates—that almost £5 million will have to be spent on a beautiful building, which has served a practical purpose for everyone in east Cheshire for hundreds of years. The costs and convenience of those who work in the court have been put before the service that they provide to local communities. I note that more cases will sit on fewer days. What does that tell us? I support every word uttered by my hon. Friend in defence of a local justice system for east Cheshire. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) is also supportive, because this proposal, about which there appears to be no meaningful consultation, will equally adversely affect his constituents.

1.46 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) on securing this debate. Both he and the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) made their points extremely cogently. The hon. Gentleman managed to get almost all the way through his speech without making the partisan comments that he said he would avoid. He asked eight questions, most of which were perfectly reasonable. Rather than answer them now, or write to him tomorrow as he requested, I offer both hon. Members a meeting, if that is acceptable—he nods. My office will be in touch to arrange a time in the next few days when we can deal with all the points in detail. I hope that I will be able to provide reassurance.

I assure both hon. Members that I will approach the meeting with an open mind, as I always do. I am prepared to listen carefully and constructively, and I ask them to do the same. As a backdrop to the meeting, I will set out some of the background to the decision. Although both hon. Members made their points with great force, they did not give the entire picture, and I would like to give some context to the decision to go to consultation on the closure.

The proposed closure of the Crown court at Knutsford is currently subject to public consultation, which began on 10 April when, on the same day that I answered a question to the House from the hon. Member for Tatton, the group manager for north Wales and Cheshire wrote to all court users in the locality setting out the reasons for the proposed closure. He invited comments to be returned by 8 May, four weeks from the date of the letter. It would be inappropriate to second-guess the outcome of the consultation, as we are only halfway through it.

As a matter of process, the circuit administrators of each of the Court Service's six administrative regions determine how many courthouses and what other accommodation are needed locally. They are required to undertake regular reviews of accommodation requirements in fulfilling their responsibility. Each circuit must provide an efficient and effective service to their court users while maintaining secure, well-equipped court accommodation and ensuring full utilisation of court facilities. That seems reasonable, and I hope that the hon. Members for Tatton and for Congleton agree.

Mr. George Osborne: Will the decision to close the court be made by the regional manager of the court service or will it, ultimately, be a ministerial decision?

Mr. Wills: I am just about to come on to the next stage of the process. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bear with me.

In August 1988, the Lord Chancellor's Department issued guidelines for the closure of Crown court centres. If hon. Members do not have those to hand, I am happy to provide them. It is acknowledged that the potential removal of local services, particularly in more rural areas, will always be controversial. I shall return to that theme later. The guidance states that when circuit administrators contemplate the closure or re-siting of a court centre, they should not base their decision on financial considerations alone.

Initial consideration will consider the views of the judiciary, the state of the accommodation, the work load of the particular office, where the work would be dealt with in future and the implications for Crown court availability, including any increased difficulty of access for the general public by private and public transport as a result of the changes. Obviously, there will also be an assessment of the cost and savings generated by the proposed changes.

If, having considered those issues, the circuit administrator believes that there is a justifiable reason to take the proposal forward, a submission will be sent to the Lord Chancellor asking whether he or she is content with taking the proposal to public consultation. In the case of Knutsford, the Lord Chancellor approved such a move, and the consultation is now under way.

A formal submission will be sent to Court Service headquarters if the circuit adminstrator believes that the responses received during the consultation, which includes local discussions that arise, indicate that the closure of the court is still the most appropriate course of action. A decision will then be made as to whether to invite the Lord Chancellor to consider formally closing the court.

As the guidance clarifies and the president of the Law Society recently wrote, it is of the utmost importance that the closure of any court should be based on an overall strategy and not done on an ad hoc basis or simply because of cost. It is also important that we assess what impact any closure is likely to have on local users. Therefore, it is important that Court Service officials do not lose sight of local concerns. Equally, it is important that local concerns do not lose sight of the needs of the criminal justice system as a whole.

All court users deserve an efficient service that is delivered in well-equipped and secure buildings. The Crown court estate contains an assortment of buildings. Some were built in the 19th century, others were built in the 1990s. The oldest listed building in the estate may have historical or social significance but, in itself, that does not justify its continued use as a court building. On its own, an old building does not make a court. The Court Service and the world have moved on since the 19th century. Secure accommodation, separate waiting areas for victims and witnesses away from defendants and access for disabled people are basic standards of accommodation that people expect from their courts today. Improvements must be balanced against other factors, such as local transport difficulties—we heard a little bit about that today.

The Government are particularly concerned to provide courtrooms that enable cases to be listed in a manner that will achieve our aim of reducing delay in the criminal justice system. Users want their case to be heard on the day that it is listed. Transferring the work load to better-equipped centres is one way to modernise and improve the overall service that the Court Service provides. Circuit administrators and group managers have local knowledge and are best placed to make judgments about how to make the best use of all their resources, whether finance, staff or buildings.

Why has Knutsford been brought forward? Hon. Members will be aware of the case, but I think that it is worth setting it out. The Crown court at Knutsford is a historic building. It is a third-tier centre, which hears

class 4 work, including cases such as wounding or causing grievous bodily harm, robbery or assault with intent to rob, crimes of conspiracy and any either-way case; in other words, cases that can be heard in either the magistrates court or the Crown court. At present, all preliminary hearings in class 1—the most serious cases, including murder, which are generally heard by a High Court judge—class 2, which are also usually heard by a High Court judge and include cases such as manslaughter and rape, and class 3, which can be heard by a High Court or a circuit court judge and include all indictable-only cases other than those mentioned under classes 1, 2 and 4, such as aggravated burglary, kidnapping, death by dangerous driving and cases requiring video-link access, are already heard at Chester. Of the 72,000 cases committed for trial in England and Wales in 2000, only 265 were sent to Knutsford.

As we have heard, the court is a grade II* listed building and was purchased from the local authority in 1993. The accommodation is what one would expect of a building of that age, and does not meet the requirements of a building that we expect to deliver court services in the 21st century. For example, it is not compatible with disability discrimination legislation.

Despite reports in the local press and the suggestion by the hon. Member for Tatton, the building has been maintained in accordance with grade II* listed building requirement. We have had advice from our specialist conservation consultant, and have spent in the region of £130,000 to maintain the building in the past five years. That said, significant investment of about £5 million will be needed to bring it up to standard. That is not a negligible sum, nor is it for negligible work. It is not only for a new roof, but for a new heating system—justice is not best dispensed with inefficient and inadequate heating. New ceilings, total rewiring, air conditioning, improvements to cells, secure areas, and separate waiting areas for vulnerable witnesses are not nothing, but essential to the dispensation of justice in the age in which we live. I hope that hon. Members agree on the importance of such things.

So surely it is reasonable to ask whether it is a sensible use of limited public funds to spend so much money on works when alternative and more modern accommodation is available. I ask hon. Members seriously to consider that central point before the meeting.

Travel, to which both hon. Members referred, must be considered carefully, including the provision of details of public transport to alternative venues and its additional time and cost. We will go through that in detail when we meet.

The Lord Chancellor is committed to making the best use of the physical estate. We must make better use of joint working between all courts—magistrate, crown and county. Joint use of courthouses can create more justice centres in which hearings of different types of case can be conducted. We need to consider how we can benefit from closer working. If two courthouses—a magistrates court and county court—are close, perhaps all their work can be accommodated in one place, and only one courthouse will need to be closed. The best use of the estate must be considered in a business-like way.

I understand the deep attachment that many people have to the court system as it has grown up over the years, and to their local courthouses. That is evident whenever there is a proposal to close a courthouse, whether it be in Knutsford or elsewhere; we hear the same passion that we heard earlier. However, justice is not just about where a courthouse is situated. That is important, but it is rather about the Government's commitment to modernising the services that courts provide. We said in "The Way Ahead" that

"a criminal justice system must be: effective at preventing offending and reoffending; efficient in the way it deals with cases; responsive . . . to the needs of the victim and the law abiding community; and accountable for the decisions it takes".

In other words, a criminal justice system must deliver justice for all. Decisions about the estate, and everything else, must be seen in the context of pursuing those aims. The local crown court is not the only place involved in delivering justice, and we are doing much work to bring all the disparate elements together.

I shall bring my remarks to a close because I am against the clock. I assure both hon. Members that we take their concerns seriously, which I hope they will recognise when we meet. I hope also that they will approach the meeting with an open mind, as I will. I understand the worries of local people in Knutsford about the proposed closure. However, I hope that they will consider the interests of the criminal justice system as a whole, and carefully consider, sentiment apart, how the people of Knutsford can best have justice dispensed.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 25 April 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

British-US Relations

[Relevant documents: Second Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 2001-02, HC 327, and the Government's response thereto, Cm 5372.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

2.30 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): It gives me great pleasure to open this debate on the report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs report on British-US relations. It was published in December 2001 and we received the Government response in February. It was the first substantive report of the new Parliament. Due to the importance that we attach to transatlantic relations and to the fact that there was a new Administration in Washington—that of President Bush—we decided to focus on the subject as a matter of priority. Our decision was made last July, when we could not have envisaged the terrible events that took place only a couple of months later, which made our inquiry of even greater relevance and significance.

In the course of our inquiry, the Committee took oral evidence from senior academics, the former US Assistant Secretary of State, James Rubin, the Foreign Secretary, and Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials. We also received a host of written evidence, which is published at the end of the report.

An important part of our inquiry was the Committee's visit to the United States in November 2001. At ground zero, I had the honour of laying a wreath in tribute to those who lost their lives, and the Committee spent some moments in sombre reflection. We were appalled by the scale of destruction and the horror of what had happened only a few weeks earlier. I repeat now the tribute paid in the Committee's report to the staff of our consulate-general in New York and other United Kingdom diplomatic posts there. We were able to meet some of the staff, who worked magnificently on and after 11 September in support of British victims and their families.

In Washington, we viewed the scene of destruction at the Pentagon. Again, it brought home to us the impact on the American people of those terrible events on 11 September. We went on to meet several senior officials at the Pentagon and the State Department, among others. We were highly impressed by the performance of our embassy in Washington DC: it is this country's most important diplomatic post, and the calibre of our diplomats there reflects that.

During our visit, we were struck by the respect shown for our diplomats by the key movers and shakers in the US political and military establishments. Ours is a most impressive operation, of which this House can be proud. Only last month, two colleagues from the Committee, both of whom are here today, and I were able to pay a further visit to New York and Washington to update our impressions.

Some scepticism has been expressed, especially in the media, about the value of overseas visits by Select Committees. To the sceptics I say that the Foreign Affairs Committee's visits to the United States have been enormously informative; in addition, they have allowed us to act in something of a representative capacity on behalf of the House. I believe that it is of the greatest importance that the Committee undertake further such visits to report to the House on America's conduct of the war against terrorism—we will publish an interim report and, I anticipate, further reports on that subject—on developments at the United Nations, and on our countries' bilateral relationship.

If we were left with one overriding impression from our visit and our inquiry, it was that the special relationship is as strong as ever. It is founded on shared history, shared values and shared interests, and that must be my starting point. There is no more important relationship for the United Kingdom. The United States is at one and the same time our foremost political and military ally, our single greatest trading partner and our largest source and recipient of inward investment. It is, of course, also the world's sole remaining superpower.

Since 11 September, we have witnessed an extraordinary time in transatlantic relations, and the United Kingdom has stood shoulder to shoulder with the US. The spontaneity of the British reaction was evidence of the instinctive nature of our bilateral relationship. Whether in the United Nations Security Council or NATO, in the field of intelligence or in coalition building, the British Government have taken swift action to support our key ally, and the US has greatly appreciated those signs of solidarity. That was made evident when the Senate issued a resolution on 15 November last year, expressing

> "appreciation to the United Kingdom for its solidarity and leadership as an ally of the United States and reaffirming the special relationship between the two countries."

Yet, in recent months, many people have asked what is in it for us? What do we get out of the special relationship? People have heard that the United Kingdom has a seat at the table and that our Government's views are taken seriously, but how far and how deep does our influence really extend? Do we exert any significant influence on decision making, or does the special relationship allow the US merely to share, on its own terms, the burden of being the world's policeman? Perhaps the Minister can set out the practical benefits of the relationship and tell us what we would lose if it became less special. In practical terms, what does this country gain that is not gained by France or Germany, which have been less supportive of the US in key areas?

I know that the Minister has a special interest in the steel industry. Trade policy is obviously not his responsibility or the Committee's, but perhaps he can update us on the imposition of tariffs by the US on steel imports from the United Kingdom and other countries. Will he comment more generally on the trading relationship, including export subsidies? Will he also tell us how many US tourists are returning to this country to spend their dollars?

[Donald Anderson]

On more specific issues, our inquiry focused extensively on international security, encompassing missile defence and a range of multilateral agreements. We found considerable differences between our Government and that of the United States, particularly on the range of arms control treaties.

On missile defence, the Committee met the head of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organisation at the Pentagon, who made a strong case for the need to take counter-measures against the threat posed by what used to be called "rogue states". Whether missile defence is, as is suggested, the best counter-measure remains to be seen, but I am certain—I believe that the Committee is, too—that the United States is determined to proceed along that route. The arguments for and against have been well rehearsed in our previous debates and are based in part on the report by our predecessor Committee, so I shall not repeat them. Many key questions remain unanswered, however, and I anticipate that the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Select Committee on Defence will return to the issue.

On international arms control measures, the report of our predecessor Committee provided a solid foundation. We were concerned to establish whether the well-trailed decision of the United States Administration to give notice of their withdrawal from the anti-ballistic missile treaty, their refusal to ratify the comprehensive test ban treaty, and their rejection of a verification regime for the biological and toxin weapons convention revealed a pattern of unilateralist behaviour. United States officials gave us a robust defence of their position, which might be characterised as "Good treaties yes, bad treaties no." Senior members of the Administration told us that they are prepared to sign international agreements that they believe will be effective and fair, but they are not afraid to refuse to support treaties that, in their judgment, will not work.

The Administration have also refused to sign up to the International Criminal Court: when we were in Washington, we asked about the reports that the United States will de-sign the ICC treaty. The rejection of the Kyoto protocol is another regrettable example of lack of engagement on the part of the Administration. The US Administration do not see their position as unilateralist, but seen from this side of the Atlantic it is difficult to interpret it otherwise. I certainly would welcome an update from the Minister on where we stand on those treaties and on what Ministers are doing to persuade the United States to take a more value-based and less self-interested approach to international co-operation.

Since our initial report, we have heard the speech containing the phrase "axis of evil". Commissioner Patten has suggested that the speech showed that the United States had gone into what he called "unilateralist overdrive". The speech exposed differences between European and British views of the international situation. It is as Hubert Védrine, the French Foreign Minister, said: it is simplistic to speak of an axis of evil. It is indeed difficult to perceive a key nexus between the three countries mentioned, but we should all recognise the concerns that underlay President Bush's use of that term. However, that Manichean view of the world—the world seen in absolutes—is potentially counter-productive, and can cause great concern among key allies. My judgment is that our European partners and we have a more nuanced view of the world.

We must accept that Iraq is indeed a threat to regional and even world peace. Knowing of the US intention to act makes it easy for other countries to stand aside, shout from the sidelines and avoid taking responsibility for that serious problem. It requires greater courage to face up to Saddam Hussein, to insist that UN inspectors must return to counter Iraq's attempts to develop weapons of mass destruction, and to stand firm against any attempt on Saddam's part to withstand the UN regime. Indeed, recent developments have assisted him—the Beirut summit and the Palestine crisis have allowed him to divert attention to some extent from the pressure to have the weapons inspectors back. Saddam's tactic has been not only to seek to divide but to play for time.

Our tough line on Iraq gives us greater credibility when urging our American allies to exercise caution and to act only with consensus and in accordance with international law. It gives us influence that we should be prepared to use. In particular, Ministers should press the United States to adopt a demonstrably more even-handed policy towards Israel and the Palestinians. The Foreign Affairs Committee has written to the Foreign Office to ask a series of questions about Iraq and the doctrine of pre-emptive self-defence set out by Richard Haass of the State Department, for which I personally see no basis in international law and which suggests hesitation within the United States about the basis of international law.

In respect of Israel-Palestine, the rhetoric of our ambassador to the United Nations has been markedly different from that of the United States in the UN Security Council. For example, our ambassador stated that if the alleged massacre or gross human rights violations at Jenin were confirmed, it would reveal

"a callous disregard of civilian safety".

That is different from the US response. That difference gives us a degree of credibility in the Security Council, and an ability to play a bridging role between the US and other states. It may in turn have brought the US further along than it would otherwise have come, enabling the unanimous Security Council resolutions—with Syria alone abstaining on resolutions 1397, 1402, 1403 and 1405—to be passed. Finally, it shows that, even with our strong alliance, we differ from the US in key areas.

Iran is a different matter. As the Committee states in its report, the Government have sought constructively to engage with Iran. Progressive forces in that country are working hard to wrest effective power from the hard-line Islamists. The question is whether engagement with Iran helps the cause of the moderates, or lends the fundamentalists a legitimacy that they do not deserve. We in the United Kingdom take one view, the US another.

From our perspective, it is difficult to say that the Iranians have an evil regime and then engage with them in matters of direct relevance to the United Kingdom, such as the drugs trade, on which we co-operate closely with Iran. A number of Iranian officials have been killed seeking to prevent the drugs trade from using routes across their country. However, the US cites the Karine

A arms shipment and Iran's long record of support for terrorist groups in the middle east, placing Iran firmly in the so-called axis of evil. Such activities cannot be overlooked and there are real causes for concern, but the UK notes the rise of democratic and pro-western elements in Iran, and values Iran's limited but significant contribution to the coalition in the war against terrorism. Notwithstanding Iran's wholly unreasonable rejection of David Reddaway as ambassador, the UK takes a different view.

Intriguingly, the Government's response to our report states that:

"The United States is interested in our policy of engagement"

with Iran. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will explain the nature of the US interest in our policy. I ask him to state clearly that the United Kingdom will continue to take a different line from the more absolutist one taken by the US Administration.

The Committee was pleased with the key role played by the UK in the war against terrorism through Sir Jeremy Greenstock's chairmanship of the counter-terrorism committee set up under UN Security Council resolution 1373. The US cannot play that role because of its difficult history in the UN, but it is a role at which Sir Jeremy and his team excel. It has given even more credibility to our delegation to the UN, which was already held in high esteem. Our delegation's work is rightly held in the highest regard, and we should be proud of that, but no one should underestimate the considerable burden that the work places on our hard-working diplomatic team at the UK mission during our period of chairmanship.

In their response to the report, the Government undertook to ensure through a Whitehall interdepartmental committee that the counter-terrorism committee receives

"all the support it requires".

Can the Minister assure us that that remains the case? What plans are there for the United Kingdom to pass on its role to another member of the Security Council—or is it assumed that at the end of the six-month period, which has just been renewed, Sir Jeremy will continue, perhaps even until he retires next year?

Since the Committee produced its report, the US has opened its detainment facility at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Let me express the Committee's gratitude that Ministers allowed us to see the reports made by UK officials who have visited the base but remain concerned both that the US might not be fully respecting international legal norms of behaviour towards detainees, and that the proposed military tribunals are an unacceptable way to proceed against the detainees. I hope that the Minister will bring us up to date on the situation in respect of the detainees, particularly those who are British citizens.

Finally, as the Committee report concludes, the UK response to the events of 11 September demonstrated once again the special nature of this country's relationship with the most powerful nation on earth. Those of us who have observed the relationship at close quarters recognise the considerable influence at our disposal. We can never be the economic or military equals of the United States, but we can seek to match it in terms of political credibility and moral authority. In my judgment, the transatlantic relationship is strong, and it is mature enough to accommodate differences such as the ones that have arisen in the United Nations Security Council on the middle east, and on the great range of arms control treaties. As James Rubin told the Foreign Affairs Committee,

"the special relationship is not about personalities; it is about policy,"

and those policies go very deep. Our US allies understand and appreciate that. So should we.

2.52 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak. I do so from the Back Benches; the policy of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition will be explained in some detail by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). I hope that there will not be too much divergence between what he and I say. I have been warned by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), the Opposition Whip, who was present for the early stages of the sitting, that on no account should I make any spending commitment.

I wanted to take part in this debate because the subject is enormously important. The relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom is important and has far-reaching implications. It is important particularly because it is a subset, a critical element, of the relationship between north America and Europe, and that relationship is key to the resolution of many of the most serious problems faced by the world. So long as north America and Europe remain partners, great progress can be made in dealing with those problems, but if that partnership degenerates into rivalry, or perhaps something even worse, that would not only be a very bad thing for north America and Europe, but a very bad thing for the world.

Because I believe that that relationship is under serious threat, I founded and chair an organisation called Atlantic Partnership, which exists to try to counter those threats in an entirely non-partisan way—there should be no differences between the parties on these matters—and alert people to the dangers. There are several causes for concern, some fundamental, others visible on the surface. There are some fundamental trends at work in north America which, left unchecked, will weaken and undermine the partnership.

North America's centre of gravity has shifted westward. All the centres of new technology, such as Silicon Forest and Microsoft, are found on the west coast of the United States, and California overtook New York as the most populous state in the union long ago. Even before the events of 11 September, the focus of those in the US, was shifting: people were looking towards the Pacific and beyond, to Japan, still an immensely important economic power, and even further to China, which is both a huge potential market for the US and the only potential rival superpower on the horizon. Demographic trends reinforce that tendency. There are more and more Asiatic and Hispanic Americans. The Asiatics tend to look to the east, and the Hispanics to the south, to Latin America; they do not look across the Atlantic to Europe to anything like the extent that Americans used to.

[Mr. Michael Howard]

On this side of the Atlantic, too, there are trends at work that are not entirely favourable to reinforcing the partnership. The movement towards political unity in Europe need not be an impediment to the partnership. Many of those who are in favour of greater political unity want that united Europe to be a partner of north America, but many do not, preferring a European entity that is set up as a rival centre of power to the US. It seems to me that several dangers attach to the latter view.

As well as those fundamental concerns, we see the problems that come to the surface and cause day-to-day irritation and difficulties: they include problems with trade, defence and the environment. This is not the time or the place to go into those matters in detail; the important thing—the point that I want to emphasise above all today—is that those dangers and difficulties should be managed in such a way that they do not impair, undermine or weaken the partnership as a whole. We will of course we will have disagreements with the United States on such matters from time to time, but we should take care not to allow those disagreements to threaten the relationship.

There is a real danger because people have a strong tendency to look at such problems in a compartmentalised fashion. Lots of people know what is happening in trade; to them, trade is the most important thing. The same is true of environment and defence matters. The danger is that people will not look at the picture as a whole and so will not take account of the dangers that can arise from such irritations growing.

What do I mean by saying that those problems should be managed in a way that does not impair the US-UK relationship? Let me give an example. Both parties to the current trade dispute over steel claim that they are acting within the rules of the World Trade Organisation. We are fortunate that the WTO exists, because it provides a rules-based framework for resolving such disagreements. Rather less fortunate is the fact that disputes take a long time to resolve. Although both sides say that the WTO will eventually rule, everyone knows that it will do so only in a couple of years' time. That is not an entirely happy situation.

I have a positive suggestion to make. A real effort should be made by both the European Union, which has jurisdiction in these matters, and the United States to get the WTO to streamline and accelerate its decision-making processes. Both sides to the dispute claim to be acting within the rules. If those claims are bona fide and sincere, there should be no reason for the two parties not to co-operate to shorten the time scale for WTO decisions.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I am following the right hon. and learned Gentleman's arguments closely. He makes an interesting point. Which party does he believe is right? Is the US or the EU right about the tariff barriers to steel?

Mr. Howard: I certainly regret the decision that the US Administration took. There is no question about that. However, I lack the expertise to say whether they were right or the EU was right in terms of the detailed interpretation of the rules of the WTO. I do not know that, but I have no hesitation in saying that the decision of the US Administration is regrettable.

We must take these difficulties and dangers seriously. There is always a tendency for discussions of the transatlantic relationship to be bathed in a sea of complacency. I thought that the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee was going to fall victim to that, but he proved me wrong in the second part of his speech, even though I did not agree with everything that he said then. We pretend that everything is wonderful, that our relationship with the US is special, and that nothing much needs to be done to attend to it. That is extremely dangerous. If the relationship between north America and Europe is not nurtured, there is a danger that it will be fractured. That would do immense harm, not only to the partners in that relationship, but to the world as whole.

Can anything else be done? There is merit in the idea of setting up a standing conference comprising representatives from the EU and north America—not just the US, but Canada and perhaps even Mexico—whose expertise would span a range of activities. The conference would have the task of examining, identifying and anticipating areas in which problems might arise. Anticipating the difficulties that have arisen over steel was not beyond the realm of human wisdom. Setting up a standing conference of that sort would provide no guarantee that such frictions will not arise and cause problems, but it would help.

It would help if potential difficulties were identified early and drawn to the attention of Governments on both sides of the Atlantic, so that discussions could take place and action could be taken to stop the issue becoming a real problem. If the body that I propose achieved that result in only a few cases, it would have earned its money. I am not sure whether that amounts to a spending commitment, but I doubt that the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury would be too upset by that proposal.

Donald Anderson: The right hon. and learned Gentleman may be comforted to know that the NATO Parliamentary Assembly is aware of the problems that can be caused by friction in different sectors and seeks to set up organisations within the Assembly to boost its operations. That is a positive development. Hopefully it will be possible to anticipate and manage the problems to which he refers in that more informal atmosphere.

Mr. Howard: I am aware of the work of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, to which I pay tribute. However, those of us who are not in government must face the fact that organisations of that sort have more clout if they are Government organisations and if the representatives are selected by and report to Government. If we could thus improve on the work of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the sort of body that I am suggesting would have more clout and would be likely to have a greater impact on the problems.

My intention in speaking in today's debate was to register the dangers to a critical relationship. We should be alert to those dangers and consider ways in which to minimise them. My modest suggestions might play some part in achieving that objective.

3.6 pm

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I am pleased to take part in this refreshing debate this afternoon. I sense that it will, unusually, be largely consensual and free of partisan point scoring, which is one of the vacuous and synthetic hallmarks of this place and diminishes it.

The debate allows us to show the broad agreement between and within the parties on several foreign policy objectives, especially on our unique relationship with the United States. I recently accompanied the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) to the United States. We were invited to a say a few words at a luncheon about the US-UK special relationship. I hope that they will bear with me as they have already heard what I am about to tell the Chamber.

I used the opportunity to show my lifelong commitment to the unique and important relationship between the United States and Britain. I describe myself as an Atlanticist and a proud European. In our chat at the lunch in Washington DC, I reminded people that during our darkest days, President Roosevelt wrote a letter of introduction to Winston Churchill for his defeated presidential election opponent—Wendell Wilkie. In it, he set out lines from Longfellow:

"...sail on, O Ship of State!
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on the fate!"

I will complete the picture, as it has some resonance today. In a subsequent broadcast, Winston Churchill asked:

"What is the answer that I shall give in your name to this great man, the thrice-chosen head of a nation of 130,000,000? Here is the answer which I will give to President Roosevelt.

Put your confidence in us. Give us your faith and your blessing, and under providence all will be well. We shall not weaken nor tire, neither the sudden shock of battle, nor the long, drawn-out trials of vigilance and exertion will wear us down. Give us the tools and we will finish the job."

I have rehearsed that speech many times, because it is something that I am proud of. It calls on us to remember that we should never take for granted the great debt that the United Kingdom, and civilisation as we know it, owed to the people, the Congress and the President of the United States six decades ago and in respect of subsequent conflicts, and our special bond. It is reflected even as we speak by the fact that the Royal Marines are engaged in conflict now. They are buttressed, supported and supplied by the United States—"the tools" are being provided.

I was interested in what the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said, and I agreed with much of it. We need to nurture the relationship and constantly remind ourselves not to take it for granted. Above all, we need to remind others that it is a unique relationship and, as our report stated—it was published at such an extraordinary time for British-United States relations—the United Kingdom's status as a leading European member adds rather than detracts from its role as the premier ally of the United States. Our role is pivotal between north America, especially the United States, and our colleagues in western Europe, and we have carried out that role well.

Rightly or wrongly, I have a reputation, which I deny, of being a critic of the Prime Minister. I am pleased to be able to speak in the debate because I can show that in terms of the Prime Minister's international stewardship, especially since 11 September, I wholeheartedly endorse what he has done. I am unequivocal: I congratulate him on his skill, zeal, energy and dedication in trying to promote the best interests of the United Kingdom and in tempering what would have been the understandable but reckless hitting out by the United States in the critical hours and days following 11 September. As the Prime Minister showed, only a United Kingdom Prime Minister can have this relationship and he has dispatched his duties with considerable skill and success.

Only when the history of these times is written will we fully understand how extremely important were the initiatives of the Prime Minister and George Robertson, the Secretary-General of NATO, in getting article 5 of the NATO treaty invoked. That enabled us to say to the United States, "Look, we as a world community are wholeheartedly behind you, especially those of us in NATO, but implicit in that is some co-decision making."

People say that the United States goes off and does things and we read about them the following day, but I do not wholly subscribe to that view. That we have been able to ensure some co-decision making and consultation with our principal allies is due largely to the Prime Minister's—and George Robertson's— initiative in invoking article 5, to which I have just referred, and his skill and that of other players in the European Union in helping to bring the Russian Federation and China on board. Against that backdrop I unreservedly commend the Prime Minister's work.

From time to time, people criticise the Prime Minister for being abroad and involved in summitry, but there is no greater duty or burden on a British Prime Minister than ensuring, promoting and protecting our interests internationally. That is his number one duty. A British Prime Minister is somewhat disadvantaged because, unlike a President of the United States or a Chancellor of Germany, he has to deal with many domestic matters that elsewhere state governors or the presidents of the Lander deal with. He is obliged to know about some of the most obscure places and interests in the United Kingdom—as we sometimes hear at Prime Minister's questions. The British Prime Minister has been able to do that at the same time as fulfilling his principal duty. I say without cynicism that I would accept the second deputy Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, fulfilling the role that Clem Attlee carried out between 1940 and 1945 in looking after the domestic situation, thereby allowing the Prime Minister to carry out other important tasks. However, while that might create a good relationship, it could involve a major constitutional change into which I do not want to go now.

When the tragedy of 11 September occurred, members of the Foreign Affairs Committee were not greatly surprised. While none of us could foresee the horror that unfolded on our television sets, the Committee had, in a previous Parliament, examined the threat of weapons of mass destruction and had realised how bad it was. Another reason why I support the Prime Minister is because there is a race against time to prevent the delivery of weapons of mass destruction to other

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cities of western Europe and north America. I believed that before 11 September and I believe it even more now. I am concerned by the degree of complacency and false sense of security among Members of Parliament and some journalists that somehow it cannot happen here.

I hope that I will continue to be proved wrong about that, but we have to regard the situation as extraordinarily grave. It is serious because we know that weapons of mass destruction exist and that despots and wicked people around the world have the capacity to deliver or develop these weapons of mass destruction. We look back almost with nostalgia to the days of mutually assured destruction, which worked, in a perilous way. The Soviet Union was not going to invade western Europe and the United States was not going to invade the Soviet Union and that terrible balance was relatively safe, compared with the dangerous situation now. We therefore need to engage with our United States partners in trying to prevent further outrages and in working doubly hard in our fragile and dangerous world.

Our report alludes to a number of points on which the Government should be engaged. Will the Minister amplify the reference on page 5 of the Government response in respect of the convention on biological and toxin weapons? The United States was unhappy about the draft protocol, which seems to have reached a deadlock. Can the Minister explain why, and tell us whether he sees any way around the problem? Will he also comment on the Government's undertaking to issue a detailed paper on containing the threat from biological weapons?

What further energies have the Government brought to bear in trying to reduce the volume of nuclear material languishing in the old Soviet Union? To what extent are the Government satisfied that that material is being audited, controlled and held? Also, what further measures would assist the Russian Federation in disposing of some of those dangerous materials?

The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee has rightly referred to the skill and dedication of Sir Jeremy Greenstock, our ambassador to the United Nations and his staff, and the work of our colleagues in the British embassy in Washington DC. I wholeheartedly associate myself with those remarks and express the hope that when Sir Jeremy moves on in his career, the United Kingdom can hold on to the chairmanship of the counter-terrorism committee of the United Nations. We have a special capacity to fulfil that role. It would take a successor from another country some time to acquire the skill, expertise, knowledge and relationships that have been built up under Sir Jeremy's stewardship. It would therefore be in the interest of the whole if the chairmanship remained with the UK ambassador.

I have a couple of points that express some reserve or disappointment. I regret that the US still fails to sign up to the International Criminal Court. None of us has any illusions that we are not at the beginning of an embryonic system of international law that may fail and have many deficiencies, and that many people will not recognise it. However, that is a case for trying harder rather than for not trying. I hope that we continue to press the US Administration and our contacts on the Hill to persuade them that the US really should sign up, if only on a conditional basis.

One contributing factor to the dreadful position in the middle east was the policy paralysis immediately after the change of Administration in the US. While a mood of disengagement and lack of interest in the middle east was not the cause of the problems in that region, it certainly did not help to minimise the dangers. I welcome the fuller engagement of the US today.

The middle east is also relevant in the context of international war crimes. We have seen what happened in Jenin and, on the face of it, action way beyond proportionality was taken, which could amount to war crimes. What happened should be investigated. When the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), recently faced the Select Committee, he made it clear that the UK Government had expressed grave concern that the Israeli Government were not allowing UN inspectors and other agencies into Jenin. He hoped that access would be granted later, but after the Select Committee hearing finished, I understand that the Israeli Government continued to be stubborn, which I greatly deprecate. I should be pleased if the Minister would amplify on the current position.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the State Department and the National Security Council in Washington had watched the enormous effort that President Clinton had put into the middle east peace process, and that after Camp David and Taba, they came to the conclusion that Arafat had no intention of doing a deal, so they decided not waste so much time on it?

Andrew Mackinlay: I go along with the hon. Gentleman's recollection of the views expressed to us in Washington, but I depart from the conclusion that the US should not waste more time on it. We simply have to persist on the issue. The more difficult the problem, the more resolution is needed. That has been borne out by events and is accepted by the US, which is now demonstrably involved.

Mr. Chidgey: On that very point, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is strange that America feels that it has no influence on events in Israel, when Israel is the largest recipient of American aid? About a third of American aid goes to Israel. If that is not a lever of influence, what is?

Andrew Mackinlay: I do not want to digress from the debate's main subject matter. I do not mean it discourteously, as I too was tempted down the same road. Seeing my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) is a constant reminder of what we should be discussing elsewhere. However, we are debating UK-US relations, so I did not want to depart from the subject, other than to refer to the US hiccup in using its good offices in the middle east.

Two days ago in the Select Committee I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member

for Exeter, about the director-general of the chemical weapons inspectorate, whom the UK Govt had not supported. Indeed, we voted against him and he was dispatched. In the public hearing, the Minister could not be candid about why the UK had taken the view that it held, so it became a tetchy area between myself, mainly supported by the rest of the Committee, and the Minister. It was inconclusive.

I still think that that matter needs to be resolved. I am concerned because my wife telephoned me earlier and said that there was a briefing note on the issue in the Labour party resource centre at Westminster. I said that it must be a blank sheet of paper, because the Minister had refused to tell the Committee why we voted against that man. However, I have discovered that the paper consists of two pages of A4. I do not want to labour the point, but if the Minister's special advisers can produce a note for Labour MPs on the issue, they should as a courtesy have ensured that members of the Foreign Affairs Committee were written to first. I think that the Minister will take the point.

Donald Anderson: The reply was received today, and the greater part of it will be put in the public domain.

Andrew Mackinlay: I would not pursue the point except for the fact that some see this as evidence of our being prepared to do the bidding of the US State Department. I also regret that the Minister did not feel that he could be more candid with Parliament through the machinery of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

That brings me to my final point, which involves an acknowledgement or credit. When the Foreign Affairs Committee goes to Washington, I find the remarkable candour of our colleagues in the US extraordinarily refreshing. That is the case whether there is a Democrat or Republican Administration and whoever speaks to us on the Hill. I only wish that they could export that candour to Ministers and officials in the UK. I do not say that flippantly. We might hear what we do not want to hear, or we might disagree with it, but our colleagues in the US tell it the way it is. When they say, "We're going to get this guy and cut his head off," I get the drift, and I find that refreshing.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Has the hon. Gentleman ever thought of offering "teach yourself" classes in candour to his Labour colleagues?

Andrew Mackinlay: I might have to find another job one day, so who knows?

Our relationship with the US is, to me, a sacred issue. I have referred to the events of five decades ago, and although I cannot recite it precisely, word for word, I, like others, find it profoundly moving to recall the words of Winston Churchill when Roosevelt died. He said that there was no greater friend that Britain had ever had and no greater champion of justice and freedom, whose arms had stretched across the oceans, than the President of the United States.

When we talk about the President, we also include the people and Congress of the United States. It is essential that we maintain that relationship. I am proud to be associated with it, and I believe that the UK Government's prosecution of foreign policy is in the spirit of and in line with that objective.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Before I call the official Opposition spokesman, I give notice that I intend to call the Liberal Democrat spokesman afterwards. I hope that those hon. Members who wish to catch my eye—all of whom are experienced and distinguished, and many of whom are members of the Foreign Affairs Committee—will apply some self-discipline so that everyone can speak. I intend to call the Minister at five minutes past 5, to enable him to respond to the debate fully. I call Mr. Alan Duncan.

3.28 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I approach the debate with what some might describe as uncharacteristic diffidence, following as I do the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson)—who is proving such a distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee—and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). He has devoted an immense amount of time and energy to this topic over the past few years and, I am pleased to say, shares my views exactly.

I am also rather diffident because, although I am sometimes thought to be a bit of a mimic, I am afraid that I can hardly compete with the Churchillian tones of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay). I shall have to go off and brush up my Napoleon.

We welcome the report, and I am pleased that the Committee focused on our relationship with the United States, which is such an important aspect of foreign policy. I am impressed that the Committee remained undaunted by the scale of its task. The detail and content of its report is testimony to the hard work of its members, and I pay tribute to them for that. I am only sorry that the time allowed does not permit us to consider all the Committee's conclusions, so I shall focus on those that I consider to be especially important.

Much has changed in the world since 11 September, but it is as much a recognition of the process of change that began with the end of the cold war as a sea change in itself. The end of the cold war and the collapse of the bloc mentality, when two superpowers balanced one another, has led to a more fluid international situation. The threat is now the rogue state, or a terrorist organisation, rather than a state intent on waging a conventional war on its neighbour. Such new threats require new flexibility.

The ability to meet those challenges requires a recognition of the unique place that America occupies in the world today. America is the most powerful nation on the planet. It possesses unprecedented military, economic, technological and academic might, unrivalled by others, and we must recognise the exceptional nature of its position. That is the reality, and it is a reality that we must work with.

The contribution that America, often in partnership with Britain, has made to freedom and stability during the past century cannot be exaggerated. The second world war is merely the most obvious example—among many. Too frequently, however, we are asked to choose between two polarised views of America and its foreign policy. We are asked either to condemn and criticise its power and policy as arrogant and aggressive, or to take the view that, because of the special relationship—and

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it is special—we must offer unquestioning and uncritical support. However—let me be clear about this—neither view is correct, or helpful, and I am pleased that the Committee did not feel tempted to fall into the trap of choosing between one and the other.

The reality is that we are the United States' closest ally, with a unique place in American thinking and a unique influence on its policy making. Most of the time, our interests coincide, and we co-operate on the basis of shared culture, outlook and interests—and intelligence. Our affinity with the US is greater than with any other country. However, there are, and there will be, times when our national interests or our perceptions do not precisely coincide. It is important that we recognise that being a true friend means being honest with each other. America deserves the truth from her closest ally, and Britain deserves to have its national interest put first. It is one of the great strengths of our relationship that we can be candid with one another and on occasion disagree, and agree to disagree, without undermining the basic strength and integrity of our relationship. That is the mark of true friendship.

I am pleased to see that recommendations 28 and 29 recognise the fact that Britain's relationship with the US is especially strong and useful because of our position as an active European nation, and because of our special transatlantic links. However, it is a shame that the Government should seem intent on choosing between US links and EU links, which suggests, through their policy of greater involvement in a European common foreign policy, that it is a case of either Europe or America, when in fact it should be both. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that. That, in essence, was the main point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe. Essentially, the view of those favouring closer integration through a common EU foreign policy seems to be that we must forge European nations into a bloc in order to compete with or balance America in some way. We should focus on co-operation with both, not competition. In that context, flexibility is the key. I am glad that the Committee has recognised the value of all our partners.

We share the Government's, and the Committee's, support for our diplomatic staff in the United States and at the United Nations, and we pay tribute to their hard work in furthering British interests, trade and diplomatic links, and for their hard work in the aftermath of 11 September, as expressed in recommendations 24 to 26.

On questions of defence policy, raised in recommendations 3 to 9 and 17, we fully support the Committee's view of the importance of NATO. We recognise the need for reform of NATO, with the question of enlargement featuring highly, and we welcome the Government's support for NATO in their response to the Committee, hoping very much that they will heed our warnings and not continue to press for a European common foreign and security policy, which would risk undermining an excellent organisation that they otherwise fully support.

Our stance on missile defence has always been clear. We fully support the right of the US to take measures to protect itself from the threat of missile attack. Noting Committee conclusions 3 to 7, we hope that the British and US Governments will continue to talk to all concerned parties, particularly Russia and China, and work to find a way forward that will lead to multilateral cuts in nuclear weapon stockpiles and a tightening of non-proliferation treaties and procedures.

In conclusions 19 and 20, the Committee comments on policy towards the Arab-Israel dispute and towards Iran. We fully support the Committee in its encouragement of the US to take an active role in the middle east. As we have said in other debates, that is crucial to any progress. We believe that the Americans have a vital role to play in bringing influence to bear on both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government to achieve a peaceful settlement recognising legitimate Israeli security needs and the need for an independent, viable Palestinian state that is equally secure in its own borders.

The issue, of course, is wider than that, and includes the whole middle east. We share the Committee's support for a policy of constructive engagement with Iran, although, as the report states, we should not proceed at the cost of existing friends. As the Government response states, we must be robust in discussions relating to areas of concern such as Iran's link to Hezbollah, but it is vital that we recognise the moves that Iran is making towards economic and social liberalisation and reform. Those moves are, necessarily, hesitant and slow, but we should not misinterpret them or adopt a shallow stance that might undermine the process of change. Such changes, hopefully leading to Iran's constructive participation in regional politics, and in a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, are as much in Britain's and America's interest as they are in those of countries in the region.

Both Britain and the US must adopt a subtle and regionally sensitive approach to diplomacy, aware of the nuances, and the fact that one basic policy cannot suit all circumstances and countries in this sensitive region. I am pleased to say that when I visited Washington with my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), last December we found US decision makers engaged in a mature, careful and wide-ranging analysis of all possible options for action and policy in Iraq, Israel, and the wider middle east.

We welcome the tenor of the report, emphasising as it does the closeness and importance of our relations with the US and with the nations of Europe. We very much hope that the Government will recognise, as they appear to in their response, that the most appropriate course is to adopt a stance that encompasses both Europe and America, rather than a Euro-integrationist approach. I welcome the fact that the Government, in their response, appear so much in agreement with the policy of flexibility and co-operation with America that we have been advocating for so long. I only hope that it is supported by their actions in the future.

3.38 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): This is a very important and useful debate. Like the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), I pay tribute to the contributions that have been made this afternoon. It was very helpful of you to set out the guidelines for who would be called at what point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that you

might have to make special arrangements for an encore for the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) after a particularly fine contribution, which I will not seek to emulate in terms of drama or poetic value.

As the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton said, the Foreign Affairs Committee is to be congratulated on an important piece of work. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) and his colleagues on their wide-ranging report, which deals comprehensively with fundamental issues that affect the world and lie at the heart of the British-US relationship. Given the timing of the evidence gathering and of the drafting of the report, its tenor could easily have been absolutely dominated by the events of 11 September. It is particularly commendable that the Committee took a broader view and focused on the whole US-UK relationship.

Hon. Members' contributions so far have shown how that relationship works, and we have heard about everything from 11 September to steel. In his valuable contribution, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) rightly warned us of the dangers of being complacent about our relationship with the US.

I shall not go through the report line by line, or recommendation by recommendation, but focus on a couple of themes. We live in a fast-changing world—that is certainly true of the past few months—and it is a great credit to the Committee that much of the report remains valid.

The report characterises the US-UK relationship by saying:

"now is an extraordinary time in British-US relations."

That is a wonderful example of British understatement, of which the diplomats who feature prominently in the inquiry would be justly proud. It is also undoubtedly true of the relationship after 11 September, given the woes of the middle east and the uncertainty over Iraq.

Elsewhere, the report makes appropriate mention of the enduring special relationship between our two countries. Although I endorse that description, I would add another adjective—peculiar. Our relationship is peculiar not only because its form is exclusive to the United States and Britain, but because it is odd. On the one hand, historic ties, a common language and an overlap of culture have given rise to strong bilateral arrangements: the economy is an obvious example, and the current military action in response to 11 September also demonstrates the point. On the other hand, however, the relationship is not always as robust as we might like at the multilateral level of international organisations, treaties or conventions. Indeed, complex currents run between the US and the UK at all levels, which gives rise, as the Chairman of the Committee said, to an increasingly unilateral drift within the relationship. That is not in the interests of the United Kingdom or the United States of America.

At the heart of the report is 11 September. Although it features other issues, it rightly pays much attention to the appalling events of that day and to the response to them, which Parliament has discussed on many occasions. The international war against terrorism and the coalition behind it have enjoyed firm UK support from the outset, and the Liberal Democrats have been happy to back it. It is an enduring and ongoing joint commitment, and we support its aims, not least now that our troops are spending more time in Afghanistan. Even as we demonstrate our closest ties with America, however, as a previous speaker highlighted, there are difficult issues for us, and I hope that the Minister can update us on the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.

The recent tensions over Iraq postdate those developments, but Iraq has been a feature of relations between the UK and the US for a decade or more. As that develops during the next few months, it will be a real test of our relationship. The war against terrorism has been very successfully founded on multilateralism. We receive regular signals from our Government that Britain may back US moves to deal with Iraq—which are currently unspecified—perhaps indicating that the bilateral involvement will continue. If not, will the United States act unilaterally? Does Britain count?

There is a confusion of issues here. Evidence of Saddam Hussein's involvement in the events of 11 September has not been provided. There has been a long-running and very real dispute over Iraqi development of weapons of mass destruction. We would be fools to underestimate the dangers. In dealing with that difficulty, we must consider the global context. Any action taken in Iraq must be based on incontrovertible evidence. It must be backed by a United Nations mandate, and for our own purposes, a House of Commons debate and vote. If we do not follow those steps, any action will carry no favour in this country and, more importantly, will corrode the strong links forged internationally in the war against terrorism. The dangers of a spillover into the ever sensitive events in the middle east is perhaps too horrific to contemplate.

Mr. Maples: The hon. Gentleman has set out what he thinks should happen before there could be any intervention in Iraq. However, if there were incontrovertible evidence of the development of weapons of mass destruction, does he, unlike the Chairman of the Committee, think that there is a pre-emptive right of self-defence, or does he think that we would have to wait until Saddam Hussein actually launched one of those weapons at us or one of our allies before we took any action?

Mr. Moore: I doubt that the hon. Gentleman will care for my reply, but I would say that we should wait and follow the process through much more thoroughly. I would certainly not—as I hope I have conveyed—support pre-emptive action without having seen the evidence. He argues that if we have it, we should go ahead, but I believe that the nature of the action should be determined through and legitimised by the United Nations and the weapons inspectors. I do not believe that we have developed the evidence or the arguments sufficiently to be able to follow the course that he suggests. Instinctively, I would not wish us to follow that course.

The middle east cocktail is explosive and provides a key test for the special relationship. Like the hon. Member for Thurrock, I commend the Prime Minister for the close personal links that he has developed with President Bush. There has been much talk—the clichés are rife—of standing shoulder to shoulder and the need for us to support America. I hope that that means that

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we have the right to a candid word in the President's ear. The principle of "My ally, right or wrong" is flawed. If the special relationship means anything, it must allow the United Kingdom's caution to influence the United States.

I would like briefly to highlight a number of international conventions and agreements over which there is some difficulty between America and us. This is not a uniquely British phenomenon—sometimes it occurs in a European Union context. I do not share the confidence of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton about the development of national missile defence. Such are the long-standing positions of our respective parties. Regardless of that development, the American decision to withdraw from the ABM treaty without putting alternative mechanisms in place to police any missile defence systems that might be developed or allow people to have some confidence about them is worrying. In the meantime, the potential developments in China and Russia in reaction to missile defence are a cause for concern to us all.

The comprehensive test ban treaty, which was signed by the United States in 1996, was rejected by Congress in 1999, as the report reminds us. We have been told that it is unverifiable and incompatible with American security and that there are no plans to submit the treaty to Congress. I argue that those two factors—the development of national missile defence and the failure to ratify that treaty—will have a serious impact on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The Committee was right to emphasise the weakening of the treaty and the contribution of US action or inaction to that.

The hon. Member for Thurrock briefly referred to the issue of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. While not party or witness to the recent discussions in the Foreign Affairs Committee, I share the concerns of those who wondered at the motivation for the removal of Mr. Bustani, who was the leader of that organisation. Some have suggested that he did not fulfil his obligations and that the organisation was weakly led. Part of the reason for that may be that the US is not up to date with its payment dues to the organisation. Will the Minister offer us a perspective on the suggestion that the prospect of inspections in the US made it reluctant to continue to support the leadership of that organisation?

Hon. Members have referred to the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto protocol, which are part of a catalogue of issues that tend to be influenced by the growing unilateralism of the US, as the Chairman said. An encouraging sign is the fact that the US is prepared to pay past dues to the UN. We must hope, therefore, that that spirit begins to infuse its other international diplomatic efforts.

I support the Committee's recommendation that the Government must do all they can to resolve outstanding trade issues between our countries. Trade has become not simply a matter of occasional dispute between the two countries but a problem that may affect the core of our future relationship. The EU-US disputes over steel, over the foreign sales corporation tax treatment, which gave rise to huge potential retaliation from the EU, and over bananas are all examples of the increasingly large and frequent trade disputes between the two blocs.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe made some welcome comments. We have a different philosophical approach and I would rather see an enhanced WTO than the streamlined WTO that he proposed. Anyone who has visited the organisation, as I was lucky enough to do in Geneva, will see that there are some talented and hard-working individuals there who are completely swamped by their work load. Unless they are geared up to cope with the legal power of the US Government, the EU Commission and the various corporations that are often behind the corporate challenges, the organisation cannot succeed. It is important for America and Britain to show some leadership and help the WTO to develop the skills, expertise and capability to cope with increasing technical and important trade disputes.

The report is wide-ranging and welcome and highlights the complexity of the our relationship with the US. We are crucial to each other, and the relationship itself is crucial to the wider world. Not to put too fine a point on it, our prosperity and security depend on our continuing relationship, so we must do all we can on this side of the Atlantic to ensure that it is fostered and grows.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call Sir John Stanley, I ask colleagues to use self-discipline. This is an important debate and many distinguished right hon. and hon. Members want to participate, but we must give the Minister time to reply fully.

3.54 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Having done a quick division sum with the number of those who are seeking to catch your eye, I shall observe your request, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Paragraph 168 of the Foreign Affairs Committee's report says:

> "Iraq remains the greatest threat to a wider peace in the region"—

that is, in the middle east. I wish to devote my remarks to US-UK policy on Iraq. Statements by the American President that the policy of his Government is to achieve a regime change in Iraq have been greeted with much negative comment and predictions of military disaster. I remind the House that similar negative predictions were made when the British and American Governments made earlier commitments to remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait, to take Milosevic's forces out of Kosovo, and to remove the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

On each of those three occasions, the predictions were not fulfilled. The removal of the Iraqi forces from Kuwait was achieved with, happily, very few casualties; if I remember correctly, the removal of Milosevic's forces from Kosovo involved not a single battlefield casualty in the period of the conflict; and relatively few battlefield casualties resulted from the operation to remove the Taliban from Afghanistan. I acknowledge that on each of those occasions there were, regrettably, a number of innocent civilian casualties, but the predictions of military disaster were wholly unfulfilled.

In the light of that experience, and given the fact that the American people and Administration are still scarred—indeed, traumatised—by the recollection of

the American miscalculation over Vietnam, I would expect the American Government to proceed with great care, responsibility and calculation in relation to the Iraqi regime before embarking on further military activities.

I want to put some important policy points to the Minister. There appears to be a significant difference in policy between the American and British Governments about regime change in Iraq. One does not need to read between the lines, but merely to read the lines. I am referring to the words spoken at the joint press conference that President Bush and our Prime Minister gave in Texas on 6 April. President Bush said:

"I explained to the Prime Minister that the policy of my government is the removal of Saddam and that all options are on the table."

The British Prime Minister replied immediately with these words:

"I can say that any sensible person looking at the position of Saddam Hussein and asking the question, would the region, the world, and not least the ordinary Iraqi people, be better off without the regime of Saddam Hussein? The only answer anyone could give to that question would by yes."

There is a substantial difference between what President Bush said, which was a statement of American Government policy, and what the Prime Minister said, which is a posture or attitude. It is not a policy commitment. I should be grateful if the Minister could confirm that it remains the posture of the British Government that a change of regime in Iraq would be desirable but that as of now it is not a policy commitment of the British Government that the Iraqi regime should be changed.

My next point, which also raises a big issue of policy, arises out of the leaking of the nuclear posture review document that the Pentagon submitted to Congress, as it was required to do. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Myers, confirmed in an interview on CNN on 10 March that it was a Pentagon policy document about future US nuclear weapons policy. That document postulates as an option the first use of nuclear weapons against seven named countries: China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, Libya, Syria and Iraq. Of those seven countries, only two are declared nuclear weapon states: China and Russia. The significance of the document lies in relation to the position of the British Government on first use of nuclear weapons.

The British Government set out their policy in the strategic defence review of 1998. The carefully worded key sentence in paragraph 31 of chapter 5 states:

"Britain has repeatedly made it clear that we will not use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear-weapon State not in material breach of its nuclear non-proliferation obligations, unless it attacks us, our Allies or a State to which we have a security commitment, in association or alliance with a nuclear-weapon State."

The Defence Secretary was questioned on the subject in the Defence Committee on March 20. At paragraph 234, in reply to the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight), he said:

"In terms of deterrence, clearly, our nuclear capability deters those who might threaten the United Kingdom with a weapon of mass destruction."

At paragraph 237, referring to what he described as "states of concern", with which he coupled Iraq, he concluded:

"They can be absolutely confident that in the right conditions we would be willing to use our nuclear weapons. What I cannot be absolutely confident about is whether that would be sufficient to deter them from using a weapon of mass destruction in the first place."

The key point that I want to put to the Minister is that the US Government appear to have widened their nuclear policy posture to the possibility of nuclear weapon use, not only against nuclear weapon states but against states that hold weapons of mass destruction: in other words, chemical and biological weapons. Such a state might not possess a nuclear capability. As the Minister knows, there has been some speculation in the press about the key issue of whether the Government are also altering their first use policy, as stated in the 1998 strategic defence review. There has been particular speculation about whether the Government are widening the policy to encompass not only states that possess nuclear weapons but those that possess any weapon of mass destruction.

There may be a compelling case for such a change of policy, but the change would be significant. It should be announced and debated, and the Government would need to justify it fully.

Mr. Maples: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is an important matter if the Government have changed their policy in such a way? I presume that part of the purpose would be to deter a non-nuclear state in possession of weapons of mass destruction. Such a state has to know about it, if it is going to be deterred by it.

Sir John Stanley: I agree. As deterrence is so important, I was concerned about the answer that the Secretary of State for Defence gave to the hon. Member for South Dorset in a public forum:

"What I cannot be absolutely confident about is whether that would be sufficient to deter them from using a weapon of mass destruction in the first place."

A binding obligation on Defence Ministers is to say nothing that would weaken the deterrence posture of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Does not that also undermine the negative security assurance that all the nuclear weapons states gave in the 1995 nuclear non-proliferation treaty? On the Dimbleby programme, the Defence Secretary also spoke about the possibility of pre-emptive strike, as well as first use.

Sir John Stanley: I will leave the hon. Gentleman to develop his argument if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The substantial reduction of tactical nuclear weapons is one of the most significant arms control achievements that have been secured since the end of the cold war. The Conservative Government began that process in this country, and the Government have continued it. There are now no tactical nuclear delivery systems, as far as the British Government are concerned. However, the House will have seen that the United States Government appear to be contemplating a reversal of that policy as part of the nuclear posture review. On 19 March, *The Independent* published an article under the headline, "US starts work on nuclear bunker buster bomb", which said that the United States was developing a new

[Sir John Stanley]

generation of smaller super-hardened and nuclear weapons to smash through rock and concrete and attack underground bunkers where enemy states could build weapons of mass destruction.

It is for the United States Government to argue the defence case for changing their policy. If they have concluded that they need to develop a new generation of tactical nuclear weapons, what is the British Government's view? Are they participating in the American programme? The Minister works in the Department responsible for arms control, so what is the British Government's view of the arms control implications of major nuclear powers developing a new generation of tactical nuclear weapons? Those weapons will all require testing, with obvious implications for the nuclear test ban.

4.10 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I join the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) in commending the report. Once again, the Foreign Affairs Committee has produced an admirably balanced report. It balances two key elements. First, there is the special relationship with the United States, which has been movingly apparent since 11 September and was ably invoked in the Chairman's introductory remarks. Secondly, that has to be balanced with aspects of the Bush Administration's policies—either adopted or advocated from within—that are a matter of grave concern to many people across the political spectrum in Britain.

As the report states, after 11 September our support for the US was unconditional—and rightly so. We did not expect any payback. It was an international obligation to contend against terrorism and we recognised that that might mean a cost to our armed forces, and perhaps even to our civilian population if it led to terrorist attacks on the mainland.

The Prime Minister adopted a high profile in consolidating global support and has been widely seen as exerting a moderating influence when certain people in the Bush Administration—the hawks—had advocated major military actions against a range of countries not necessarily associated with 11 September. The Prime Minister has said that he wants to be a bridge between Europe and the United States. It is important that part of being that bridge consists in expressing the concerns of Europe and the rest of the world to the Bush Administration.

The Leader of the Opposition has been strongly bipartisan in his support for the Government. However, he has always had a close relationship with the hard right in the United States, and I am worried that the preoccupation of both leaders with maintaining close relations with the US might end up with a Dutch auction that could sell out British interests, or even British lives and moral principles, to the whims of the more ideological wing of the current US Administration.

Mr. Alan Duncan: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says, but will he confirm what is evident in everything that the Leader of the Opposition, and indeed all Front-Bench foreign affairs spokesmen, have said in debates on the middle east and Iraq: that we are adopting a balanced and thoughtful view? Will he confirm that we have not realised the fears that he identifies?

Mr. Savidge: Yes. I carefully worded my comments with reassurance about a bipartisan approach. However, I still believe that we should be conscious of the potential risk that I identified, and my comment was intended as a warning to both party leaders.

Support for the US after 11 September was rightly unconditional, but that does not mean that we should give unconditional support to all aspects of the Bush Administration's policies. Similarly, our support for the campaign against terror in response to 11 September should not imply unconditional support for unrelated military adventures, which could endanger the lives of our forces abroad or, through terrorism, our civilians at home. We should recognise that counteracting terror involves many forms of operation, and not only the full-scale military operations that were right for Afghanistan. I want to concentrate on matters of concern between ourselves and the US, which will obviously require careful diplomacy. Whereas before 11 September President Bush was regarded as a controversially elected president by many people in US, they have naturally tended to unite behind him and are particularly sensitive to criticism at present, whether domestic or international. These matters need to be treated with caution.

Several hon. Members have mentioned treaties and multilateralism. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) and the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale spoke of the range of issues on which we are concerned about where the US is going, such as the International Criminal Court, small arms, land mines and Kyoto. We are concerned about the US moving away from the anti-ballistic missile treaty, its attitude to the biological weapons convention and the comprehensive test ban treaty, and the nuclear posture review referred to by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John. Stanley). There is concern about the effects that that review document could have on the most basic treaty of all, the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. I was at the preparatory committee meeting for that treaty—PrepCom—a fortnight ago. I am relieved that it ended up better than was feared but there is still grave danger to the treaty.

There is a section within the US hard right that is so concerned to protect national sovereignty that at times it sounds awfully like a desire for complete national supremacy. All parties in the UK have always backed the concept of multilateralism. It is important that we should unitedly express our concern that the voices of moderation and multilateralism should prevail over what in some areas of the US is now being called the imperial view. In that context, I should like briefly to express concern about missile defence, which in the view of some in the US has been associated with seeking full spectrum dominance. I notice that the report says that it was argued by some that 11 September made a greater justification for missile defence.

It is interesting to note that the national intelligence estimate to the Senate from the 14 intelligence agencies of the US came to an opposite conclusion. It said that if

states or terrorists wished to attack the US with weapons of mass destruction, they were more likely to use a smuggled weapon because that would be less expensive. It could be covertly developed and employed and the source could be masked to avoid retaliation. I would add that it could also be used more accurately and more devastatingly because it could be used without warning. That is the far more major threat on which we should concentrate.

It worries me that with many of these things I get the feeling that ideology, rather than intelligence in either sense, has tended to be the driving force in the US. It is noticeable that the recommendation for missile defence came from a commission chaired by Donald Rumsfeld, who, as the person who had been advocating it for the previous 20 years, would not be an obvious choice as the chair of a committee if one wanted a totally neutral opinion.

The Committee expresses the concern that missile defence could lead to a greater increase in China's nuclear arsenal. That certainly seems to be in line with what the Chinese Government themselves state. There must obviously be a concern that that could lead to an increase in weapons production by India and Pakistan. The report is utterly right to say that the worries over Kashmir and the relations between India and Pakistan need to be stressed. It looked as if there was a tendency for the present Administration to disengage from that, and we should totally encourage the actions of Colin Powell and others in trying to reduce the risks of a conflict there, which could end in disaster. The Administration has also been disengaging in Israel and Palestine.

We must give our full support to what Colin Powell is trying to do. I wish that I could have felt that the US Administration, too, were giving more support to what he is trying to do. I support what the United States has done from the start in trying to advance the Saudi peace proposals, and I recognise the problems in US domestic politics. There is pressure not just from people such as Netanyahu working with the Jewish lobby, but, especially in the Republican party, influence from another fundamentalist wing—the fundamentalist Christian right, whose adherents have a range of curious views about the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation, and are very strongly pro-Israel. I hope that they never bring about armageddon as a result.

We recognise the stresses that the US is under, but it should consider whether this President can follow his father's example in using financial pressure on Sharon if necessary. He should, for example, avoid describing Sharon as "a man of peace" when Jenin is being investigated. That is not helpful to our relations with the Islamic world.

The US must play a vital role in the peace process but because it is in such a partisan position it must involve other players such as the European Union, Russia or the United Nations if Palestine is to have confidence that mediation is even and fair.

The Chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), also mentioned the "axis of evil" speech, which caused some anxiety that there is almost a political fundamentalism in some of the United States thinking. Iraq, especially, is at present a focus of its concern. A related concern was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and by the Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale: the dismissal of Mr. Bustani from his post as director general of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

I am aware of some of the criticisms put out by the Government and by other European Governments to justify their decisions, and I am worried about the dismissal of the chair of the climate change discussions when he did not suit the United States. There is evidence, too, that Paul Wolfowitz has been busily trying to undermine Hans Blix as head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission UNMOVIC. That causes concern about whether international diplomats will be subject to United States bullying and whether the US will accept chemical weapons inspectors being free to inspect in all countries, including the United States itself. After what has been happening with anthrax, it is in its own interests to have such inspections. Whatever happens, there should be an inspection regime for biological, chemical and nuclear weapons to try to achieve a peaceful resolution in Iraq, if that is possible.

Saddam Hussein is a vile dictator who has developed chemical and biological weapons, and used them against his own people. He has denied his people human rights in many terrible ways. As the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling said, in a typically trenchant and thoughtful speech, a change of regime is desirable. However, as the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) said in a debate on the middle east last week, what exactly is new? Why should we be talking about having a war now, rather than a year or two ago, or when some of the US hawks who now advocate war were selling weapons to Saddam Hussein?

On weapons of mass destruction, the US National Academy of Sciences is absolutely right: we should be careful to distinguish between nuclear weapons, which are of a totally different qualitative power, and others. What is the position on nuclear weapons? We are simply told that if all controls were off Saddam Hussein, he might develop them in five years. No one is proposing that the controls be taken off him. He does not have missiles that could reach anywhere near the United States or even the United Kingdom. It was suggested that he might be providing weapons of mass destruction to terrorists. The CIA was asked to investigate, but said that it found no evidence of any such involvement. Once again, one worries that the information that we are receiving tends to come not so much from intelligence sources as from the ideologues in the United States. One understands that the Pentagon's military advice is that war against Iraq could be dangerous. However, it claims that the politicians are not listening to it.

According to the almost religious theory of missile defence, Saddam Hussein is so insane that he is impervious to nuclear deterrence. I do not believe that. He has a murderous obsession with his own preservation. With someone as evil as him, however, if we had a war whose sole purpose was his destruction, we would be withdrawing the only block against his decision to use biological and chemical weapons against Israel. If he were to use them, what is the danger that a Prime Minister such as Sharon would respond with nuclear weapons, and what disaster could that cause? I

[Mr Savidge]

leave aside the bizarre suggestions of the nuclear posture review, and the comments made by our own Defence Secretary to the Defence Committee and on the Dimbleby programme that seemed to imply the possibility of considering pre-emptive nuclear first strikes against non-nuclear weapons states. I admit that I found his comments slightly incoherent, so I am not certain what he meant. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling made those points well.

There is a grave danger in believing that gung-ho militarism can give simple Rambo-style solutions in our relations with Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Libya or other countries. There is a graver danger that such solutions could lead to disaster. The US hawks tend to hold Sharon up as an example. It is worth remembering what Sharon has actually achieved, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) pointed out. In the year in which he came to power, the number of deaths of Israeli citizens was four times what it was in the previous year, and the number of deaths of Palestinians four times as great again. We must learn from all that—which was before this month's terrible carnage.

In this month's issue of the *New Yorker*, someone said that the hawks, imperialists and unilateralists tend to win their way with the US Administration through determination and persistence. We must work together with diplomacy, subtlety and firmness to encourage the more cautious and multilateralist counsels in the United States to prevail.

4.28 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I will endeavour to obey your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that my colleague on the Foreign Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) can also address the Chamber. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. However, this is my maiden speech here, and I still have grave misgivings about this forum. It is a pity that the authorities who decide such matters have allowed a debate on international development to take place on the Floor of the House at the same time. Many of us here would also like to have taken part in that debate. I remain unpersuaded that having this Chamber and putting on debates of this importance in it is the best way to serve the House. That is not criticism of anyone who has spoken, and still less of you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it was something I needed to say.

I will discuss two of the report's recommendations. The report was unanimous, and I was pleased to be part of it. Our visit to Washington and New York was fascinating, and we shall all remember it. The Chairman referred to ground zero; no one could forget that experience, which was moving and sombre in the extreme. I felt a sense of solidarity such as I have never felt with any other people at any time. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), in his inimitable way, spoke most movingly of the special relationship, quoting Longfellow and Churchill—indeed, he not only quoted but acted Churchill. I hope that he never approaches my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) when he is asleep, or he will think that he is being haunted.

We enjoyed a wonderful visit and were extremely well received. Not only was the experience of ground zero moving, it was extremely moving to be approached spontaneously by so many Americans who wanted to shake our hands and say how much they appreciated what Britain was doing. While we were there, the Prime Minister paid one of his flying visits, and we all basked in reflected glory. It would be churlish to deny that he is held in the highest regard by Americans of all political persuasions for the way in which he spoke out so uncompromisingly and bravely immediately after 11 September. One felt a sense not only of solidarity with the American people, but of bipartisanship within the Committee. It is the done thing to support one's Government when one is abroad, regardless of who is in government, but on this occasion it was not difficult, and I was glad of that.

I want to talk about recommendations 19 and 23. A great deal has happened in the middle east since we visited the US. A desperate situation has gone from bad to worse and the middle east is on the brink of what could be the greatest conflagration that the world has seen since the second world war. I hope that our American friends and allies carefully consider their approach to the middle east. In that spirit of candour which was so refreshingly extolled by my hon. Friend—if I may call him that—the Member for Thurrock, one has to say that the Americans have not displayed the acumen and even-handedness that one would expect of a superpower that is seeking to bring peace to a troubled area of the world.

I regret having to say that, but I regret even more the enormous power that the Jewish lobby has in the US. I do not say that as one who is in any sense anti-Jewish. I am proud to have worked for Jewish causes—for example, I was the first chairman of the Campaign for the Release of Soviet Jewry. When I look back on my 30 or more years in this House, that is one of the things of which I am most proud. I yield to no one in my admiration of those who have run the state of Israel for most of its history, but I am deeply troubled by the actions of the present regime. It is important that the US adopt a policy that is more demonstrably and visibly even-handed.

No one can condone the acts of terrorism and ghastly atrocities perpetrated by suicide bombers in Jerusalem and other parts of Israel. They are dastardly acts and deserve to be condemned, although the desperation that drives a 16-year-old girl to blow herself up and take many fellow human beings with her is something on which one has to reflect.

I spoke briefly of those things in the House last week, but I will repeat one point. The Committee refers, in another recommendation, to the UK having relationships in certain parts of the world that are perhaps complementary to those that the Americans enjoy. Just as British Prime Ministers did not consider it wrong to use the services of former Senator Mitchell in Northern Ireland, I hope that the Americans would not disparage the notion of using those who are not American to help to bring peace to the middle east.

I have already put forward the name of John Major, who has some time on his hands and has a wonderful record as a negotiator. He laid the foundations, as the Prime Minister has said repeatedly, for the settlement in Northern Ireland which, although not perfect, is a great

achievement. Furthermore, at Maastricht he negotiated a most skilful series of deals. As a travelling envoy, John Major could bring the sides that are now so far apart at least close enough together to talk again. Any sensible person accepts that the conflict can be resolved only by negotiation. We do not want there to be nothing but destruction and more destruction before a proper attempt is made to achieve peace.

As there is now an international consensus that the conflict will be resolved only when there is both an independent Israel and an independent Palestine within mutually agreed and internationally guaranteed borders, we need someone who can take the parties towards the point at which both readily accept that. It is a tragedy that after coming so close at Camp David and Taba, everything all fell apart, but it did. Although we cannot live in the past, we have to try to recreate the former basis for negotiation, and I can think of no one better able to do that than John Major. Were he to play such a role, that would underline the bipartisan nature of this country's politics in respect of international affairs in general, and the middle east in particular.

Recommendation 23 is very important. It states:

"We recommend that the Government, with the United States Government, do all it can to resolve outstanding trade issues between our countries, and to encourage US citizens not to be deterred from travelling to the United Kingdom for their vacations."

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said, a special relationship is a multi-faceted relationship. It is not merely a question of being close together on issues of foreign policy and defence; a true special relationship must run deep, and of course it does with our American friends and allies. However, it was, to put it mildly, insensitive of the Americans to do what they did or to threaten what they threatened in respect of steel.

When I raised this point in the House, the Secretary of State said rightly that we would never be so petty as to retaliate by withdrawing our support in the war on international terrorism—that would be imbecilic. Nevertheless, the Americans ought to realise that with a staunch and true ally one should behave in all departments as a staunch and true ally. I hope that they will realise that—and something else, too. I have some experience of dealing with companies seeking to sell in the United States; it is not an easy task. I hope that the US will realise that trade, in its widest sense, must always be reciprocal and free between great nations.

That brings me to the second part of the recommendation, to

"encourage US citizens not to be deterred from travelling to the United Kingdom for their vacations."

They still are being deterred. I spoke recently to a great friend who owns a hotel in London. It is a good hotel—not enormous, but small and special—that has been patronised over the years by many American visitors. However, its American bookings have almost completely dried up. I have many friends and a son who are involved peripherally in the tourist industry. We find it sad that many Americans seem to confuse "over here" with anywhere that might be bombed, and they are not willing to travel here to enjoy what we can offer.

I hope that one of the messages to go out from this debate—it will be a test of the efficacy of Westminster Hall if Americans read the reports of it—is that we welcome them here; we want them here. Just as it is right to encourage British citizens to travel in the United States and enjoy their vacations there, so we want American visitors to come here in the same numbers as before the dreadful events of 11 September. By being together, we can increase our friendship and strengthen it. Travel is a great educator and a great builder of friendships. Let us hope that that message will strike home.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock I call him my hon. Friend deliberately talked about candour. I have tried to be candid about friends whom I hold in the highest affection and regard. There is no country in which I would rather travel than the United States, and no people in whose company I would rather relax than Americans. However, they must bear in mind that we too have feelings and sensitivities. We rate them by how they rate us, and we assess that to some degree by whether they come to this country and how they behave here—and by whether they are frightened away. This year, summer in this country will be wonderful—the summer of the golden jubilee.

I am going to obey your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if necessary by ensuring that the hon. Member for Eastleigh has even longer to speak than I have had. This has been a useful debate on a good report, and I am delighted that the Government have responded so positively to it. However, there are more matters on which to reflect, and I would welcome the Minister's comments on my points about the two recommendations.

4.43 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I would not want you to think that I had become stuck to my seat in weary anticipation of contributing to the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On the contrary, I was reflecting on the points made by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) and almost—but not quite—lost my concentration. Mine will probably be the last speech before the Minister either responds or sums up—both would be good.

Let me take us back a couple of hours. When the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee introduced his report, he mentioned that it was the second report on British-US relations within quite a short period, mainly because of the change of Administration. I was privileged to serve on both of the Committees and, therefore, to take part in both investigations. It is a terrible act of fate that, between the two investigations, the appalling events of 11 September took place. However, that allowed us to witness the impact of those events on relations between the United Kingdom and the United States. It was clear to me that there was a step change between our previous relationship and that post-11 September. Colleagues who shared the experience found that too.

Throughout our long history, our relationship with the United States has invariably been good. However, it appeared from our meetings to have become remarkably more influential in the sphere of military strategy and action, particularly with regard to the war against terrorism, as well as in terms of intelligence gathering, diplomacy and foreign policy. I should like to dwell briefly on each of those areas.

[Mr. David Chidgey]

In military terms, one of the most fascinating aspects of our investigation was to discover that in the war against terrorism, particularly immediately following 11 September, the United States—the great superpower the like of which has never before been seen—needed help from the United Kingdom's resources, not only in terms of bodies on the ground, but in terms of our ability at the highest and middle levels of military service to integrate with its strategic command operations. We were an integral part of the United States' response to terrorism in the early days. Furthermore, unlike almost every other western country, we had the ability to operate globally in the military sense. France, too, has a global capability, but France does not have the relationship that we have with the United States, and consequently could not build on it at that stage.

In the realm of gathering and analysing intelligence, our special relationship enabled us to contribute to the war against terrorism in a major way in the days immediately following the terrorist attack. A strange result of the collapse of the Soviet empire, and the ensuing peace dividend, was that the US decided, as a matter of policy, dramatically to reduce the number of CIA field officers around the world. However, it is apparent that the UK's network remained almost intact; I have no knowledge of the reasons for that. Immediately after the terrorist attacks on Washington and New York, the United States found itself relying on the United Kingdom's assets to help it to launch the war against terrorism.

In the sphere of diplomacy and foreign policy, we discovered in our discussions in New York that the United States relied to a marked extent on the formidable expertise of the United Kingdom mission to the United Nations. When the United States was drafting resolutions for approval by the UN Security Council, it used our mission to play devil's advocate with its draftspeople; our wisdom and expertise helped it to agree the text that had the best chance of gaining the Security Council's support. Furthermore, our delegation used its best endeavours and was instrumental in securing the agreement of the other members—something that, because of the unfortunate situation in which America finds itself vis-à-vis the UN, the US could not do.

I, too, pay tribute to Sir Jeremy Greenstock for the work that he and his mission have done, especially in the counter-terrorism committee, of which Sir Jeremy is chairman. Excellent progress has been made under his stewardship. As other hon. Members have said, Sir Jeremy and his team have played a vital role during the past six months in making the committee work. Is it not vital, and in Britain's interests, that we continue to provide the resources to make the committee a powerful voice for introducing anti-terrorism measures? That is what I want, and I would like the Minister to respond to that point. There is undoubtedly a great will and a great desire in the Security Council to ensure that we continue to chair the committee and that our mission has sufficient resources to do so effectively. That is the desire of Security Council members around the world, and it is our responsibility to ensure that we can make that contribution.

Since 11 September, we have been in a unique position in our relations with America. It is as though we have a unique window of influence on how the United States pursues its strategy and policy in international affairs. That interesting fact is well appreciated by our allies and enemies alike. It is recognised on the world stage that following the strange and appalling acts of fate of 11 September, Britain has developed the special relationship to a degree never before seen, and that has put us in a special place in terms of our influence on world affairs. Those events have given us a massively enhanced role, and we have a window of opportunity, but we cannot guarantee that it will remain open for the foreseeable future. The challenge for our Government is to grasp and build on that opportunity and pursue Britain's interests in the present climate of the special UK-US relationship.

Hon. Members have mentioned key issues, including rogue states such as Iraq and Iran. Britain must not stand back just because America is the superpower; we must reflect on and understand what is happening in the United States. It is obvious from our investigations and from discussions with hawks in the Bush Administration that they still bear the scars of previous policy failures. We should not forget that some advisers served in the Administration of George Bush Sr., and consider Iraq to be unfinished business. Some were involved in even earlier American Administrations, such as that of Jimmy Carter, which met with disaster in Iran. That, too, is unfinished business. Those influential politicians and political advisers are determined to ensure that the debt of honour is repaid.

At a Foreign Affairs Committee sitting earlier this week, a Foreign Office Minister who was giving evidence made it very clear that he had seen nothing to link Iraq to 11 September. The Government need a strong voice if they are to rein in the right wing in the Senate and in Congress.

A pre-emptive strike on Iraq could well cause the collapse of the coalition against terrorism, which we have worked hard to build through Government offices and diplomatic channels. A strike could threaten the stability of Turkey, which is our strongest ally in the region. It hopes to become a member of the European Union: if it were, we would be talking about a regional war on Europe's doorstep, not in another part of the world. We must understand the importance of such a strike and what its results could be.

To refer again to this week's sitting of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Minister who was giving evidence said that in some circumstances, a pre-emptive strike in self-defence could be carried out within international law. As a Government representative, the Minister here today has a duty to tell this Chamber what those circumstances are. It is not good enough to pursue British foreign policy—to launch a war against a country that has made no attack on us—on the basis that it would be legal in some circumstances. We have a right to know. We should bear in mind that it was made clear during our investigations that the United States takes the view that it will act first with a pre-emptive strike and compile its legal justification afterwards. Is that also the UK Government's policy? I would like the Minister to respond to that question.

It is clear to me that any action against Iraq or any other rogue state must be sanctioned by international law and come under the auspices of the United Nations, and it must be appropriate and proportionate. In that context, the excellent work that our mission has done at the United Nations under Sir Jeremy Greenstock has been recognised throughout the United Nations Security Council and the General Assembly. Our team's success has brought the burden of extra work, but we should build on our good work and make absolutely sure that that mission has all the resources that are needed to keep Britain's voice and influence at the centre of international affairs in the war against terrorism.

Several hon. Members have talked about America's policy on missile defence—star wars 2. I want to make a few comments about that. I am conscious of the time, but with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, four minutes should see me out. Your nod of approval is gratefully received.

Let us be realistic about star wars 2. It is all very well for us to pontificate, on a sunny Thursday afternoon, about how right or wrong it is of America to pursue a policy of missile defence. The bald fact is that it is doing so. British influence, British foreign policy and the way we use our special relationship should reflect the facts. The fact is that the Americans are spending billions of dollars on getting the technology right. To allow themselves to carry out tests that are essential to their development work, they have already agreed—at least, they told Mr. Putin in advance—that they are going to abandon the ABM treaty. Unless some unforeseen technical glitch occurs, that is what will happen.

Surely, therefore, it is time for the Government to come off the fence. When they are questioned about their policy, the Government can no longer get away with saying, "We don't have a view, because we haven't yet been asked to take part." I am sorry; that just will not do. Within the next six to 18 months, these things will happen, and we in Parliament have a right to know what our Government's view is on that American policy, which has ramifications for foreign policy, diplomacy and military strategy throughout the world, not just our little corner of it.

I turn to the middle east. One of the most interesting things to emerge from our investigations and subsequent discussions is that many Arab nations, which are the nations most directly affected by and concerned about the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, innately distrust the United States, presumably because of its history of unquestioning support for Israel. It is also interesting to discover that many Arab nations, especially the Gulf states, are well aware of the special relationship that we have with the United States, and they hope that we have some influence in that respect. They seem to acknowledge the long history and involvement of the United Kingdom in the Gulf region. Perhaps based on the principle "better the devil you know", they are pressing us to take a more active involvement in leading the search for peace in the middle east, helping organise emergency aid, seeking reparations for the destruction that has taken place under the Israeli incursions, rebuilding the shattered infrastructure, and bringing America in with us. That is an interesting point to which I hope the Minister will respond.

It was a kick in the teeth for many people in this country—not least people in the Minister's constituency—when the United States introduced the tariff affecting the steel industry. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) made an interesting point about having a standing conference composed of members from the European Union and the Americas to anticipate such eventualities. How is it that even with our enhanced relationship with the United States, the Government did not anticipate the steel tariff and the embargo? How is it that we could not use our influence to deflect or mitigate those actions? Did the Government not get any advice or advance notice, or was it just a matter of failing to act? There are many facets to a special relationship, of which trading terms are one. We seek answers to those questions.

5.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): This has been an enjoyable debate, particularly because it has allowed a wide range of comments on our most important relationship, with the United States. Mention was made of the venue for our proceedings. We would all rather have the debate in the Chamber, but the Liaison Committee decides these matters and allocates the dates. We are having more debates on foreign policy because of Westminster Hall and, as I shall announce shortly, we will have another debate on the United Nations, which may allow right hon. and hon. Members to develop some themes that have been raised in this debate. Many subjects have been covered and speeches have ranged far and wide—well beyond the report, which is our ostensible subject. I shall try to address most of the points raised. If I fail to do so in the course of my speech, I shall be happy to write to hon. Members.

The Government welcome the Committee's careful and considered examination of the major multilateral issues that dominate the UK-US relationship. The Foreign Affairs Committee's visits to the United States played their part in demonstrating Britain's willingness to work closely with the United States at a unique time. The Government appreciate the Committee's recognition of the work and the role of our diplomatic posts in the US, and in particular their words of congratulation to the staff in New York for their exemplary action on behalf of the victims of the terrorist atrocities of 11 September.

A few weeks ago, I answered a question in the House on whether the Government would raise the question of oil drilling in Alaska with the US Administration. I said no, because the matter was one for the US Congress. I also said that parliamentarians needed to engage with all the sources of policy making in the United States, including the elected members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, whose decisions, laws or reaction to international treaties weigh heavily in deciding US policy. Our media—and some hon. Members in their remarks in our debate—tend to focus exclusively on the White House and the Administration, but the United States is a vigorous, debating and self-correcting democracy. We need to increase our parliamentary contacts with the lawmakers of the US as well as engaging with the influential pressure groups—

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

such as the labour unions, which played a big role in President Bush's decision on steel, and the Churches, which wield a great deal of influence in deciding US policy and interventions.

I welcome the report and the comments that have been made in the debate. I also urge all my fellow Members of Parliament to go west regularly and engage with our friends and fellow legislators not only in Washington, but in the powerful regional political networks that make up the state assemblies.

Each year, 4 million to 5 million visitors go both ways across the Atlantic. Obviously, I regret any drop-off in the number of visitors from the US. Quite a lot were influenced by the slightly over-excited political debate that surrounded foot and mouth. We knew that we had an epidemic and that it would last for a certain period. On the basis of experience, we also knew that it would be contained and dealt with, yet international reporting made it appear as if Britain was closed. We all bear some responsibility for presenting to the rest of the world the calm and welcoming nature of our country.

In this debate, and in other discussions about the US and the UK since 11 September and in articles in our newspapers, we seem to be engaged in our own private discussion with ourselves, as well as in a public debate about the meaning of America. Almost all the speeches in this debate have been pro-America, but given some of the recent speeches in this Hall on aspects of US policy, I have been rather surprised at the support for the US that hon. Members have expressed.

Whatever position we start from, we all want more, not less, engagement with and by the US. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said earlier this month in Crawford, Texas, the way forward must be based on engagement, not isolationism. We need to engage with America.

Of course we all have a certain idea of the US, and mine is the America that saved freedom on this continent twice in the last century. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) was very eloquent in his wholly inimitable contribution. In the words of the ancient Greeks, young Americans gave their tomorrow so that Europe could enjoy its today.

My America is the one that stood up to communist tyranny when many sought to do business with the Stalins, Brezhnevs and other dictators. It is the America that stopped its own war in Vietnam because the people said no to the elite. It is the America that, from President Truman through to John F. Kennedy and President Bush the first, has always supported the construction and unity of Europe and, in the last case, the creation of the single currency.

My America imposed sanctions on South Africa in the 1980s and sent an African-American to be ambassador in Pretoria at a time when some political leaders—I mention no names—were rolling out the red carpet for the white supremacists of apartheid. It is the America that each year opens its doors to millions of legal and what are called undocumented immigrants, who immensely enrich that nation, in contrast to the fear and loathing of the anti-foreigner political class in Europe and our rabid and racial press campaigns against immigrants. Some 20 million legal immigrants, and as many, if not more, undocumented immigrants, have entered the US since 1980, each of whom has found a new life and new hope for their families and children.

My America runs a massive deficit in trade and services with the rest of the world—$750 billion of imports each year. Economists roll their eyes at that deficit, so I am delighted that the shadow Chancellor has joined us at the end of the debate. However, each import represents a job in a poorer country, not least our own. It is up to us in Europe to discover the same capacity for job creation, productivity and economic dynamism. It is an America where a black man born in poverty in the Bronx can hold the mightiest office in the greatest democracy, although he has to sit in the State Department and listen to patronising and simplistic attacks from the all-white technocrats of a European elite. It is an America that launched civil rights and women's rights as great campaigns that changed our continent.

There is another America, whose policies the Government do not agree with, and I shall outline some of those disagreements. However, as hon. Members from all sides have pointed out, we want a better America that engages with the world, and the policy of the Government and of our partners in Europe seeks to lead us in that direction.

We agree too that our relationship with the United States should remain forward-looking, and that it is just as important—if not more—in the 21st century as in the 20th century. The relationship will continue to be strong, particularly now, when our national interests coincide as much as they ever did. Britain's strategic partnership with the United States remains fundamental to the national security of this country. Yet, as the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) pointed out, we are part of Europe and our role in the European Union enhances rather than detracts from our relationship with the US. The anti-Americanism of some on the European left—I speak as a man of the left—is as tiresome as the anti-Europeanism of many on the British right. We can play a pivotal role, but by no means an exclusive one, in drawing the US and our European partners closer together and in helping to articulate their views to each other.

We should not be arrogant. Yesterday I was in Sweden, where I found a determination to support Israel's right to exist and an understanding from the Swedish Government of the threat that Iraq poses that would not be out of place in Washington. It was *Le Monde* that headlined its front page editorial a few days after 11 September with the words "Nous sommes tous americains"—we are all Americans—and Chancellor Schröder who wrote an article last year in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* under the heading "Germany: America's Best Friend in Europe". The peoples and Governments of the Netherlands or Poland, to name but two European nations—one could add others—are as proud of their friendship with the United States as we are. When Britain speaks to America we are part of the Europe, which I believe forms the majority of the continent, that wants more engagement with and by America.

international coalition against terrorism has demonstrated what can be achieved when we and our European partners work with the US. The Prime Minister and President Bush are committed to taking forward the fight against terrorism in a measured, calm way that has been carefully thought through. The debate between the Governments is an intense one and it does not help to portray it in hysterical language—we have not heard any in the debate but one encounters it in some of our press and in speeches by other hon. Members. Since the tragic events of 11 September, the value of our relationship to each other has been reinforced. It was an attack on us all, with more than 67 British citizens murdered by the terrorist atrocities. It was an attack on our shared values and a test of our integrity. Together we have met the challenge.

We are not always in agreement with the United States, but we engage as close friends and allies in an open, frank and positive manner. The US is in no doubt of our position on areas where we do not agree. Today's debate has shown many examples of that. We shall always fight for Britain's interests and beliefs and so we will, for example, continue to make clear our opposition to the use of the death penalty, which hon. Members have not mentioned but which is an issue of concern to British people, lobbying on it with our EU partners or bilaterally at state and federal level.

The trading relationship between the US and the EU is the biggest in the world—it represented about a fifth of all world trade in 2000. Some of that two-way trade is subject to disputes.

Mr. Howard: Why is the death penalty in the United States a matter on which the Government and the European Union intervene, while oil in Alaska is not? The Minister said that oil in Alaska is a matter for the Americans, so why is not an appropriate punishment in their own judicial system?

Mr. MacShane: The right hon. and learned Gentleman should not mix up an economic decision with what many people around the world regard as a cruel and inhuman punishment. It is right to raise our concerns about such moral issues.

Some disputes over trade are inevitable, but the rule-based WTO system offers the best mechanism for dealing with such disputes and, through our membership of the EU, it is the forum in which to settle our trade differences. Real progress has been made on the trade agenda between Europe and the US—for example, the resolution of the banana dispute last April and the launch of a new WTO round in Doha last November. However, big differences still exist and President Bush' s recent announcement on steel import restrictions came as a great disappointment.

I can inform the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) that, having been alerted to it more than a year ago by US steel union comments, I raised my concern about that matter with the US trade representative, Mr. Zelig, last August. My noble Friend, Baroness Symons, the Minister for Trade and Investment, also raised it, as did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. We believe that the US action breaches WTO rules and has no economic justification. The Prime Minister, addressing UK steelworkers in an article in the current issue of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation journal, said:

"I can promise ISTC members that Britain's outright opposition to the American steel industry's demands for tariffs was made directly to President Bush by me. I informed President Bush personally, by letter, and by phone about Britain's hostility to any move to restrict unfairly steel imports . . . I also told him that if the US did impose tariffs, Britain and the EU would have no choice but to ask the WTO to declare the move illegal. In the meantime, we have to take steps to protect our own steel industry and the people who make these plants amongst the most productive in the world."

As a constituency Member, I know that those remarks were warmly appreciated in the steel communities of the UK, as were statements made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in south Yorkshire last Friday in an effort to get the US to change its mind on UK steel exports. That discussion is continuing.

Climate change, or more commonly the Kyoto protocol, is another area where we do not share the US policy approach. We believe that the Kyoto protocol, with its legally binding targets and timetables, is the most effective way of reducing emissions and tackling climate change. The agreement reached on the protocol in Bonn and Marrakesh last year demonstrated the international community's commitment to Kyoto. As a result, Kyoto is alive and well and I am delighted to hear the news that Russia has initiated its ratification procedure.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I hate to introduce an acrimonious note into a constructive afternoon, but the Minister is reading a prepared speech and not dealing with the issues raised in the debate.

Mr. MacShane: I do not have the ability of other hon. Members to speak spontaneously for hour after hour without a note in my hand. After many more years service in the House I may reach that nirvana. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall attempt to deal with all the specific points that have been raised. If I fail to do so, I shall happily write to hon. Members.

We hope to complete ratification procedures for Kyoto and to allow the protocol to come into force before the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg. We also believe that we should continue a discussion with the US in order to benefit from each other's experiences and continue to seek opportunities to share information.

The International Criminal Court was mentioned. We worked hard to get the International Criminal Court Acts of 2001 through Westminster and Edinburgh in good time for ours to be among the first six ratifications. We want other countries to sign up to the ICC. It is disappointing that the US has been impervious to persuasion that its objections to the International Criminal Court are unfounded. We do not see much chance of a change of heart under the present Administration. We hope that the US—a nation based on the rule of law, not of men—will understand in time that creating the court will help human rights and democracy.

A Green Paper will be published next week on the biological and toxin weapons convention, about which we have also have disagreements with the US, as hon. Members mentioned.

[Mr. MacShane]

Hon. Members discussed the middle east in some depth. We had a full debate last week, and I do not propose to repeat those arguments. We welcome President Bush's statement, "Enough is enough," and the efforts made by Secretary of State Colin Powell in person to show US engagement. In his Mansion House speech a fortnight ago, the Foreign Secretary said:

"The world has to get behind US Secretary of State Colin Powell as he works to stop the violence and persuade both parties to re-engage in the process of peace. Yes, negotiation inevitably involves compromise: but compromise, a readiness to see and to accommodate the other side, can be a great and honourable thing."

Mr. Chidgey: Will the Minister respond to my comments about the interesting reaction from Gulf and other middle east states calling for more direct involvement by the British Government in the middle east peace process?

Mr. MacShane: If the hon. Gentleman checks the visits, statements and interventions made by Ministers and Members about British involvement, we shall not be found wanting. We must decide that the way forward should be based on a viable Palestinian state, the end to illegal settlements and a guarantee that Israel will have normal, peaceful, state-to-state relations in the region. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) suggested the deployment of the former Prime Minister, Mr. Major, as a peace envoy—a suggestion, which I shall convey to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

There has been considerable speculation about military action against Iraq, which I have read with interest. However, I can assure the House that no decision has yet been taken, and no military action is imminent. We are looking at Iraq from the wrong end of the telescope. Instead of focusing on Washington, we should surely be mobilising public opinion to support the UN, and uniting to apply pressure on Saddam Hussein to get him to comply with UN resolutions. He can help to solve the problem tomorrow by agreeing to let in an effective team of weapons inspectors. However, we should be clear that the Iraqi regime has these weapons of mass destruction, and it has shown on several occasions that it is prepared to use them. Faced with that threat, the international community's most pressing demand is that the weapons inspectors be allowed to return and finish their work.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) sought to find some difference between President Bush and the Prime Minister on the desirability of a regime change. I have the full text of the press conference from which the hon. Gentleman quoted. The Prime Minister said that the world and the Iraqi people would be better off without the regime of Saddam Hussein, and that doing nothing in these circumstances is not an option. It is clear that we identify with the United States' view.

Sir John Stanley: Is it the British Government's policy to bring about a regime change in Iraq?

Mr. MacShane: The Prime Minister made it clear that it is the will of the British Government to see a regime change in Iraq. I also made that clear in the House of Commons in answer to a similar question in Foreign Office questions earlier in this Session. I am not sure whether I declare policy—I am too modest and novice a Minister to do so—but we are splitting hairs. The Prime Minister's statement in Texas is perfectly clear.

Mr. Savidge: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. MacShane: I want to make progress, as there are other issues that hon. Members want me to deal with. I will give way to my hon. Friend, but the price is that in six minutes' time, at the end of the debate, we will not have discussed all the issues that have been raised.

Mr. Savidge: We may think that there are many countries in the world where a change of regime would be desirable, but I trust that we would not consider war in every case in order to effect it.

Mr. MacShane: Iraq represents a threat to regional peace, as many hon. Members have pointed out. It has used weapons of mass destruction against its own people and it is next to a member state of the United Nations. To debate whether a change of regime is desirable in Iraq—it certainly is, in my view—is a mistake. Our discussion on Iraq should focus on trying to press, and if necessary force Saddam Hussein to comply with the United Nations resolutions on weapons inspections. The Foreign Affairs Committee endorsed the Government's policy of engagement with the Iranians based on supporting the reformers in Iran while maintaining a robust dialogue on issues of concern.

I shall now deal with some of the specific issues raised by hon. Members, and thus avoid having to write to them. Reference was made to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its change of director. The decision was taken this week by a vote of 48:7 that the gentleman in question had not shown sufficient drive in management or policy to deliver the organisation that the international community wanted. The votes deciding his removal from office came from Asia, Africa and nearly all the east and west European countries. We must be careful not to allow every decision taken around the world to be refracted into the issue of Iraq.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling asked about the nuclear posture review paper in the United States. As statements about that leak made clear at the time—I echo the right hon. Gentleman's words—it was not a new policy but a contribution to a debate, part of which we welcomed. It was an affirmation of scaling down the level of nuclear warheads that the United States holds, and at the time a commitment to no first use of nuclear weapons. I will refresh my memory on the matter and write to the right hon. Gentleman if he wants.

Other hon. Members have debated whether any nation is able to use any of the weapons that it possesses in the manner best designed to maintain its security. I am not going to announce that Britain, faced with what it would perceive to be a direct threat, would not use all the necessary means at its disposal to maintain the nation's security. That would be of the highest irresponsibility and I am surprised that I was asked to comment on it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) asked about help for Russia in disposing of nuclear weapons and material. The Government have taken an active lead in that matter and I will be happy to write to him about it.

I was asked about Guantanamo Bay and the status of the British citizens who are prisoners there. They have had visits—the most recent was last month—and we are seeking another. We have been assured that their treatment is in accordance with international humanitarian norms. The International Committee of the Red Cross has a permanent presence there. The United States and all countries that have citizens there are still discussing their legal status. It is a conundrum and it is right that we engage with the United States on the matter. If—

It being half-past Five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 1 May 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Defence Policy (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Fitzpatrick.]*

9.30 am

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): I express my thanks to Mr. Speaker for selecting this important topic for debate, coming as it does in the midst of a national consultation on the significant new chapter of the strategic defence review. I hope that the many hon. Members who represent Scottish constituencies use this opportunity to contribute their suggestions about the new chapter. The debate is important as it deals with the issues posed in the aftermath of 11 September and concerns the possible need for us to reconfigure our defence requirements as a result of such atrocities.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence outlined his reasons for opening a new chapter of the strategic defence review in December last year, he summed up his thinking in one line. When commenting on what happened on 11 September, he said that we must

"ensure that Britain has the right defence concepts, capabilities and forces to deal with threats of this kind and of this scale."

We are not starting with a blank page. The United Kingdom has a long and proud military history and our armed forces continue to be among the best in the world.

The original SDR that was conducted three years ago by Lord Robertson of Port Ellen was widely praised as a model of how modern defences should be planned and structured. It set out clear policy guidelines from which our military procurement and planning would follow, and laid out the range of capabilities needed to defend the UK. Indeed, the action that we have taken since 11 September has been made possible thanks, in large part, to the work carried out in the SDR.

However, it would be wrong to assume that our defence requirements are set in stone, and we must now ask some serious and probing questions about how equipped we are as a country to deal with the growth of asymmetric threats and rogue nations. Although the consultation document outlines questions and comprehensive options, I shall restrict my remarks to only one—that, which the document describes as "engaging the causes", in other words, dealing with the ways in which to prevent further atrocities such as 11 September. Incidentally, I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend resisted calling that chapter "Tough on asymmetric threats, tough on the causes of asymmetric threats", but that more or less sums up the position.

It is encouraging that the Government are actively consulting on ways in which UK forces can help developing states build better counter-terrorist capabilities for themselves, as well as assisting those developing countries in an ongoing humanitarian effort to defuse potential terrorist activity before it is too late. Such objectives are not contradictory and, even if they occasionally sit uneasily together, they should not be decoupled. I am pleased that the Government are giving a commitment to that end. That aim will mean a concerted and ongoing global effort, which the UK cannot do alone, and deeper co-operation with other agencies such as the UN, the EU and our NATO allies will be needed if we are to succeed in that noble task.

What are the implications for Scotland? There are three main areas. First, and most importantly, Scottish members of the armed forces have been at the forefront of many of our recent campaigns in Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and elsewhere. I hope that hon. Members agree that we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to those men and women. In future, even more may be asked of them, but I believe that they will be equal to the task.

Secondly, many of our Scottish bases may be asked to assume new or different responsibilities in the changing environment. The Ministry of Defence has 374 sites in Scotland, covering nearly 25,000 hectares, including some in my constituency. That amounts to about £1.3 billion in cash terms alone—a considerable investment. At present, 10 per cent. of those employed by the MOD work in Scotland, a figure that has grown in recent years.

I hope that those who are negotiating a transfer to the private sector at Faslane and Coulport receive favourable terms in relation to pay, conditions and pensions. I understand that good progress has been made between management and the unions, but I would welcome assurances on those points.

The third implication for Scotland is in the vital realm of defence procurement and defence-related jobs. In order to be brief, I shall restrict my remarks to naval procurement, in which I have a strong constituency interest.

I am delighted at the success of the Clyde yards in securing major new defence contracts, especially for type 45s, which are worth about £2 billion. The Government have announced their intention to embark on the largest warship building programme since world war two, and they have already brought a degree of job security to Clyde shipyards that we have not known in many years.

We await with keen interest the placing of the contracts for the new aircraft carriers. Yesterday's announcement in the Scottish press of the agreement between BAE Systems and Clydeport that the Inchgreen dry dock in Inverclyde would be used for assembling the aircraft carriers should the bid be successful was extremely welcome news. As a Member who represents a constituency that contains Inchgreen, I strongly urge my hon. Friend to support that excellent bid.

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I thank my hon. Friend for having secured this excellent debate. I apologise that, because of a Standing Committee, I shall not be able to stay for all of it.

I share my hon. Friend's pride in the shipyard work and the warship orders that have been placed. Does he agree that while Rosyth dockyard and the Clyde shipyards hope to secure work on the new aircraft carriers, we are all clear that such work and a prospect

[Rachel Squire]

of a secure future would not be available to us if Scotland were to go down the road of independence or had voted Conservative?

David Cairns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who, with her customary foresight, pre-empts my next passage. I am sure that the Rosyth bid will be excellent.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): When the Conservative party comes to government three years from now, we shall continue orders for the carriers.

David Cairns: I accept the sincerity with which that assurance is given. However, my constituents in Greenock and Inverclyde have been used to many assurances from previous Conservative Governments, and have learned to treat those assurances with the deep scepticism that they deserve. Indeed, our ability to build ships in Greenock and Inverclyde is recovering only now from 18 years of decimation brought by the Conservative party when it was in power.

On a wider note, following the introduction of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire), today is the fifth anniversary of Labour's return to office. It was a glorious day, pretty much like today, as I remember.

Throughout the past five years, the Government have shown beyond all doubt our commitment to the maxim that a Government's first duty is to defend their citizens. It follows axiomatically that the first duty of a political party that aspires to government must be to explain to those citizens exactly how it proposes to defend them.

During a recent debate in a Scottish Grand Committee, some of my hon. Friends were uncharitable enough to suggest that the Scottish National party had a somewhat insubstantial defence policy. *[Interruption.]* I, too, was shocked to hear that. I decided to verify the matter for myself, and must report that to call SNP defence policy insubstantial would be flattering. There is next to nothing on the subject on the SNP's website, and a search of *Hansard* yields slim pickings.

In desperation, I turned to the SNP's 2001 general election manifesto, a document so compelling that it moved the SNP into third place in Greenock and Inverclyde—down from second place, unfortunately. It secured the party the princely total of less than 15 per cent. of the vote. The manifesto contains some interesting paragraphs on defence, although considerably fewer than those devoted to a fascinating article called "A Day in the Life of Alex Salmond", which I warmly commend to hon. Members who have not read it. To summarise it, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) gets up, talks a lot of nonsense and goes back to bed.

The paragraphs on defence make fascinating reading. In them, for example, the SNP says that

"our opposition to nuclear defence will make our continued participation in nuclear alliances difficult."

The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who could not be here due to a long-standing engagement, sought to clarify the policy during a Scottish Grand Committee debate. I told him yesterday that I would quote him. He said that

"we cannot take part in an alliance predicated on the first strike of weapons of mass destruction. That is a principle on which we are not prepared to compromise."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 5 March 2002; c. 26.]

Nothing could be clearer: an independent Scotland will be out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on principle.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Does my hon. Friend agree that withdrawal from NATO would leave not only Scotland but Britain in an intolerable position? It would do nothing for the world's fight against terrorism.

David Cairns: My hon. Friend is right. It is bizarre that while countries across Europe are queuing up to join NATO, the SNP thinks that Scotland should leave it. Scotland would be the only country ever to leave NATO. However, if that is the policy, no one seems to have explained it to Mr. Colin Campbell, a Member of the Scottish Parliament and the official SNP defence spokesperson. He told the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament:

"The SNP supported full participation in NATO but the stumbling block of first use of nuclear weapons made it modify its stance.

The SNP states that an independent Scotland should not be part of the NATO command structure".

Mr. Campbell chose his words carefully. He could have said, "An independent Scotland should not be part of NATO—full stop", but he did not. He spoke of the command structure only. Mr. Campbell knows full well that, as France has proved, it is possible to be in NATO but not in the command structure. So which is it to be? The SNP can either be out of NATO on principle, which is what the hon. Member for Moray clearly stated, or it can be out of the command structure but a member of the rest of the organisation, as Mr. Campbell desires. It cannot do both. The point is important, and the SNP must clarify the matter urgently.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): As my hon. Friend is no doubt aware, the SNP states elsewhere in its manifesto that it would

"negotiate a phased withdrawal from NATO but will retain military co-operation with NATO nations as a result of . . . other proposed international involvements."

We have heard about withdrawal from NATO from one quarter, participation in NATO but not in the military command structure from another, and withdrawal but co-operation from yet another. Is not that just one more example of the inconsistency of the SNP's policy on membership of NATO?

David Cairns: My hon. Friend is correct. The Scottish National party's policy is nothing short of a shambles. Each option is fraught with difficulties and questions that must be answered. When the party has made up its mind on the options, there are a series of questions—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) wishes to intervene so that we can hear the word from the horse's mouth. Would the SNP leave NATO on principle, or would it stay in the NATO political structure but leave the command structure?

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): The hon. Gentleman has discussed the Scottish National party's defence

policy at length. I am more interested in Scottish new Labour's defence policy, especially on nuclear weapons. Will the hon. Gentleman tell us the extent to which he supports that policy?

David Cairns: I anticipated that the hon. Gentleman might ask that. Whenever SNP Members are asked about the shambles that is their defence policy, they trot out elderly resolutions that were passed by Scottish Labour party conferences many years ago. The most recent Labour party policy document says that Labour will continue to be the party of strong defence by investing in our armed forces so that they are able to meet today's challenges and tomorrow's threats. It remains committed to strong security through NATO. That is clear and unambiguous. It is the Labour Government's policy to remain in NATO as part of the defence structure, and we are committed to participating in the nuclear umbrella that NATO affords. That has been demonstrated clearly over the past five years.

The hon. Gentleman declined to answer my question—perhaps if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, he will do so later. However, I want to pose questions that flow from any of the options that the SNP is juggling as its policy.

Only France is in NATO but outside its command structure, which is Mr. Campbell's preferred option—this gets confusing so I hope that hon. Members are following this strand of SNP policy. However, France has its own independent nuclear capability, which is more substantial than ours. Does Mr. Campbell seriously believe that other NATO members would be happy for Scotland to participate in NATO's political planning and decision making, but to make no contribution to the military effort? That is fantasy.

The other options are equally difficult. Setting aside the fact that countries are lining up to join NATO—as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) said—at the exact time that the SNP wants out, important questions must be answered.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) said that the SNP's policy is to have a phased withdrawal. Let us examine what phasing means. It would take time to close the nuclear base on the Clyde, and if the SNP was to be the good neighbour that it claims, presumably the rest of the United Kingdom would be given time to prepare alternative sites. The entire armed forces would have to be divvied up and personnel, property, hardware and material would have to be allocated between an independent Scotland and the rest of the UK. That would take years to sort out and, in the meantime, the nuclear base would remain in Scotland. There would be the absurd position that Scotland would house England's nuclear capability but would have zero influence on how it would be used.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Perhaps my hon. Friend is being a little too charitable to the SNP. A few months ago, the leader of the SNP in Scotland, Mr. John Swinney, was at the gates of the Clyde submarine base at Faslane asking for the base to be closed not tomorrow, but now. That would destroy 6,000 to 7,000 jobs. The next time that we hear an SNP spokesperson talking on an economic platform, we should bear in mind that the hallmark of the SNP policy is job destruction, not job creation.

David Cairns: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We both share a strong interest in the matter because many of our constituents are employed in the bases.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire), I apologise that I cannot stay for the whole debate because I have to attend a Standing Committee. Is my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) aware that in my constituency the SNP has opposed the removal of the anti-submarine warfare Pacility, HMS Gannet, which forms part of the nuclear capability at Faslane? Does he agree that that is rank hypocrisy?

David Cairns: My hon. Friend makes her point tellingly. She mentions another strand of SNP policy. The manifesto calls for a phased withdrawal, presumably over time, but there is now a commitment to immediate withdrawal. Which is it to be? If it is the first duty of Governments to defend their citizens, it must surely be the first duty of political parties to explain to those citizens how they propose to defend them. The SNP has a huge amount of explaining to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that the debate should be based on the subject for which the Government have responsibility, not on other political parties.

David Cairns: Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am grateful for that ruling.

As I have said over the past five years, it is clear that the Government are trusted on defence, and we must ensure that that remains. We are trusted because our policies are consistent, coherent and geared towards providing a strong defence of our country. I make this point for the last time, even though it is directly relevant—the current leadership of the SNP knows that, unlike the Government, its entire defence policy is a complete and utter shambles.

Pete Wishart: I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's tirade against the SNP's defence policy. Will he comment in his closing remarks about the Government's privatisation agenda and the impact that it is having on defence jobs throughout Scotland?

David Cairns: I have already done so. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening. I clearly asked my right hon. Friend the Minister a series of questions on the precise negotiations taking place in Faslane and Coulport. I asked for specific assurances and I expect to receive them. It is hardly my fault if the hon. Gentleman was not listening. I appear to be in a no-win situation—if I speak about Labour's defence policy, the hon. Gentleman does not listen, and if I speak about the SNP's, I stray beyond the bounds of good order.

The Labour Government—*[Interruption.]* This is my fourth attempt to conclude, but I will happily give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The hon. Gentleman mentioned that one objective of the Government's

[Mr. Mark Francois]

defence policy is to be coherent. Will he explain where the coherence is in taking the Sea Harriers out of service and abolishing the air defence for the fleet at sea?

David Cairns: Those are questions that emerge from the aftermath of 11 September. We must deal with important questions—about the size of our aircraft carriers, for example. In a sense, this is a case of chicken and egg. If we go for Harriers based on aircraft carriers, we have shorter aircraft carriers. If we have shorter aircraft carriers, they cannot be used by our allies because they do not have Sea Harriers, which limits our ability to participate in global alliances and actions throughout the world. We must carefully consider all such issues in the light of 11 September and the new dispensation that will result.

I hope that the signs given by the Secretary of State on Navy day recently when he spoke about increasing the envelope size for the new aircraft carriers are taken up, precisely because of the questions asked by the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois). I hope that we build the largest possible aircraft carriers within the existing framework. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister may wish to comment on that in his winding-up speech.

Mr. Francois: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Cairns: No. I have already gone on far longer than I intended. I have given way many times and I am trying to conclude.

We are trusted on defence, and we must continue to ensure that that remains the position. People know that we have a Government and a Prime Minister with the courage and determination to stand up to tyrants and aggressors. They also know that the current leader of the SNP does not even have the courage to stand up to Margo MacDonald, although if he did, he would be able to stand up to tyrants and aggressors.

I urge the Government, especially the Chancellor, carefully to consider the funding of defence in the current comprehensive spending review. He has already allocated increased defence spending after several years of defence cuts by the previous Conservative Government, but more may be required if we are to rise to the ambitions set by the Prime Minister and fulfil our historic role as a leading international power—a country devoted to fighting for the principles of freedom, justice and democracy.

9.54 am

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): I am reminded of how I usually feel when I inadvertently stray into the Scottish Grand Committee: I feel as though I am impinging on private grief between the Government and the Scottish National party.

I wish to use the short time afforded to me to redirect the discussion to the topic in hand. I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) on securing the debate. Since we last discussed the subject, in the recent Scottish Grand Committee, we have been reminded—if any reminder was needed—that this is a vital topic for Scots. As the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir)—who, sadly, has just departed—knows, Arbroath's 45 Commando is in combat in Afghanistan. It offers an outstanding example of the selfless role of our forces in today's world, and we should focus on that at all times during the debate. As a part of the UK's and the international coalition's war on terrorism, 45 Commando plays a key role in the defence of Scotland. Its war is a just war, and it is conducted on behalf of all of us. I know that all of Scotland is proud of those troops.

However, the debate is about defence in Scotland, and that points me to address how the activities inherent in our nation's defence impact on Scotland itself—and, naturally, on my constituency. All too often, the debate on how Scotland's defence industry impacts on Scotland has degenerated into a sterile exchange—often, I hasten to add, between Ministers and the Scottish National party—about whether Scotland gets its fair share of defence expenditure.

I genuinely hope that we can move on from that futile argument, as I believe that we cannot split the UK's defence into neat compartments. Some political parties may seek advantage from suggesting otherwise, but the truth remains that all four parts of the UK benefit from the UK's defence, and that our security is non-divisible.

However, many people are concerned about the way in which the Government have run down the Scottish regiments. I am sorry to be non-consensual about this, but five of our regiments are currently significantly undermanned, as the Minister knows. Rightly or wrongly, in Scotland that is taken as showing that those historic Army battalions are no longer the priority that they once were.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): If the hon. Gentleman's party was still in government, what would be the situation with regard to manning in those regiments?

Mr. Duncan: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me for a few seconds, I will come to that shortly.

Speaking to armed forces personnel from my constituency, it is clear that morale among officers and in the ranks is at an all-time low. Recruitment is perceived to be the problem, but difficulties with retention are the source of undermanning in those Scottish regiments. I know that search consultants have been retained to improve the recruitment process, but the greater problem is the increasing likelihood that highly trained and disciplined personnel will find the lure of private industry irresistible when resources in the forces are under such strain.

In addition to reducing armed forces numbers, there has been a similar reduction in our naval capability. The Minister's attention has rightly turned to maximising the value to the taxpayer with regard to refitting programmes. Regardless of whether the externalisation that is under way is "partnership"—as the Ministry of Defence would describe it—or privatisation, the concern remains that the transfer of refit activities in Scotland should not result in a situation that prejudices our naval capability through lack of emergency maintenance capacity. I would welcome any reassurance that the Minister can offer on that important matter.

The role of the Secretary of State for Scotland in the recent naval refit procurement crisis needs to be clarified. Scotland looks to that office for reassurance that Scotland's interests are being looked after. However, the manner of the release of some of the information concerning Faslane and Coalport again gives rise to the suggestion that the Secretary of State is currently the Cabinet's man in Scotland, rather than Scotland's man in the Cabinet.

Employment dependence on defence contracts is not limited to central Scotland, never mind Clydeside. Many communities that are miles from the M8 are heavily indebted to MOD activity. My constituency is home to some of the lowest average incomes in the UK, and one of our major assets is our landscape, which is valuable to armed forces for low-flying practice, firing range activities and an airfield.

I would like to explain the importance of how MOD activity, or inactivity, can hold back economic development in the rural communities of Scotland. As the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde mentioned, there are 374 sites throughout the UK, but some are more significant to their immediate communities than others. In Wigtownshire, we have been served a huge blow since the Scottish Grand Committee debate by the MOD announcement that West Freugh airfield will close to full-time operations. That closure will lead to between 50 and 80 job losses in one of the most remote areas of southern Scotland. Compared with the potential losses through naval maintenance, that number may not seem huge to hon. Members who represent central belt constituencies, but it is a devastating blow to the local economy, and one from which we must learn.

The airfield was operated by a Government-owned plc called QinetiQ, which was given a lease on the airfield. It certainly had challenges, with the number of military aircraft movements steadily declining to the point at which the MOD airfield regulator deemed that there was insufficient traffic to ensure air safety. Several reasons can doubtless be cited for that decline, but one must be the confusion at the heart of the commercialisation of MOD activities in the sector. QinetiQ had been given the task of operating the airfield, but it showed little ambition in developing new and replacement business. It accepted the declining movements, and despite having the ability to investigate the alternatives, it regrettably chose not to.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): I am extremely amused by the hon. Gentleman's synthetic concern about job losses in the defence industry. I stand here as a victim of his Government's defence review of the early 1990s, when I and thousands like me were made redundant. At that time, there was no concerted effort to help those people. This Government are investing, and encouraging companies such as BAE Systems and Thales to invest, in quality jobs, albeit in the central belt. That, coupled with the fact that Rolls-Royce has also decided to stay in Scotland, is tangible evidence that such companies have confidence in the Government in delivering the quality goods that the armed forces need.

Mr. Duncan: I simply direct the hon. Gentleman to the Bishopton area, where he can hear how well the Government's policies are regarded.

Those who work at West Freugh, many of whom have been in touch with me since the closure announcement, speak plainly of how little business development work was undertaken, while any that was completed was ignored. The airfield represents one of the most significant structural assets of Galloway, but it was clearly more important to Galloway than it was to QinetiQ. The company is rightly focusing on developing its core businesses in holographic 3D imaging, fibre optics, and radar-avoidance and missile-tracking technology, but against that background, the importance of maximising the potential of remote airfields was regarded as trivial. To the local economy, however, it is far from trivial—it is crucial.

The MOD must introduce new and imaginative proposals for interacting with the private sector, enterprise agencies and others. Under-performing assets can sit on the MOD balance sheet with little or no consequence for the Ministry or, with respect, for Ministers. However, the effect on assets such as West Freugh can, if left to fester, be devastating for rural employment. From where will the impetus now come for investigating the use of the airfield for civil flights to supplement employment? Where is the drive to explore new uses for airfield buildings?

I was always highly dubious of the 1998 decision to involve the private sector in what was then the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, as the independent agency's major customers in the USA and elsewhere had every right to be sceptical of the security implications of that privatisation. However, the net effect of the process has been to put the precious infrastructure in the hands of an independent company with little likely reward for exploiting the potential. The Minister and his colleagues should think carefully about the current situation, and consider involving private companies in developing asset value where they have value to the communities in which they lie. West Freugh is typical of many locations throughout Scotland and the UK that would benefit from such an approach.

Great strides are possible so long as the private sector is given free rein and is allowed to reap the benefits of its ingenuity.

Mr. Francois: Does my hon. Friend accept that part of the problem that affects the site that he mentioned harks back to the fact that the Government have had four years to try to get DERA right? We are now on the third strategy for dealing with that. After four years, they still do not appear to have a coherent plan that commands support throughout industry, and people in Scotland are suffering as a result.

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. As I said, there is confusion at the heart of the commercialisation policy. I am looking for a simple strategy that will benefit our rural communities.

Scotland's defence is rightly dependent on our key role in the UK, as we play our part in supplying troops, technology and training grounds. Scotland's geography has much to offer our defence industry in the 21st century.

Mr. Joyce: The hon. Gentleman's intonation suggests that he is about to conclude his remarks. I want to return

[Mr. Joyce]

to his point about manning levels in Scottish regiments. To jog his memory, the previous Conservative Government had such abysmal manning records that they disbanded regiments. Would he like to comment?

Mr. Duncan: I admit that the MOD is addressing the recruitment problem. If the hon. Gentleman checks the record, he will find that I referred to the fact that the problem is now retention. I know that he has experience of his own. The Government's current policy is doing nothing to address that problem. I hope that the MOD will appreciate that open-mindedness in its evaluation and research procurement could result in retaining and returning wealth to those rural communities that have served the Ministry so well for so long.

10.7 am

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I am delighted to contribute to this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) on securing it and on his excellent contribution.

We have had this discussion many times, so it will not surprise the Minister if I concentrate mainly on shipbuilding. The Scotstoun yard is in my constituency and it is dear to my heart. Shipbuilding remains a crucial industry to Anniesland and the Clyde, as well as to Scotland and the UK. Our standing in naval circles throughout the world has been second to none ever since the first coracle managed to sail up a short river, probably somewhere in the north of Scotland. We have been the envy of every country in the world, and we must retain that leadership.

Today, shipbuilding employs only 30,000 workers; in 1960, there were 200,000. Various problems have contributed to the decline of shipbuilding, but we are here to talk about defence. A large problem facing the warship yards in the early 1990s was the significant reduction in MOD orders—part of the peace dividend. I blame no Government for that—the world was grateful not to be under such strain. Now, however, we are under a different type of strain. The critical problem occurred prior to that, when shipbuilding was privatised. We privatised purely for money, and we forgot to modernise. Companies such as BAE Systems have said that extensive investment is needed and that they will supply that investment in the Clyde. I wait to see what investment they make. I hope that it will bring more work to the Clyde, but there are other issues to consider.

In October 2000, the MOD ordered six vessels worth £240 million. Two of the orders went to Harland and Wolff in Belfast, but the other four went to Germany. The Govan yard missed out and, as everyone knows, it was under threat of closure for quite a while. Although we are thankful for the MOD orders that saved the yard, they did so with reduced manpower. Our shipbuilding industry is heavily dependent on military shipbuilding, which sustains the Clyde in particular. The Clyde was once the foremost shipbuilding power in the world, but the number of jobs there is now down to 3,000. The loss of the ro-ro ships to German yards was a real body blow to the Clyde. EU rules lost us those ships because we had to tender outside Great Britain. The loss of those four ships almost led to Govan's demise.

Jim Sheridan: My hon. Friend is commenting on the overdependence of the shipbuilding industry on defence orders. We must learn from what happened in the early 1990s, because the number of ships that the MOD can have built is finite. Does he agree that every effort should be made to encourage defence companies to diversify, to exploit commercial markets and to gain expertise from those workers who build frigates and other aircraft carriers on the Clyde?

John Robertson: My hon. Friend makes a good point and is absolutely right. Companies such as BAE Systems will have to invest in the yards that I have mentioned. If we do not get that investment, I have no doubt that the yards will close, even with Government orders.

As we know, the orders for the type 45 frigates have been given out. I was fortunate to be present at the signing of the contracts that, along with the ALSL—alternative landing ships logistic—orders, will keep the Clyde on the go for about 10 years. I congratulate the Government on showing their commitment to the Clyde and to shipbuilding throughout the country with those orders. I am sure that the Clyde will not let them down and will provide the usual high standard of workmanship. However, even though the Government have helped by placing those orders, the industry continues to shrink year by year. We need to consider the overall picture to ensure that subsidies and handouts are not needed in the long term. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan) said, it is important that the industry diversifies.

If skilled labour is lost, it cannot be replaced. It takes more years than we care to mention to train someone, and in that time the industry might have gone out of business. Losing the shipbuilding industry would be like losing our heritage: the power of Britain in years gone by was based on shipbuilding. However, while other countries develop their shipbuilding industry, we, sadly, seem to be doing the opposite. We must try to regain our place in the world in that respect. The strategic review is helping in its own way by considering our defence requirements, an issue that I believe the Government have taken seriously.

In addition, a newspaper in Scotland, the *Daily Record,* is mounting a campaign to try to secure two aircraft carrier orders for Scotland. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde has a copy of that paper. I commend that newspaper for its campaign, which is important not only for the Clyde, but for competitors in Rosyth and Nigg. It is important that we get those orders for Scotland. We have shown in the past that we can handle large ships on the Clyde, and I have no doubt that the workers there would receive the work gratefully.

It is important that we are part of NATO. It is important that we show that not only Scotland, but Britain and Europe are part of NATO. It exists for a reason. Certain ships were used at the beginning of the confrontation with Afghanistan: without the American ships to help with the initial landings, take-offs and

missile firings, the whole theatre of war would have been impossible. We would not be sitting here today talking about how well our troops are doing and how happy the people have been since their arrival.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Does my hon. Friend agree that if Scotland were to withdraw from NATO, it would, in the words of a leading Scottish National party thinker, George Kerevan, find itself committed to a Brigadoon republic?

John Robertson: I thank my hon. Friend for that. I did not know that there were any SNP thinkers.

I have said on several occasions that the MOD will need to consider our naval requirements. I have asked the Minister to ensure that during consideration of the new chapter attention is given to whether we have the necessary shipping to mount a campaign similar to the one in Afghanistan. If the Americans could not supply the necessary vessels, could anyone else do so? The Americans are an important part of NATO, but we cannot always rely on them to supply every ship that is needed. By examining the landing craft and other types of ship that would be required for such a theatre of war, we might stimulate our shipbuilding industry and other armaments businesses in the United Kingdom. Moreover, we would not be reliant on a friendly country to assist us if an operation had to be mounted within a short time.

Mr. Francois: I heard the hon. Gentleman's point about not always being able to rely on the Americans in all circumstances. If he believes that, will he have a quiet word with the Minister at the end of the debate about the fact that part of the rationale for getting rid of the Sea Harriers is that we will always be able to rely on American carriers for fleet air defence?

John Robertson: Harriers have some shortcomings in that they are not quite as speedy as some of the aircraft that they may come up against, and although they can take off vertically, they have many restrictions. We must look at what is best. We have always said that we want to give our troops and Air Force the best equipment, and I believe that the Harrier is not the best plane for the current job. I may be wrong—I am not a pilot—but that is how I see it.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde on securing the debate. I ask the Minister to get the aircraft carriers up to the Clyde—I might get him a ticket for the cup final. If he cannot do that, I will not hold it against him, but Scotland must do the job that it has done in the past and be given the opportunity to show off its high standards of workmanship.

Mr. David Taylor (in the Chair): Before I call the next speaker, I remind hon. Members that five people want to speak in the 12 minutes remaining before I call the Front Bench spokesmen at 10.30.

10.19 am

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): In the time-honoured way, I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) on securing the debate. I am not sure what more he hopes to learn about defence in Scotland, given that we debated that topic in the Scottish Grand Committee only a few weeks ago. There is a feeling of deja vu and "Groundhog Day" rolled into one, with the debate featuring the typical attacks on SNP defence policy that we have come to expect.

Our debate takes place at a time when many Scottish service personnel are serving abroad with great distinction. Hon. Members present here and all the political parties in Scotland support that. Unfortunately, conditions are not so rosy on the domestic front. Rarely have service personnel and defence support staff in Scotland been in such a state of flux. That is because of the Government's privatisation agenda: morale has been undermined at Navy and Air Force bases by plans to contract out the transferable skills and experience of committed workers to companies in the private sector.

Last week, union leaders representing naval workers in Scotland set the Ministry of Defence a seven-day deadline to avert industrial action. I am relieved and pleased that industrial action has been averted but, like Jack Dromey of the Transport and General Workers Union, the SNP believes that it is "bitter" that naval support jobs at Faslane and Coulport, and at Portsmouth and Plymouth in England are to be transferred to the private sector. Regrettably, it was not announced on the Floor of the House of Commons. Instead, Members of Parliament received letters while the Ministry of Defence was frantically briefing journalists in a damage-limitation exercise.

The Government's privatisation agenda is not restricted to Navy installations—it also affects air bases. My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) has consistently raised with the MOD the proposed privatisation of the Defence Fire Service. He is deeply concerned about the consequences and implications of that privatisation for RAF Lossiemouth, which is in his constituency. There is little support for the proposal from the DFS, from other support staff or from service personnel, regardless of rank.

Early-day motion 853, which was signed by members of all political parties, some of whom are present, calls on the Secretary of State for Defence to halt all consideration of proposals to put out to tender and to privatise the Defence Fire Service. The hon. Members for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) and for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang), and the hon. Members for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray) and for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan), all of whom signed the motion, are as anxious as I am to ensure that the Government reverse their position on that daft privatisation proposal. I shall be interested to see whether the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde will join his hon. Friends in signing the motion, given his interest in defence in Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Moray asked a question about the DFS during Defence questions on Monday. Will the Minister answer that question, which on Monday he studiously deflected with a typical tirade against the SNP? I remind him of the question:

[Pete Wishart]

"Can he name one single neutral observer, trade union, political party or Back-Bench Member of Parliament . . . who supports the privatisation of the Defence Fire Service? "—[*Official Report*, 29 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 662.]

Mr. Joyce: Will the hon. Gentleman briefly describe how he would configure the Defence Fire Service in an independent Scotland?

Pete Wishart: Along with everyone who is involved in the debate, the DFS opposes privatisation. The Minister knows that full well—it is why he could not reply on Monday. He could not name one person who supported the proposal.

An issue that concerns me, my party and the vast majority of public opinion in Scotland is the stationing of all the United Kingdom's nuclear defence weapons in Scotland. As this is a debate on defence policy in Scotland, it is worth examining the defence policy of Scottish new Labour, on which I congratulate the Scottish Labour party. It is a good, well thought out policy and—surprisingly for Scottish new Labour—it is in tune with Scottish public opinion. The policy states:

"Conference notes that Scotland now houses all of Britain's nuclear weapons and that the Russian Threat previously used to justify these weapons has disappeared."

It continues:

"Conference further notes that scrapping Trident would now save some £1.5 billion annually which could and should be constructively employed in areas of obvious need such as housing, education and the Health service as well as ensuring the creation of alternative employment and retraining of displaced defence workers."

That is a very good motion. I would sign up to it immediately, but it presents more of a problem to Labour Members.

I was impressed by the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) during the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee. I asked him whether he supported any part of the policy. He candidly replied that he now supports the Government policy, which presumably renders the policy that I quoted redundant and not worth the paper it is written on. I wonder what on earth the Labour party delegates were doing in Perth at the recent conference. Presumably, they were discussing motions to decide policy which, if the new Labour Government do not like it, will be rejected out of hand. I hope that hon. Members who support new Labour question party policy and the party's reaction to nuclear weapons, and that they will consider their position during the scramble for seats at the next general election. They must find out whether that policy is supported.

At least, the membership of Scottish new Labour recognises that nuclear weapons are a serious issue for Scotland. Scottish public opinion is opposed to the continued siting of nuclear weapons on Scotland's soil, as are the Churches and a vast array of civic groups. I am sure that, like me, they were chilled to the bone to hear the Secretary of State for Defence saying in Defence questions on Monday that he would still be willing to use such evil weapons of mass destruction in certain circumstances. No circumstances can justify the use of a weapon that, with a press of a button, would cause genocide on an unthinkable scale and exterminate society as we know and understand it.

It is curious that not one Scottish Labour MP here and present at the Scottish Grand Committee's debate has supported the Labour party's policy—but let us not be too unfair to them. The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde referred to the Scottish National party website, but I could not find a Scottish new Labour party website. I do not know what gems it is trying to hide, but I certainly could not access such a website yesterday.

I am not surprised that there is no mention by the Ministry of Defence of the lost economic impact of defence spending in Scotland. In January 2001, the Government were asked how much of the defence budget in actual terms was spent in Scotland. The reply was that the Defence Bills Agency had spent only 4.6 per cent. of its £15 billion budget in Scotland, representing a shortfall of £600 million for Scottish taxpayers. That is a massive reallocation of taxpayers' money away from our economy. I want to ensure that Scotland secures maximum taxpayer benefit through significant domestic procurement.

We remain dependent on Whitehall Departments' decisions to give contracts to Scottish manufacturers. We have seen countless examples of job cuts and uncertainty on the Clyde. That is not the case in neighbouring small, independent countries, whose support for shipbuilding and defence-related employment exceeds that seen in Scotland. I am particularly impressed by Finland, which supports 14,000 shipbuilding jobs, and Norway, which supports 10,000 such jobs. Sadly, the shipbuilding industry in Scotland has been in decline under both Conservative and new Labour stewardship. Meanwhile, small, independent countries are prospering.

Mr. Francois: As the hon. Gentleman mentioned Finland, can he give us some idea of the future Finnish naval shipbuilding programme and say how many 50,000 tonne aircraft carriers the Finns intend to build?

Pete Wishart: I am impressed with what Finland has achieved. Compare its 14,000 shipbuilding jobs with what is happening on the Clyde. The Finnish example is a good one.

The Scottish National party fully supports the commitment and professionalism of our service personnel and wishes the members of 45 Commando—some of whose families live in my constituency—a safe and speedy return after the completion of their crucial mission.

Mr. Lazarowicz: The hon. Gentleman has spoken about the service men and women in Scotland. Will he give them an idea of his party's policy on membership of NATO, and will he answer some of the earlier questions that he has so far failed to deal with?

Pete Wishart: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was about to stand up and defend his Government's privatisation agenda, which is of genuine concern to service personnel throughout the United Kingdom. It is unfortunate that no Labour Member has tried to defend that policy.

We want an enhancement of our position within the emerging European defence architecture. Will the Minister say which Scottish regiments and what

manpower from Scotland have been committed to the European rapid reaction force? Is the number close to the 2,000 people that Finland and Austria have each promised?

We should aspire to a normal democratic Scotland, where the Parliament in Edinburgh makes key decisions about defence priorities and ensures the maximum economic benefit from Scottish tax spending for the national economy. It is sad that the defence debate has been dominated by Labour's agenda of unnecessary privatisation. I urge the Government to rethink their unpopular and unjustified policy.

10.29 am

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) on securing this important debate. Like the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart), I feel a degree of deja vu, having debated the subject in Scottish Grand Committee. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) began the Liberal Democrat contribution in that debate by saying that he felt that there was some aggressive defence going on. I am delighted to see that that remains consistent, as there is some aggressive defence from the Scottish National party.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman considers there to be an element of deja vu. However, does he not agree that the question of the future security and defence of Scotland is so important that it is correct to try to ascertain the policies of the major opposition party in Scotland?

John Thurso: Indeed I do, but it is more important to concentrate on one of the parties that is more likely to form a Government in the United Kingdom in the foreseeable future.

I intended to confine myself entirely to asking the Minister questions. I was not going to talk about the SNP at all. However, I cannot resist making one small point. The hon. Member for North Tayside mentioned a scramble for seats. In view of yesterday's news that the SNP's defence spokesman, Mr. Colin Campbell MSP, failed to secure the nomination for a seat for the Scottish Parliament, the scramble for seats in Scotland probably affects his party more than any other.

I turn to the serious subject before us—defence policy in Scotland. The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde, who opened the debate, mentioned the consultation on the new chapter of the strategic defence review. That is extremely important. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife and my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), who have responsibility for those subjects, will engage fully in that process, and we will play our part.

Defence policy will revolve round what the United Kingdom chooses to do with regard to foreign policy. Our foreign policy objectives will be crucial in determining the shape of defence policy and the sort of forces we need. It is clear that we must have a strong and solid national debate, so that we can clearly define our aims, what we are asking our men and women to do when we put them into theatres of conflict, and what kind of forces we need. The debate must begin with foreign policy.

Another aspect of the debate is the cost that we are prepared to bear. The Chancellor of the Exchequer will have a key role in ensuring that our troops and forces overseas are properly funded, so that they can undertake the role required of them. It seems to Opposition Members that that role can be played only from within a united kingdom. The United Kingdom is stronger for acting together on the issue. We must operate within NATO. Since the close of the second world war, NATO has developed in a way that has enabled it to show what it can do. Any suggestion that we should develop a policy without NATO is clearly unacceptable. We wholly support the Government in the prosecution of those strategies.

As has been mentioned, Scotland has a proud tradition of contributing to our military forces, on land, in sea and—most latterly—in the air. There is a strong link between regiments and particular parts of the country. Not long ago, I was reading a book called "The Sword of the North". It is worth remembering that in two major conflicts in the past century, my part of the world sent between eight and 10 battalions of Seaforth Highlanders to war. For a population of about 40,000, that is a significant contribution. Reading any war memorial in any small village in my constituency will clearly show the commitment of the north of Scotland, which the whole of Scotland shares, to our defence.

Those links continue to this day, with regimental associations and regiments that continue to serve proudly. I should be grateful if the Minister would respond to the question about the shortfall in recruitment in Scottish regiments, which is running at about 10 per cent. below strength for the Scottish regiments, as opposed to about 6.5 per cent. for the rest of the Army, with the Royal Scots 17 per cent. undermanned, the Scots Dragoon Guards 15 per cent., and the Black Watch 13 per cent. Perhaps he would comment on the progress of the venture by SEARCH to recruit. I believe that it is up for review at the moment, and it would be helpful to hear about that.

Other links that have been referred to this morning are equally strong. The first is the jobs that come from defence procurement and all the equipment, which several hon. Members mentioned. There are also links with the bases. There are many bases in Scotland. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife has RAF Leuchars in his constituency. With the forthcoming disbandment at RAF Coningsby, I believe that No. 5 Squadron may be going to RAF Leuchars. I should be extremely grateful if the Minister would comment on that.

About 15,100 personnel are deployed throughout Scotland. That obviously has a huge economic impact, as well as being a core part of what goes on in our community. The hon. Member for Gailoway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) mentioned 45 Commando, and I add my support. I am sure that we all send our best wishes to the men and women there. I recently read newspaper reports of thefts from the home barracks of 45 Commando, which has been upsetting for those serving in Afghanistan. What action has been taken? Are the reports true or false?

[John Thurso]

The third link affects my constituency in particular, in that we have many of the disadvantages of military activity without the benefit. We have two major bombing ranges—a live one at Cape Wrath, and Tain. I hasten to add that my constituents fully understand the need for such ranges, and there is no question of their asking for them to be taken away. However, I ask the Minister to accept that in this modern day the relationship between the forces that use such facilities and the civilians who live there is crucial. Perhaps as part of the current review we might consider how that relationship can best be taken forward and what, if any, financial compensation could be given, perhaps to community councils, in such areas for what they put up with.

We broadly and fully support the Government's defence strategy and welcome the current review. It must be based on our foreign policy objectives and where we are going to go and what we are going to do. Finally, it must surely be up to the Chancellor to ensure that proper resources are available so that the objectives that we set in foreign policy mean that we have the best equipment to undertake the task.

10.39 am

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso). In a previous existence, I lived in the gardener's cottage at Skibo castle, and the bombers in the Tain run used my cottage as a turning point. He is right to say that the interrelationship between defence matters and local people is extremely important. In my constituency, where we have RAF Lyneham, which we intend to continue to have for a great many years to come, local people welcome the fact that the Harriers take off and land over their houses.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) on securing the debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) on delivering my party's opening contribution. It is an important debate.

As a lifelong unionist, I initially found the title of the debate—defence in Scotland—slightly galling; after all, defence is a national matter, and I am proud to be the shadow defence Minister for the United Kingdom. However, I am a Scot born, bred and educated, and, on second thoughts, it occurred to me that I am, of course, immensely proud of the contribution that my home nation—as it were—makes to the defence of the realm. I use the word "realm" to refer to the United Kingdom, not Scotland. We are not discussing the defence of Scotland; we are talking about the defence of the United Kingdom, and the contribution that Scotland makes to that.

It used to be said that the first great export from Scotland was whisky, and that its second great export is people. I am proud to be one of those exports but, with regard to defence, precisely the same thing is happening. The current figures on deployments of the Scottish infantry regiments are interesting; 3,074 Scottish infantry are deployed in England and overseas, compared with only 1,656 who are still in Scotland. About twice as many Scottish infantry are abroad or in England than are in Scotland. Among them is 45 Commando, as my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale memorably said—and other hon. Members also mentioned—and we think of its troops in particular, and of the contribution that they are currently making in Afghanistan.

It would be interesting to know how long they will remain on deployment in Afghanistan. It would be useful for people in Arbroath—wives, children and other family members of those troops—to know that. It would also be interesting to know which of the three infantry battalions that we believe are marked out to replace it, will do so. The Minister might like to comment on those matters.

Infantry is an area in which Scotland has made one of its greatest contributions to the defence of the realm. However, those of us who consider the matter on a national level are concerned about some of the plans that the Government might currently have with regard to the infantry battalions. As several hon. Members have mentioned, there is severe undermanning in some of the Scottish regiments. The Royal Scots are 17.4 per cent. undermanned; the Royal Highland Fusiliers are 12.3 per cent. down; the Black Watch are 13.6 per cent. down; the Highlanders are 17.9 per cent. down, and so forth. Interestingly, the Scots Guards is the only regiment that is currently overmanned—by 10.8 per cent.

When the Minister replies, it would be useful to know whether he has any plans with regard to the structure of the Scottish infantry regiments. At the sad time of the death of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, we were concerned about the amount of press speculation that her colonelcy of the Black Watch might have been one of the reasons why it had been preserved.

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Oh, not again.

Mr. Gray: The Minister says, from a sedentary position, "Oh, not again," and raises his eyes heavenward. I would be more than satisfied if he were to give me a cast-iron, 100 per cent. guarantee that the Black Watch is safe in his hands now, and in future. Perhaps he would like to make an intervention on that now?

Mr. Ingram: I did not intend to intervene. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is continuing to raise that point. It is a canard that has been put to bed time and again. There are no plans to disband the Black Watch. Will his party now accept that?

Mr. Gray: The Minister uses weasel words, to say the least. He says that there are no plans to disband the Black Watch. I am ready to accept that there are currently no plans to disband it; it would be surprising if there were. However, I ask him again for the guarantee that I have requested; will he take this opportunity to give me a cast-iron guarantee that the Black Watch will not be disbanded now, or in the future? *[Interruption.]*

Hon. Members find that amusing, but I do not, and neither does the Black Watch. I am asking the Minister to give me that guarantee.

Mr. Ingram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me this speaking time; it is obvious that he does not have much to say in this debate.

I have given the hon. Gentleman that guarantee. I would be interested to learn whether, if his party were ever to return to power, he would plan to reinstate all of the regiments that the Conservatives disbanded when they were in government.

Mr. Gray: The Minister has now given us the guarantee. That will be on the record, and we are grateful to him for it. The people in and round my home area in Perth will also be grateful for that. We are glad that he has finally been forced to give that guarantee in the House.

Those who talk about cuts when we were in power forget that the Labour party spent the entire time after the end of the cold war saying that our cuts were not nearly deep enough. Of course, it is true that we had the peace dividend—as it was called—at the time, and that it was necessary for us to cut the size of the Army, for example.

I was speaking to a general the other day, and he told me that when he joined the British Army it had 1 million soldiers. Today, under this Labour Government, there are 98,000. Of course, many of the cuts took place under the Conservative Government, but at the time, members of the Labour party said that the cuts were not deep enough and that they wanted to see more.

If we want to see evidence of defence cuts, we need look only at what the Labour Government are doing. They have cut the Territorial Army to shreds in Scotland, as elsewhere. We discussed defence manufacturing, but look at what they are doing to ammunition manufacturing. We can no longer make ammunition. We leave it to the Germans, Belgians and, amazingly, the South Africans. Bishopton closed as a result. Elsewhere, it looks as though their commitment to carriers seems firm, but look at the closure of 5 Squadron. It may go to RAF Leuchars—good luck to Leuchars. What about the people around 5 Squadron?

The mothballing of the Sea Harriers means that we could not now carry out a Falkland campaign even if we wished to do so. To suggest that that capability will be replaced by type 45s is nonsense, not least because type 45s will not be fully operational until 2015. There will be a big gap between the mothballing of the Sea Harriers and the introduction of the type 45s.

"Illustrious" is the latest example. It has been delayed for nine months until a refit starts in October. "Fearless" has been withdrawn from service 12 months early. There have been 700 jobs cut from the Army base repair organisation. That information was slipped out during a statutory instrument debate recently. The Minister says that that is all good stuff and marvellous and that it is all to do with a training fund, but the jobs of 700 car mechanics who work on army vehicles have been cut, thanks to the Government.

In the Conservative party, we are opposed to the privatisation of warship support that has been mentioned and the privatisation of airbase fire services at RAF Leuchars and elsewhere. The only point on which I agree with the SNP on this issue is that we are entirely opposed to the privatisation of defence fire services. It is astonishing to hear a Labour Government proposing such a thing. The Minister laughs and says that he is thinking about it. Let him tell us whether he intends to privatise the fire services.

Wherever we look at what Labour is doing to defence, we see cuts, cuts and more cuts, often for minute amounts of money. The Government may save a million here or a million there, but in the course of doing that, they make damaging cuts to defence capabilities throughout the nation. That becomes clear when we examine the Government's procurement programmes. As far as we can see, the procurement budgets in the Ministry of Defence are a shambles. For the past two years, the National Audit Office has refused to sign off the MOD budgets in a straightforward way. No commercial company would be allowed to continue to exist in the same circumstances. It is apparent that the MOD's procurement proposals cannot be implemented unless the Chancellor of the Exchequer provides more money.

One curious feature about last week's Budget is that no mention was made of defence. In an internet search of the Chancellor's speeches since 1997, he does not use the word "defence" once. It is impossible to discover the increase in defence spending from reading the Red Book after the Budget. It seems to be approximately £950 million, but it is hard to tell whether that is a straightforward increase.

Mr. Joyce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: No. There is no time before the Minister replies. He can tell us how much extra the Chancellor has given him, but as far as we can make out from a detailed study of the Red Book, it ain't a lot. We find that procurement spending as well as everyday spending on defence is under severe pressure. That is why we see cuts across the board.

Of course, our defence forces will, as they say, turn to the right, salute, march off and do precisely whatever the Minister asks. They will not complain. Our Army, Air Force and Navy do what they are required to do. However, they are being asked to do more and more with less and less by this ever expansionist Prime Minister. The Government must not take advantage of their readiness to do whatever is asked of them, by demanding more and not providing the proper resources with which to carry out difficult tasks.

10.49 am

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I echo the congratulations paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) on securing this debate. He and other hon. Members have raised important issues. I do not share the view that this is deja vu and that we should not continue to examine and rerun these issues. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso), who made that comment, should reflect wisely on it. Our debates add to the overall assessment of what is happening on defence, which is a critical part of what happens to this country.

Scotland and its people play an important part in the defence of the United Kingdom. Although there have been many changes in defence policy over the years, the one constant has been the importance of Scotland in defending the United Kingdom's overall interests. Defence continues to play a vital role in Scotland.

Defence has a considerable footprint in Scotland. I contend that Scotland receives a good deal from defence and gives a good deal in return. My hon. Friend the

[Mr. Adam Ingram]

Member for Greenock and Inverclyde rightly referred to the number of sites that the Ministry of Defence has in Scotland. There are 374 sites that extend over nearly 25,000 hectares. Our policy is to achieve a better balance of activity throughout the United Kingdom. All three services are well represented as part of the overall defence footprint throughout Scotland.

Hon. Members referred to 45 Royal Marine Commando, which is based in Arbroath. That represents a significant presence of about 1,000 Royal Marines, to whom I shall refer, if I have time. The Royal Navy submarine base at Faslane is one of the largest single-site employers in Scotland and employs more than 15 per cent. of the local economically active members of the population.

Mr. McFall: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ingram: I must try to deal with all the points. I shall address warship support and modernisation and perhaps, at that point, I shall allow my hon. Friend to intervene.

Under the new arrangements of partnership with a commercial company at Faslane, the base will remain a significant employer, and I shall say more about that later. The naval reactor test establishment at Dounreay employs more than 300 people in one of the remoter parts of Scotland. That gives a flavour of the naval presence.

I shall touch on the presence of the Army. Several major Army units are based in Scotland: the 1st Battalion of the Royal Highland Fusiliers is based at Fort George in Inverness; the 1st Battalion of the Highlanders is based in Edinburgh; and the Royal Scots are based at Dreghorn barracks in Edinburgh. That represents the first incidence for a considerable time that three of the six Scottish regiments have been based in Scotland.

I take arguments about poor recruitment on board. Scotland has a proud record of providing recruits for the services. Last year, Scottish recruitment offices enlisted 2,5000 officers and other ranks, which is more than 15 per cent. of the total number. Nearly 12 per cent. of people in the Army classify themselves as being of Scottish nationality. A proud history and record has been maintained against difficult backdrops. Clearly, retention is important, and we recognise that we must do better and do more on retention. However, I will not accept criticism of what the Government have tried to do. We have innumerable initiatives to try to solve deep and entrenched problems, and I could set out all such initiatives in the remainder of my speech—they have all had measures of success.

A large aspect of retention relates to families, and not only to those who serve. That is why I head a cross-departmental committee of Ministers—the service families taskforce—that addresses ways in which we can drive forward initiatives from government.

I shall write to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross to answer his specific question about SEARCH. We are still assessing the important initiative, and it is too early to say what its outplay will be.

I shall address the role of the Royal Air Force. RAF Kinloss is home to our Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft. Leuchars and Lossiemouth are home to our Tornado F3 and Tornado GR4 aircraft. Under current plans, Typhoon will replace the Tornados at Leuchars. Royal Navy and RAF search-and-rescue helicopters are based at Prestwick and Lossiemouth. Those sites are important to our defence role and mission, and they play an important part in our local economies. RAF Lossiemouth and RAF Kinloss, for example, employ almost 10 per cent. of the working people in their areas.

I do not intend to spend any time addressing the comments of the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart), other than to make a passing reference. The Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy would not be that if we had an independent Scotland. The Royal Marines would not be in Arbroath if we had an independent Scotland. When the Scottish National party claims to support the action taken by our armed forces against international terrorism in Sierra Leone, Macedonia, Kosovo and elsewhere, we should bear in mind that they would not have that prominent role if Scotland were independent. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take that on board.

More than 23,000 MOD personnel work in Scotland in 27 of the 32 unitary authorities. That includes more than 14,400 military personnel from all three services and more than 8,800 civilians. Almost 10 per cent. of MOD personnel who work in the UK do so in Scotland. Approximately 6,000 Scottish jobs are directly dependent on defence equipment expenditure. Most of the jobs are skilled, with pay rates above the Scottish national average.

It has been said that defence cannot be divided, and that must be repeated. Defence does not benefit some members of the UK more than others. It is there to protect us and to provide us all with security wherever we may be. It is not like health or education, where spending on a hospital benefits one local community. Defence benefits the whole of the UK, wherever it occurs. The hon. Member for North Tayside repeated old arguments about the totality of defence expenditure in Scotland. I thought that I had laid that argument to rest at the last debate of the Scottish Grand Committee. His figures are wrong, and he should re-examine the information with which he was provided. The expenditure is much greater than the £600 million figure that he presented: a conservative estimate is £1.8 billion. Much of that is not captured because of the way in which the spend is allocated.

The shipbuilding industry is a key part of defence spend. The Government plan to build up to 30 warships in the UK over the next 15 to 20 years. That is the biggest shipbuilding programme since the second world war. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) declared his support for, and commitment to, the Clyde. I am reminded of a line from an old song, "It was tears that made the Clyde." It is almost as if the MOD is saving the Clyde. I know that my hon. Friend will support me when I say that the shipbuilding companies must also move into commercial shipbuilding initiatives.

Warship support and modernisation has attracted much debate outside the Chamber, but not inside it.

Mr. McFall: I thank my right hon. Friend for his involvement in negotiations over the past few days on

the changing nature of the jobs at Faslane. On Monday morning, I had a meeting with John Howie, the managing director of Babcocks. It was made clear that there was a need to change the perception that there would be massive losses, as they could be accommodated over five years. Does the Minister agree that the Astute-class submarines berthing at Faslane would enhance its position and increase its capacity if we were to get the negotiations right with the trade unions?

Mr. Ingram: Part of the tragedy of the debate is that people have taken the lurid newspaper headlines and tried to perceive them as reality. They should learn the lesson that newspapers do not necessarily speak the truth. We tried to explain what was happening at the dockyards. In the worst-case scenario, 750 jobs would go over five years. We concluded intensive discussions with the trade unions that will ensure a good future for all the dockyards including Rosyth, not just the three dockyards that will retain their partnership with the MOD. It is worth bearing in mind that Rosyth is a wholly privatised dockyard that provides a tremendous service to the MOD. There should be no fear. Jobs can be retained if there is a workflow, but we must address overcapacity in the yards.

The hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale asked about naval support in an emergency, and I can give him an assurance. We have retained a four-yard strategy to ensure that we have that maximum surge capacity if it is required.

Finally, an examination of airfield support services is taking place. I accept that there is a united front against it, but it is a united front against something that has not yet been presented.

Tourism (South-West)

11 am

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I am delighted to have this opportunity to debate such an important subject. I am also pleased to have the support of so many of my Conservative colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), who is sitting next to me. Many hon. Members from all parties want to speak, so I shall speak so far as it relates to Bournemouth for both of us. My hon. Friend wants to be firmly associated with my comments.

Tourism is very important to the economy of the United Kingdom and the south-west in particular. It is the country's fourth largest industry and earns about £75 billion a year for the UK economy. The south-west is one of the regions most dependent on tourism as a percentage of its overall economic activity. Bournemouth, part of which I have the honour to represent, earns £500 million a year from tourism. We welcome 5 million visitors a year and employ in tourism 20,000 people. That gives some background to the scale of our subject.

Much as I admire the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting, the Government have not given the support to tourism that they promised. We have had constant platitudes but no delivery. For example, there has been no help with marketing. The Scottish tourist board spends £19.4 million on marketing, which is £3.77 per head. The Wales tourist board spends £15.5 million, which is £4.03 per head. The English tourist board and the regional tourist boards combined receive only £11.7 million from the Government; the actual spend is 20p per head. That gives us some idea of the scale of the problem for England and the south-west in particular.

We no longer have an English tourist board with the responsibility to promote tourism in England, and we should revert to that. We are told that the British Tourist Authority does a lot of work that benefits England. However, in its latest UKOK campaign, which was supposed to support the south-east and south-west of England, it managed to miss out any mention of Dorset, Bournemouth and the New forest, despite the fact that we have England's first world heritage coastline and that the New forest is a national park of outstanding importance. The New forest was the only national park not mentioned in the campaign. The Government's record on support for marketing is tragic.

We should also consider support for local authorities. Resorts should be able, and encouraged, to improve their visitor facilities. We should ensure that visitors to resorts in the south-west find the amenities that they are entitled to expect. They should be at least comparable with those of our major overseas competitors. What is the Government's record in relation to resort towns? I am a vice-president of the British Resorts Association, and we have repeatedly had to tell the Government that we are not receiving anything like adequate support. The way in which the Government's subvention to local authorities in general and resort towns in particular is organised, discriminates against resorts. More and more burdens have been imposed on tourist towns through increased regulations and requests to take more asylum seekers and to set up drug rehabilitation centres, which we in Bournemouth and other resorts have done.

[Mr. John Butterfill]

The resorts and the south-west in general have a disproportionately high number of retired people. The problems of the elderly impact most severely on many resort towns, but the support that we receive for them is declining. Bournemouth has lost £3 million of support for rest homes every year since the Government came to power. Overall, Government support for Bournemouth has gone down from 73 per cent. in 1997 to 65.8 per cent. now. We have lost £13 million in Bournemouth alone. That is mirrored in resorts throughout the country and in the south-west in particular.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I am sure that my hon. Friend will be as concerned as I am that the seaside and market towns scheme, which looked like a good scheme, has run into the ground because it has been stop go, stop go. Bureaucracy has been added to it. Some towns that started out on the scheme with a lot of enthusiasm have now backed off. There does not seem to be any clarity about how the scheme works and how it can be taken forward. It has done more harm than good because of the way in which it has been administered.

Mr. Butterfill: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. She is absolutely right. Often, the Government have ideas that sound terribly good, but at the end of the day they do not deliver. How on earth are we supposed to support tourism facilities within our resorts if we are not given the financial support that increasing Government burdens demand?

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): My hon. Friend, in his inimitable way, puts forward a cogent and powerful case. The reduction in Government expenditure to Bournemouth is mirrored in Torbay, Torquay, Paignton and Brixham. Does he agree that the Government's insistence on audits means that, instead of going to seaside towns, money is being used on audits of every conceivable kind? There is more bureaucracy and more intervention from the centre.

Mr. Butterfill: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is the new stealth tax. There have been huge reductions in Government support for major towns, particularly resort towns, throughout the south-west. Because the Government are giving us less, we have to raise revenue through council tax to maintain anything like adequate support facilities. Expenditure in Bournemouth has increased by less than 2.3 per cent. a year in each of the years that the Government have been in power. That is less than the rate of inflation over the same period. However, we have had to increase our council tax by over 10 per cent. this year. That is an absolute disgrace. The Government hope that the electors will blame our councillors, who are doing a cracking job, but they may find in the local elections up and down the country that they have been rumbled on that new stealth tax.

One of the many other points that I wish to deal with is infrastructure and infrastructure investment. The south-west is suffering incredibly badly. We have heard what happens in Scotland. Other regions have had huge investment from the Government, but the south-west has had almost no serious infrastructure investment. That wonderful organisation Railtrack, for example, managed to close the Devon-Cornwall rail bridge at Easter, just when visitors were coming back after foot and mouth. There are no rail links from Dorset to Exeter, the supposed seat of the regional government.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Devon to Cornwall line was closed over Easter and the Exeter to Plymouth line will be closed for four weeks in May, which is likely to cost the region up to £20 billion in lost revenue?

Mr. Butterfill: I was indeed aware of that, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing it to our attention.

Anyone wanting to go from Bournemouth or any of the south-east Dorset conurbations to the putative seat of regional government, which the Government are so keen on, would have to go back on the railway line as far as Basingstoke, wait there for another train and go back in the other direction. It is complete and utter nonsense to say that it is part of the region. It takes one and a half hours to get to London and two and a half hours to get to Exeter. There are no railway lines at all to Bristol and the north.

As for roads, there is the main south-west spine, the A30-A303, which is supposed to bring tourists from London and the major conurbations, but it is still not dualled, despite protestations that that would be done. Anyone who wants to go from Bournemouth to Exeter by road must travel from Dorchester onwards on the mediaeval cart track that dignifies itself with the name the A31. The Highways Agency has just published a report about what it intends to do about the road.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) opposes trunk road status beyond Dorchester because he does not want the traffic rumbling through the villages in his constituency?

Mr. Butterfill: Nimbyism exists in every part of the House, especially among the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I followed with interest the hon. Gentleman's analysis of the result of the privatisation of the rail industry, which he voted for. The dualling of the A30 in Cornwall, which is a serious issue, was delayed by the Government whom he supported. We are only now getting back to where we were 10 years ago.

Mr. Butterfill: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but we must move on. The Government have been in power since 1997 and they said that they would change all that. They have failed to do so and have often been supported by the Liberal Democrats.

There are no links to the north on the A350 from Dorset; to describe many parts of that road as a mediaeval cart track would be charitable. From Bournemouth and its conurbations, the only way to go north is on the M27 to the M3, then up the M3 to pick up the A34. Torbay still needs the Kingkerswell bypass

and the new bridge crossing at Barnstaple is still outstanding—delays that are supported by the iberal Democrats.

The wonderful regional government based in Exeter is beloved of the Liberal Democrats, but the problem is that the boundaries do not relate to any form of economic activity or to the infrastructure. We are doing the best we can about that. We have good relations with the poor people who are charged with making progress. That is the only way to go forward, but what is needed is a properly defined role for the agencies and an inter-relationship with Government Departments, which is still lacking.

Agriculture and tourism are the lynchpins of the south-west economy; they play a vital part in everything that goes on there. However, we have had no real Government initiatives to support or encourage rural tourism. I know that a number of my hon. Friends will speak much more lucidly on that issue than I can, because they represent rural constituencies.

With regard to our international competition, we have some of the best destinations in Europe. However, we often do not qualify for European aid or regeneration grants; Bournemouth is an example. Those grants go to other competitor resorts. In addition, VAT is higher in the UK than in many continental competitor countries, and the Government have now imposed on the industry the working time directive.

That is another wonderful European idea, which is supported of course by the Liberal Democrats, who love everything that comes from Brussels. Far more important, however, is the way in which the 48-hour restriction affects shift patterns. The hospitality industry, among others, has to operate 24 hours a day, a fact that the Government seem not to realise. We have to look after our visitors all day, every day—24 hours a day, seven days a week. That imposes shift patterns, but those are in no way recognised by the nonsense to which the Government have agreed.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): My hon. Friend will have noted in the Budget the increase in national insurance contributions for employers. That will have a major impact on the tourism industry, which employs many people in the Bournemouth and Poole area, and will be detrimental to its business prospects.

Mr. Butterfill: The increase will be hugely damaging. The Government do not understand that national insurance increases impact particularly severely on industries and businesses that are already in great difficulty, on the margin, not making profits and struggling to stay alive. That applies throughout the south-west, particularly after foot and mouth. The increase is the equivalent of a 3 per cent. rise in corporation tax. Of course if it had been a tax increase, the businesses that are not making profits anyway would not have been affected. The increase in national insurance contributions, however, will probably ensure that some of them fail.

Jim Knight: I do not wish to rehearse the whole Budget debate, but surely the hon. Gentleman welcomes the use of national insurance for the sake of the many pensioners whom he talked about earlier. They have already paid for the national health service during their working lives, and will reap the benefits of the extra investment without having to pay any extra: the increase is not in tax, but in national insurance.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman is right, but pensioners do not pay corporation tax either. My point is that the measure could have been targeted much more effectively to support the industries in his constituency that I am sure he, too, holds dear.

I know that many hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall be brief. Throughout the south-west, language schools are a success story. Every year, 30,000 students come to Bournemouth alone to learn English as a foreign language. However, they have terrible problems with the Government when it comes to getting visas. People come to me repeatedly from the Association of Recognised English Language Services, saying that they cannot get their students into the country because of the enormous delays in Departments and at Lunar house—lunatic house, some people call it. The system is supposed to be administered there, but the delays run into months and months.

If students want to extend their stay so that they can take a further course, they cannot get permission to do so. They cannot go home for Christmas either, because if they do so, they will not be let back in. The situation is complete madness. I know that the Minister is sympathetic to the problems, but more must be done. If we are to have joined-up government, we should be able to make better arrangements for such educational purposes, particularly for the people whom we have already let in.

One of the final indignities involves the British Council. It does a wonderful job in the countries where it operates, but it should not set up English language courses subsidised by the Government in those countries. Such courses take business away from language schools in this country. I hope that the Government will make that clear to the British Council.

There is a great tourist industry in the south-west. Bournemouth is a world-class resort, but we need a little more support and a little more joined-up government. I hope that the Minister can do something about that.

11.20 am

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I should declare that I am a trustee of the Tank museum, an important tourist attraction in the south-west.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on securing this important debate, which gives us a valuable opportunity to discuss important issues for a crucial industry in our region. Her Majesty the Queen is in Falmouth today launching her golden jubilee tour of the country. That is one reason why my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) could not be here, although she would have liked to be.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Where are the rest of them?

Jim Knight: I cannot account for everyone, but I was specifically asked to pass on apologies from my hon.

[Jim Knight]

Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne. Many of the dynamic team of Labour Members in the south-west are Ministers, have other responsibilities and find it difficult to attend.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West talked about the importance of tourism to the country and the south-west. It accounts for 10 per cent. of that region's gross domestic product. The spending that tourism generates is equivalent to £1,150 per resident of the region, so it is clearly of huge significance. It is the same size as the tourist industries of Wales and Scotland combined. We in the south-west would be most grateful if we received the £34.8 million that their tourist boards received in subsidy from the Government, but I suspect that we are being a little optimistic in hoping to receive that.

Mrs. Browning: I have a lot of sympathy for what the hon. Gentleman says, but is he making a proposal for the Barnett formula to be revisited?

Jim Knight: I am grateful for that most helpful contribution. I do not want to re-rehearse the Barnett formula. I hope that the formula is named after my predecessor, the only other Labour Member for South Dorset, Guy Barnett, although I should know whether that is so. [HON. MEMBERS: "Joel Barnett."] Never mind. At least I had a chance to plug Guy Barnett.

I am privileged to represent South Dorset. The traditional seaside tourism industry is crucial in Weymouth and Swanage, which is in my patch. We have heard how important it is to Bournemouth from the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West. Tourism is becoming much more important in the countryside, as is environmental tourism. The previous time I spoke in Westminster Hall we debated world heritage status. I talked at some length about the importance of world heritage coast status not only to South Dorset but to the whole area. I am sure that if the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) makes a contribution, he will mention its importance to Devon.

The tourism industry, important as it is, does not have a loud enough voice. That is one of the reasons why I welcome this debate. If tourism had the strength of voice that the farming industry has through the National Farmers Union, for example, some of the issues that we want to address today might be higher up the public agenda. Perhaps if we had the strength of such a lobby, there would be more support for the tourism industry, which is what I am sure most of us will be arguing for today. Given that the voice of the industry is not as loud as I would like it to be, this is an opportunity to question the Minister on its behalf.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Given the importance of the voice of tourism, will the hon. Gentleman recommend to his party that the seaside group of MPs should be broadened to become an all-party group and not be the exclusive domain of Labour MPs?

Jim Knight: I am sure that it would be open to hon. Members to form an all-party group. I would be happy to support it. There is value in Labour Members holding private discussions, but I am sure that it would also be helpful to have discussions on an all-party basis. There is no doubt that the Labour group has done good work on behalf of seaside towns, and that such information has been passed on to the all-party tourism group.

Does the Department view tourism as a domestic industrial issue, which it is, or as an industry that is just about attracting inward visitors? The balance of payments deficit for tourism has now increased to £12 billion a year. That is a huge gap. Given the proposal for schools to have six terms, I wonder whether the Department has listened properly to the voice of our domestic tourism industry. For example, Monkey World is an excellent tourist attraction in my constituency. I have received faxes galore from it about the proposal. The weather in this country is neither reliable nor perfect and Monkey World is worried that restricting the summer holiday to five weeks could have a significant impact on its business. It could cope, because there are other aspects of the business, but it is concerned about some of the smaller outlets, such as Farmer Giles' farm, the family farm that people can visit to understand agriculture. If we contract the tourism season, smaller businesses could suffer.

Our traditional seaside tourism industry relies on good weather and a long summer holiday to make the vast bulk of its income. A contraction of the summer holiday may cause significant damage to some of its businesses. I should be interested to know whether the Minister has discussed such matters with his colleagues at the Department for Education and Skills and what the outcome was. Schools in other countries. such as France, for example, are out for specific winter weeks. The winter sports industry can benefit from that. If the Government have five or six school terms, surely holidays could be arranged to benefit the tourism industry. I should be interested to know whether that will happen.

Are the needs of the tourism industry dealt with by all the Departments? I know that the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting and his Department focus well on the tourism industry and I am sure that they are doing their best to broaden that throughout the Government, but it important that other Departments pay due attention to it. I have spoken previously about the world heritage coast in the belief that that Minister had responsibility for that coast. To my embarrassment, I found out that the Minister with responsibility was my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs.

I am grateful to the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting for visiting the area. He has walked along part of the coast in west Dorset, and I am sure that he will represent the interests of the world heritage coast well. However, only a few of the points that I raised in my contribution on world heritage status—such as improving the standard of accommodation and of access through better transport, and the things that must be dealt with to allow the world heritage coast to prosper—are necessarily issues for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Some of them would be better addressed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and others by a variety of other Departments.

I have mentioned the school term issue facing the Department for Education and Skills. It is also responsible for further education. Increasing the level of

skill among workers in tourism is an important matter for the industry. The further education sector is somewhat undernourished at present. We are seeing some of the cost of that in my area. Weymouth college is suffering significant financial difficulties—I have been talking at length to lecturers there.

We need that sector to prosper. We need it to focus on making better links with the economic development strategies of our local authorities to deal with things such as skills gaps in our industries. I know some good work is being done. Bournemouth university has just started a degree course that includes sports management, particularly golf management. Work is being done in education, but that needs to be extended. In the local care sector in Dorset, excellent work is being done to deal with the skills gaps.

I turn to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The funding to local authorities has been mentioned. It is historically low in Dorset. It is too low; it is unfair. There is something wrong with the funding formula, and we are hopeful that that will be dealt with by the Department this year.

We need to ensure that our local authorities have a better settlement so that they can fully carry out those of their responsibilities that have an impact on our tourism industry. For example, we are trying to encourage some of our farmers to diversify into equestrian facilities. That should be developed, as it is an important element of the tourism industry in our countryside. However, our local authorities are struggling to ensure that our bridleways are properly maintained. My wife and daughter are regular horse riders. In the area where I live, it is a great problem for them properly to enjoy the Dorset coast on horseback, because bridleways are not properly maintained, and they are not connected to make decent routes. I would love the local authority to be given the funding to enable it to resolve that issue. That is just one example of the point that I am making.

Infrastructure is largely a responsibility of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I have talked about heritage coast access, and the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West talked at length about the infrastructure problems in the south-west. I sympathise with what he said. That must be improved, and the Department must make it a priority.

I turn to the Department for Trade and Industry. Monkey World is keen to see an improvement in the appalling broadband access in our area. It is the only primate rescue centre in Europe, and there is considerable interest in it from educational establishments. They wish to be able to follow and monitor what is going on with the primates that it looks after. It is now working with the learning and skills council and others to get some broadband access.

South West Tourism agrees with me that it is important that we see an improvement in e-tourism, so that people can book online, and understand what the area has to offer online, prior to visiting the area.

The regional development agency is the responsibility of the Department for Trade and Industry, and I would be interested to hear whether the Minister feels that it is properly addressing tourism. There is some evidence of that locally. The RDA is supporting Portland and understands that extending and improving the sailing facilities in the area is vital. That is contributing hugely to improvements in the number of visitors coming, and considerably extending the season.

The Government have made good progress on tourism as a whole, especially in improving the economy. The fact that we have such low unemployment and inflation and that economically we are doing well means that people have more money in their pockets to spend, are out visiting things and coming to our region. Tourism is doing reasonably well. The introduction of the minimum wage ensured that the lowest paid people, who are the most likely to want to enjoy our seaside tourism industry, had more money in their pockets, more disposable income and could come to enjoy bucket and spade holidays on Weymouth beach.

The "Your countryside, you're welcome" initiative has been a success and my final plea is for more such initiatives. For every pound that the Government spent on it, £30 was generated in bookings in the region. The Treasury gains 30 per cent. of that income. For every pound that is put in, the Treasury gains many times over.

I wish the Minister every good fortune in the comprehensive spending review to ensure that he secures more money for tourism and that, instead of spending more in Wales and Scotland, which receive enough, we spend it in the south-west.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

David Taylor (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind hon. Members that I intend to call the three Front-Bench spokesmen at 12 o'clock. Four people are standing. If they confine themselves to five or six minutes, we can fit everyone in.

11.36 am

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Thank you, Mr. Taylor, for calling me to speak in this important debate for the economy of the south-west.

I shall first discuss the south-west as an artificial construct. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) mentioned that his constituency had few links with Exeter. Mine has a few more, but not many.

In a previous debate in this Chamber, the Liberal Democrat spokesman accused me of being a Wessex regionalist. I shall speak a little about Wessex, if only because I am terribly proud that my constituency contains the site of the battle of Ethandune, where King Alfred saw off the Vikings and where he established— *[Interruption.]* That may be disputed by my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), but we can safely say that the battle of Ethandune took place in my constituency, which is where Alfred established his kingdom, which became England. It is an extremely good tourist destination, and hon. Members who have not visited the site must do so, if only to improve the local economy.

Tourists do not visit regional tourist board areas. They may go on their holidays to the Chilterns, the Cotswolds or the highlands and islands, but they do not say to themselves, "Let's go to the English Tourism

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

Council south-west region this year." Administrative boundaries are an irrelevance and a distraction in the context of today's debate. Last night, I asked the director of the fledgling Wessex Tourism Association to define his borders, but he was not much bothered. He said that, for the purposes of his business, he was dealing with Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset, with a bit of Berkshire thrown in. What concerned him was establishing a sense of place, and what interested him as a business man was how to brand the area that he liked to call Wessex and how to sell it not only to the UK market, but, more importantly, to international tour operators. Selling holidays to one another is fine, but we need to attract foreign visitors to the country in the interests of the economy.

In the south-west, although the number of UK visitors has increased slightly, and the number of nights spent in the south-west has increased, by even less than that, the number of overseas visitors has declined over the past five years. That cannot be blamed only on foot and mouth and the tragic events of 11 September because the decline started well before that.

Structural arrangements to support tourism could be inadequate, and we have heard about arrangements for marketing. Local government's statutory tasks are underfunded, and funding for tourism will always be a low priority because it is difficult to define a return on the investment in a way that would satisfy elected local authorities. That is reflected right the way up, because tourism is only a small part of the remit of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which is hardly a leviathan. That is a great shame because UK tourism generated £75 billion in 2000, which is about four times the amount of revenue generated by agriculture.

The tourism sector remains disproportionately significant in the south-west despite the ravages of foot and mouth. The sector is surprisingly hidden, partly because it is so disparate and fragmentary. The hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) commented on that and noted that no effective voice is heard from the industry.

A chief brake on the sector has undoubtedly been its skills base. Traditionally, it relied on low-skilled staff on low pay who probably had a fairly low status and did not mind working antisocial hours or putting up with poor career prospects. Although the inevitable service product may have been acceptable to the United Kingdom market at one time, it is no longer because people demand higher quality. The product is certainly not acceptable to our overseas visitors.

Many colleges have put on imaginative courses. However, we are dealing exclusively with small and medium enterprises that, in times of financial hardship, experience great difficulty investing in the skills of their staff because of the marginal nature of their business. When times get hard, such enterprises must inevitably make difficult choices, and one choice is how much to invest in staff.

I hope that the newly formed Sector Skills Council will deal with such issues. The SSC for travel, tourism and hospitality has an ambitious remit. We are told that it will reduce skills gaps and shortages, improve productivity and increase opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's work force. It will also improve the learning supply, which will include apprenticeships, further and higher education and national occupational standards. It will achieve that by assessing the labour and skills market, identifying strategies for action and working with all those involved in the fields of training and education in order to deliver solutions. That sounds grand, but it reminded me of the British Telecom business solutions advertisement that talks about "imagineering".

The project sounds very vague, and I was especially worried when I heard that the Government would pay up to £1 million of match funding to support it. The match funding will come from employers. Given the project's ambitious remit, I do not know how £2 million will cover the task. I am unclear how the money will be extracted from employers, and I shall welcome the Minister's comments.

11.43 am

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): I am supporting the debate secured by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) because my south-west constituency is unusual. Most south-west Members present represent coastal towns, but my constituency contains a beautiful forest surrounded by beautiful rivers and has a landscape to die for. We have tourist attractions slightly different from piers and bucket-and-spade holidays.

The Government have recognised our landscape. We received £1 million from the Countryside Agency to secure environmental development that goes hand in hand with economic and social development. That has been successful in promoting our area and giving it a type of brand.

Along with most of the south-west, last year we suffered the devastating effects of the foot and mouth outbreak. The Forest of Dean had a difficult time, because there were 47 confirmed cases and the whole landscape was closed. That had a major impact. Our outdoor centres were closed, as was access to rivers for canoeing and other water sports. Our forest was closed, so school trips were cancelled because nobody could access the landscape to enjoy any activity. Our youth hostels and campsites were closed. Only this spring did we start to remarket our youth hostels, when the Minister visited and walked a little of Offa's Dyke as part of the "Your countryside, you're welcome" initiative, to advertise the fact that places had re-opened. We were devastated.

It was not until we experienced the closure of the countryside that we recognised the inextricable link between agriculture and tourism. We had thought that tourism was something that involved London, the coastal resorts or, possibly, walking in the Cotswolds, and that agriculture was something different. We had not realised how linked the two activities were.

We had not really noticed what tourism was. No Government—neither the previous Conservative Government nor the present Government— had bothered to support it in our area, because it had flourished. The number of jobs had increased—one in four new jobs since 1997 were in the tourism sector. Our

tourism had done okay on its own. It was a patchwork of large and small businesses. Consequently, we had never really looked at the sector in detail, or at a strategy. There were no training initiatives for the industry, and we had not examined how we could develop and support it. That is what we must do now. The good thing that could come out of the foot and mouth outbreak would be taking forward the strategy and the training.

In a small way we have started to move forward in the Forest of Dean. We have been one of the most successful districts in the south-west in obtaining grants from the Government after foot and mouth to help us remarket the area. We have had a fantastic response. We set up a light show at Beechenhurst on the sculpture trail, and 45,000 people visited it. We were expecting 4,000 or 5,000 cars to come, but we had 10 times that number of people. A little marketing, advertising and promotion and we had a huge response. That is the way forward.

We also had a food fair in Speech house to promote local produce, reflecting the link between agriculture and tourism. We have given grants to individual companies such as canoe companies, to get them restarted. There are outdoor experiment companies such as Motiva, in which people climb ropes. Presumably Monkey World, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) could have something to do with that. With the little money that is coming through, we are starting to build and develop.

We have considered the problems sporadically. The Government have not completely ignored the sector. Hon. Members have mentioned the minimum wage, and we have talked about how the growth of the economy has meant that more people can use the tourism sector. The minimum wage was crucial in lifting wage levels in a sector in which pay was traditionally very low.

Mr. Swire: I am not aware that anyone else has mentioned the minimum wage today. We talked about national insurance, and the hon. Lady should be aware that an average firm employing 10 people, which in my part of the west country means an enormous number of firms, will have an increased NI bill of £2,361 as a result of the Budget. That is the problem that we were drawing attention to, not the minimum wage.

Diana Organ: I am more concerned about the vast numbers of people who work in the sector. They had a rough time until the introduction of the minimum wage because they were poorly paid.

We have also developed training initiatives. The new targets are vocational training courses in colleges, and the ability to tell people that they should stay in either full-time training or education until the age of 19 will help develop that area of training for the sector.

As we have said this morning, the key issue is to promote and market the sector in the south-west if we want it to recover and develop. The Forest of Dean used to be covered by the Heart of England tourist board, but because of recent changes, we are being taken over by the South West Tourism. I am happy about that, because I was visited by the chair of the board, Cairns Boston, who I believe is in the Chamber today as an observer. He asked me how we could bring together local people and tell them about the SWT. We organised a conference at Speech house at which South West Tourism told many members of the sector about its services, including market research and advertising support. Most of us were impressed, although we found its budget laughable.

Mr David Taylor (in the Chair): Order. I would be grateful if the hon. Lady drew her remarks to a close to allow other speakers to contribute.

Diana Organ: Thank you, Mr. Taylor.

The marketing budget of South West Tourism and other tourist offices and local councils is too small. My only plea to the Minister is that more resources for specialised marketing should go into those areas of the south-west where tourism needs to recover from the devastation of last summer's foot and mouth.

11.51 am

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): We have developed a clear strategy for tourism in the far south-west in the past few years. We have tried to promote quality and professionalism and make the industry less seasonal so that it can provide us with full-time, well paid rather than part-time, seasonal jobs. We have also tried to create a targeted and co-ordinated marketing campaign to drive up the number of visitors who will spend money in and bring economic benefits to our region.

There are three aspects in which the Government can assist the process. First, planning guidance must move away from considering only land use to examining all resources, so that decisions can be taken in the context of an economic environment. Individual planning applications should not be accepted without considering the total economic context that we want. One simple but rather silly example concerns the use of brown signs to promote attractions and direct people to them. It is an absolute minefield of bureaucracy and stupidity. For a couple of hundred pounds' worth of signs, we must go through an amazing plethora of decision making.

Secondly, hon. Members have mentioned rail delays when talking about infrastructure. There will be delays on roads, too, and we all accept that, but timing is crucial. Is it not possible to involve elected representatives in ensuring that when programmes are made for rail or road infrastructure improvements, they take into account the needs of the tourism industry, including their possible economic benefits? Even if it will cost a bit more to repair a certain bit of railway or road in a slightly prolonged programme, it is vital that we get the voice of tourism into the decision making. People will be turned off from coming down to the far south-west if they have to wait in long traffic jams or get off the train and on to a bus for an unplanned 20-mile bus ride.

Dr. Murrison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Breed: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

My third point concerns grants. I ask the Minister to examine diversification versus upgrading and the way in which grants are applied post-foot and mouth. A lot of money is going into diversification, but some of it is merely working against the strategy. We do not want a

[Mr. Breed]

large number of extra farm tourism projects that might lower the overall quality. We have been driving up the quality to get the experience right. Upgrading is sometimes a better way of using that money. We want diversification in some, but not all, projects. Money invested in genuine upgrading is an essential part of trying to support the overall strategy. Some people have explained to me the tortuous process of trying to receive grant assistance. They produced huge business plans, only to be told that their project did not meet the criteria six months before. It is ludicrous to have objective 1, the Government office for the south west, tourism boards and everything else. The process must be more streamlined so that grants can be given quickly where they are needed.

11.55 am

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): Objective 1 covers Cornwall, and objective 2 covers part of Somerset. Our problem in Somerset is that we cannot match the necessary funding in order to take up the difference. Councils want to be able to market directly and to take steps to encourage tourism, but they cannot as they cannot match the funding. Will the Minister consider that problem in the light of foot and mouth disease? There could be more direct marketing under objective 2 if the funding could be matched.

It was obvious at a meeting with the regional development agency that it wanted to be the prime producer of marketing for tourism in the south-west. It cannot be, as the south-west is a diversified area. I admit that my constituency has little in common with Cornwall, Weymouth or anywhere else. It is unique. I hope that the Minister will continue to pressurise bodies such as the regional development agencies to target their money where it is required. Exmoor encourages many people to come to it, as do the Quantocks and the Levels. I will not even talk about the battle of Sedgemoor. We will encourage people to come much more if we can target the resources through the RDAs and keep out the regional assemblies.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): It is a question not only of investing the money, but of the speed at which the response is required. During the foot and mouth crisis last year, organisations did not help people on Exmoor quickly enough.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I agree. I will excite the Minister even more, and I know that he will approve, as I will talk about Butlins. It is a tremendous place, and he should go there. Some 9,000 people a week gather in one place, and the repeat rate is almost 66 per cent. a year. Last year, Butlins had to produce videos and brochures, as the local council could not produce them during the foot and mouth crisis. It was let down by the people who said that they would promote tourism in the south-west, but did not. It was left to a major employer of 750 people—hon. Members may like to imagine what their national insurance bill will be this year—to make its own video for the council. Butlins is vital to areas such as mine. It is the largest employer by far, yet it receives almost no help to encourage people to come.

I also wonder about Taste of the West, which was trumpeted as an opportunity for producers to promote their food and drink products in an organisation that could foster the best of the west. What has happened to it? Where has it gone? Why are the regional development agencies not using it as a marketing tool to increase productivity and provide genuine reasons for people to come? Cream teas are synonymous with the south-west. What has happened to them? Why is there no marketing budget? Why are the Government not promoting schemes such as Taste of the West as a tool to encourage people to come to the south-west?

Direct marketing is the way forward. If we want to encourage people to come, we must target them specifically. We have 20p per head, unlike the Welsh and the Scots. There is palpable jealousy towards Wales, which my constituency overlooks, because of the money that is available to it, but not to us. Why cannot the Minister target that money through counties, if necessary, so that they can raise the profile of their areas and promote good tourist attractions, such as the battle of Sedgemoor or Monkey World? That would avoid having to go through the plethora of organisations. I suspect that the money will go where it is easier, such as to objective 1 areas such as Cornwall, and not to areas like ours which are rather unsexy because they are out on a limb in the middle of Somerset. Will the Minister think about it?

11.59 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): In view of the pressure of time, I will concentrate on the issues on which there has been broad agreement this morning. I should first like to take up the point that the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) just made. The proportion per capita that is being invested in promoting this extremely important industry in England is a disgrace, but there is nothing new in that. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) will recall that in the 1992-97 Parliament I tried to persuade the then Conservative Government to recognise that inequality. The discrepancy worsened during the course of that Parliament and is now, frankly, deplorable.

I agree with what has been said about the need to ensure that we get a quality product. I was at the Eden project this Monday and there were thousands of visitors. Although a great many of the projects that came out of the millennium have been far from satisfactory and disappointing—the dome was obviously at the forefront of that—the Eden project has been a triumphant success. It is firmly based on a good-quality product that is already in Cornwall. People do not come to Cornwall just for that project; they come for the whole Cornish experience. We have a brand in Cornwall that is saleable all over the world. If we can achieve that in other parts of the United Kingdom, we could make huge progress.

Mr. David Taylor (in the Chair): Order. I will let the hon. Member continue, but the Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman will need to finish at ten minutes past 12.

Mr. Tyler: I thank the Liberal Democrat spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), for co-operating on that.

I wanted to mention two other issues that have not attracted much attention this morning. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West mentioned VAT in passing, but the discrepancy between the cost of a holiday in the United Kingdom and the cost of a comparable holiday in continental Europe acts as a disincentive to people, not only to come to Britain, but to keep coming here. I, too, am a vice-president of the British Resorts Association. The work that was done for the industry to identify the effect of that discrepancy—again it was under the previous Tory Government—has never been properly addressed by the Treasury. It must be.

Mr. Swire: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: I do not have time.

It is a major problem and I hope that the Government will look at that issue again. It arises every time we have a discussion in my constituency.

The other issue, perhaps the word that dare not speak its name, is the euro. Every holiday business in my constituency, in the rest of Cornwall and throughout the south-west is suffering from the overvalued, uncompetitive pound. That problem must be addressed. Those who argue that it is giving way to the euro and that Britain should never enter the euro, should recognise that the euro has already entered Britain. It is part of our national economy now. It is a major factor. It affects this industry and the farming and fishing industries to an extent that is almost impossible to calculate. It is the biggest single problem that the industry now faces.

Something has to be done, both to enable the industry to compete more effectively—that means that the value of the pound must be addressed—and to prepare it if, in due course, we find ourselves going into the eurozone. Already the enterprising businesses in this industry are catering for the euro, but they are not best helped by the way in which the Government drag their heels on the wider issue. I am grateful for the brief opportunity to contribute to the debate. I thank my hon. Friend for giving me that time.

12.3 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on securing this debate on an important subject at a crucial time for the industry. The season has begun and we can see whether tourism across the whole of the south-west will improve, following the difficulties that it faced last year.

I was surprised that the hon. Gentleman gave a number of reasons not to visit Bournemouth—its mediaeval cart tracks and other problems.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Member give way?

Andrew George: I am sure that representatives of the tourism industry will want to thank the hon. Gentleman for his efforts in that respect. Had he chosen a less combative approach he might have—

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew George: Yes.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman mentioned me, and my constituency. I did not say that Bournemouth had [illegible]rt tracks; I said that the roads that went from Bou[illegible]emouth to the north and to the west were no bett[illegible]than cart tracks and I asked for them to be imp[illegible]ved.

[illegible]drew George: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman fo[illegible]iving me the opportunity to put the record straight as [illegible] as he is concerned. In advancing his arguments, he m[illegible] be careful not to dissuade people from going to B[illegible]rnemouth. His approach to the issue should be less c[illegible]bative.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Member give way?

Andrew George: I will not give way. I will make some headway. I have little time left.

We need to identify the many shared interests in planning for a more effective tourism industry in the south-west. People have been talking about the foot and mouth disease that has affected the region; humans are suffering from benefit of hindsight disease, the symptoms of which are a brass neck and short-term memory loss. We heard a litany of failure on the subject of Railtrack, VAT on accommodation, lack of investment in roads and the funding formula for tourism authorities, but the seeds of those problems were sewn by the previous Conservative Government.

Mr. Swire: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sanders: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andrew George: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) as he has not spoken.

Mr. Sanders: The Kingkerswell bypass—the essential link between Torbay, the third largest tourist resort in the country, and the rest of the UK—would have been built by now if the previous Government had not de-trunked it in 1996.

Andrew George: My hon. Friend is right. In view of earlier comments, it is fair that he should have the opportunity to put the record straight.

The hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) made some helpful points. He said that he was hurt to be described as a Wessex regionalist, but he should not be worried about that. I agree with his fundamental point: as far as marketing is concerned, the south-west is an artificial administrative construct. In tourism terms, places, not artificial constructs, should have a brand. Any additional funding to tourism outside Scotland and Wales should be directed to places that have a clear identity, whether they be in Wessex, Cornwall or elsewhere, and should be used to market those places effectively. Opportunities for joint marketing in a wider area should, of course, be encouraged but such opportunities should enable places to become involved; they should not be cajoled or forced into joint marketing.

Branding will provide a good opportunity to integrate tourism and other sectors, which the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) wanted to encourage. Objective 1 in Cornwall will provide an opportunity to establish a clear Cornish brand. People who have

[Andrew George]

enjoyed their holidays in Cornwall will after returning home be able to find products from Cornwall on their supermarket shelves.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall rightly said that we should be careful that public funds do not result simply in more diversification and thereby saturate the market. The Government cannot simply shift the problems of farming on to tourism; they must be addressed in farming.

My hon. Friend also referred to infrastructure. In a debate in January, I took up the prospective closure of the Albert bridge at Easter. At that stage, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), said that it was wrong that Railtrack had consulted only within the industry and not with tourism agencies and commercial and other passenger users. We were told that something would be done about that, but now we face the closure of the rail service between Exeter and Plymouth every weekend in May. There will be further road closures throughout and beyond May. The Minister must take on board the need for Government agencies to consult more widely.

12.10 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I remind colleagues of my entry in the Register of Members' Interests, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on securing this debate on tourism. I look forward to visiting Bournemouth in September and October.

We last debated tourism in Westminster Hall in November, when coincidentally we also focused on tourism in the south-west. Perhaps it is not entirely coincidental that we are concentrating on south-west England again, because tourism is a major industry in that region and its tourism businesses were badly hit by the foot and mouth crisis. Geographically, the south-west is one of England's largest regions. A huge diversity of potentially enjoyable visitor experiences is on offer in Britain as a whole.

As my hon. Friend said, the south-west enjoys a long and scenically beautiful coastline, as a result of which many tourism businesses depend on the seaside resorts and visits to the seaside for their prosperity. Those seaside resorts face some of the greatest difficulties in attracting and retaining long-stay visitors and in adapting to the changing pattern of leisure and holidays in recent times. As my hon. Friend reminded us, the future success of the tourism industry in many seaside resorts such as Bournemouth depends on the support given to tourism by local authorities and the ability of local government and other agencies, including the RDAs, local tourist associations and chambers of commerce, to attract and secure funding for regeneration, to improve the infrastructure, such as transport and the provision of car parking, and to provide better facilities and enhanced amenities.

My hon. Friend rightly said that this year's local government settlement for seaside resorts has been disgraceful. I can report that Scarborough, which is partly in my constituency—part of the borough includes the seaside resort of Filey— has had a desperately poor settlement. The Government must address that issue if they are serious about wanting to support tourism in seaside resorts.

I visited Bournemouth in autumn 2000 and I commend the efforts of the local council to boost tourism in the area. We cannot assume that even a resort such as Bournemouth, which is one of the most popular and prestigious, will for ever retain its leading position. It is essential to continue new investment to make the town and surrounding area more attractive and to help businesses modernise and improve accommodation facilities. This is as much an issue for the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and the support that it gives to local authorities, as it is for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, with its responsibility as the sponsoring Department for the tourism and leisure industry as a whole.

Since last November's debate, I have also had the chance to spend time visiting many other parts of the south-west, where I have met people from businesses large and small: from small farm guest houses through seaside and historic city centre hotels to major theme parks. I was in Devon in March, visiting Dartmouth, Totnes and Exeter. I also spent an enjoyable morning on Dartmoor, for which I am grateful to Mr. Malcolm Bell, the chief executive of South West Tourism. I commend him and his staff for all that they have done to promote tourism in the south-west during the difficulties of recent times.

Several issues emerged during my visits, some of which I shall raise with the Minister. I was struck by the tremendous resilience of the people working in the tourism industry, especially those running their own businesses. The year 2001 was not a good year, but they are keen to make progress in 2002. They do not ask for favours, although they think that the Government could do more to help. National insurance contribution increases will not do that, as the chairman of Tourism Alliance said in a letter to hon. Members dated 26 April. It was suggested that the NIC increase will cost £250 million to tourism businesses throughout Britain next year.

The tourism industry is worried that the Government have no apparent strategy to deal with a further outbreak of foot and mouth. It is keen to promote self-help and to do the best for itself. I commend the Dartmoor Tourist Association and others in south Hampshire for their work to improve the quality of destinations, hotels, guest houses and other attractions and for their promotion of literature. The association is keen to improve quality. One of the paradoxes of the money that got through to tourism businesses following the outbreak of the foot and mouth crisis was that they were able to improve facilities. As one guest house proprietor in Dartmoor said, "We have this wonderful new facility. We are all up to date. We have refurbished, but we have no customers." That is the key issue.

The tourism industry is keen to invest in training, and it would like more money to be made available for training. It wants to ensure that some of the attractions that have been supported and created by the private sector do not lose their customers to the many other attractions that have received substantial public subsidy through the lottery, such as the Eden project to which the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler)

referred. I hope that, in the years ahead, we can help businesses throughout the sector with lottery money, especially for heritage.

Mr. Butterfill: Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of training, I hope that he shares my hope that the Government will, in future schemes, do better than they did with individual learning accounts, which have been so comprehensively criticised.

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend has made an extremely good point. The tourism industry wants more patronage, and that brings me to marketing. Last November when we discussed such matters in Westminster Hall, the Minister had the courage to admit that the Government had not taken the industry seriously enough and were wrong to remove the marketing role from the English Tourism Council. I remind the hon. Members for North Cornwall and for St. Ives (Andrew George) that, under the Conservatives, the old English Tourist Board had a marketing function. This Government removed it from the English Tourism Council.

Andrew George: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Greenway: No, I do not have time.

Andrew George: But the hon. Gentleman named me by constituency.

Mr. Greenway: I know, but I am only reacting to what has been said. I am slightly surprised that the Liberal Democrat spokesman has not restated what I understood was Liberal Democrat policy, which was to call for the English Tourism Council to be given a marketing function. Over the past six months, there have been encouraging suggestions. I believe that the Minister and the Secretary of State are trying hard to convince colleagues in the Government that that is the way forward. I hope that the Minister will have something more to say about it today. Everyone in tourism believes that we need a national marketing strategy for England—even in remote parts, such as Dartmoor. Regional promotion has its place. It is important, but regional government is not the answer.

It was suggested in the *Financial Times* today that the Government may be publishing a White Paper about regionalism this Friday, when the House is not sitting. It is a serious matter and the Government must recognise that what is needed is not a competition between different regions of Britain for the same customers, but a strategic marketing strategy to persuade more domestic tourists to take holidays, short breaks, leisure breaks and so on in this country. Since last November's debate, Tourism Alliance, which the Minister can take some pride in having launched, has published its report, and I welcome it. One of the key conclusions is that we must give the English Tourism Council a strategic marketing role.

The vast majority of tourism businesses in south-west England, and the rest of the country, depend on the domestic market for most of their visitors. As Tourism Alliance said, £4 of every £5 spent in our tourism businesses comes from the domestic market. The alliance suggests that we increase the value of domestic tourism by at least 1 per cent. above the rate of growth in consumer expenditure. That is a challenging objective, and it will not be achieved unless the English Tourism Council has a marketing function. I hope that the Minister will say something about that.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on inspiring an interesting debate. It is great to see half the Conservative party on either side of him. I have never seen such enthusiasm for a debate of this sort. That is good news. We have little time, but I shall try to answer some of the questions that have been asked.

I agree with almost every word that the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said. The lack of a marketing role was a mistake, and that was exposed when there was a downturn in the American economy, then foot and mouth, and then the events of 11 September. We have got to sort out the marketing role, and some interesting suggestions have been made about how we might take marketing forward.

We must not forget that Bournemouth is a great success story for tourism. As the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West said, it generates an enormous amount of revenue and employs many people. I think that I am right in saying that tourism brings £500 million to Bournemouth—a tremendous amount—and employs some 20,000. He is right to point out that Bournemouth is peculiar in terms of its geography. I hope that he does not mind me saying so. Several hon. Members pointed out that people go to a place to visit attractions, or perhaps because they want to explore it. They do not go because it lies within an artificial administrative configuration, but for lots of other reasons, and the hon. Gentleman's colleagues have made some of them obvious.

Mrs. Browning: Many of those attractions are signposted by brown tourism signs. I have already raised with other Ministers my concern that the Highways Agency has said that it would like fewer such signs. I thoroughly disapprove of that, and hope that the Minister will use his influence with the Highways Agency to ensure that it does not take action on the matter, because many small rural businesses and attractions will lose out if it does.

Dr. Howells: I assure the hon. Lady that we are trying to punch our weight in such debates. I think that there is too much road signage, but that is not a matter for this debate. We must be rational on the matter, but we must not lose the benefit that brown signs can bring to tourist attractions, especially in areas where there are no other industries, or in rural areas with no obvious tourist attractions. We need to be guided to hidden attractions. The hon. Lady is right, and we shall certainly play our part in the debate.

The hon. Member for Ryedale will be interested to hear me admit that I have taken my model for how to take tourism forwards from the south-west. There were shortcomings in every part of the country in the way that help was given during and after the foot and mouth

[Dr. Howells]

scourge. Despite those shortcomings, the south-west acted well. South West Tourism, with John Boston and Martin Bell, has provided us with a working model, along with the regional development agency and all the private practitioners in tourism in that area. We must look hard at that, because it points the way forward.

I have travelled all around this country looking at tourism projects and the way in which public funding tries to help them, and I think that the most successful area is the south-west.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): The Minister has visited Percy's hotel at Virginstow in my constituency, and he has seen the importance of training for excellence. We would benefit from seeing more of that help—training for excellence—throughout the far south-west.

Dr. Howells: Indeed.

The hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) raised the important issue of training. I am sure that he did not mean to give the impression that it is all right to carry on using people who do not mind having low wages and unsocial hours—I think that that was the way that he put it. I do not know anyone who does not mind having a low wage.

Dr. Murrison: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Howells: No, I will not give way. If the hon. Gentleman will sit down, he will find out that I am just about to praise him.

It is important that we understand what makes a success story such as Percy's hotel. It is a magnificent hotel: it is in the middle of countryside; it is a great project altogether, and there are great plans for it. Such a success story depends on notions of quality. That point has been highlighted by hon. Members of all parties. It is important that we increase skills and quality, and we cannot do that on the cheap.

I return to the point made by the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger). As I understood it, he suggested that the money should be targeted at people who know the attractions of their areas, so that they can market them better. I have a lot of sympathy for that view. However, as the hon. Member for Ryedale pointed out, there is also a vital need for generic marketing, for the marketing of England, and that must be on a par with the way in which the Scots and the Welsh market their countries. What is interesting about the examples of Scotland and Wales is that those devolved Administrations have understood the enormous economic driving power of tourism, so they have put it right in the middle of economic development—not on the periphery, but in the middle of it.

Mr. Swire: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Howells: I will not give way at the moment, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind, as I must continue.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) was right to draw hon. Members' attention to the attraction of the Jurassic coast. It is a world heritage site. That is a tremendous achievement.

My hon. Friend also talked about quality—that point was made by hon. Members of all parties. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West knows better than I do that we may attract 5 million visitors to Bournemouth, but if the quality of the product is not good enough, they will not return, because this is one of the most competitive industries. However, I must tell him that every time I have visited Bournemouth, I have had a good holiday. Generally, it offers high quality, but that is not the case with regard to a lot of resorts.

I commend those who have made the point that we must take resorts far more seriously than we have done. We should take a look at the success story that is Bournemouth. I think that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West will admit that it has been a great partnership venture: all sorts of people have been involved in it. They have had to overcome difficulties, but they have been very good at marketing the wonderful spot that Bournemouth occupies, its visual beauty, its nearness to the New forest and to a wonderful heritage coastline

Mr. Swire: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Howells: I am sorry, but I will not.

We can learn from Bournemouth, because it is realising that it has a symbiotic relationship with the New forest, and it is marketing itself not simply as a tourist resort, but as a gateway to a very beautiful hinterland. That is the way forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) talked about the almost hybrid situation that her constituency finds itself in with the tourism industry. It is realising that it has some tremendous niche markets to exploit. It was a joy to stay at the St. Briavel's youth hostel. I could not believe that it was a youth hostel when I walked in and discovered that there were carpets on the floor. That was completely alien to my experience, but it was very nice to be there.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West on drawing attention to this major issue. Any industry that generates £75 billion of revenue for this country every year is important. We have managed to get £20 million out of the Treasury to market Britain this year. We have never had such sums for marketing and that is cause for celebration.

Mr. Bill O' Brien (in the Chair): Order. Time is up.

Sub-Post Offices (Birkenhead)

12.30 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Obviously, I am pleased to have the opportunity to debate the future of sub-post offices in Birkenhead. As the Minister knows, I want to look to the future rather than dwelling in the past. No sub-post offices in urban areas will be saved by looking to the past.

I shall make three comments about how the debate has shaped up in the past to allow us to begin to understand why there is real concern in Birkenhead about the future of our dozen or so sub-post offices. My first comment is about the quality of the Post Office Board in the past. The Government have started to get a grip on that, but I placed it on the record that during the short period when I was the Minister responsible for the benefit card, I was so appalled by the quality of the Post Office Board that I asked officials whether the whole board could be sacked. Sadly, that advice was not followed; consequently, taxpayers are contributing considerable sums and much of our post office network is under threat.

I am pleased to place it on the record that the Government are acting decisively on the quality of the Post Office Board and the business plans that it proposes. The previous business plan was a suicide note for sub-post offices throughout urban areas of the country.

My second point of concern is that prior to the 1997 election, all Labour Members rightly hammered the Tory Government on the rate of closures of sub-post offices. I know that the Government must be enormously worried that the rate of closure is now greater than under that Conservative Administration.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Field: The Minister shakes his head and I am sure that he will come back to me on that. We can put his figures to the Library—it provided me with the data.

My third reason for concern, but also for hope, relates to the Prime Minister's comments during a speech in Croydon prior to last year's election. He tried to establish the idea of liveability for the spaces in which we and our constituents live. I shall cite a paragraph of that speech because it sets the tone of our debate. The Prime Minister said:

> "We also need stronger local communities and an improved local quality of life. Streets where parents feel safe to let their children walk to school. Where people want to use the parks. Where graffiti, vandalism, litter and dereliction are not tolerated. Where the environment in which we live fosters rather than alienates a sense of local community and mutual responsibility."

The point is that in Birkenhead, as in many of our urban areas, the Prime Minister's objective will not be achievable if there is a further round of massive closures of sub-post offices.

At the end of the debate, it will give me pleasure to present the Minister with a petition signed by 3,000 people who use a sub-post office in the Oxton area of Birkenhead. The petition was organised at almost the drop of a hat by Mary Powell, who is the sub-postmistress of that area. My guess is that when I am in Birkenhead tomorrow she will give me another pile of signatures, so strong is local feeling in the town about the potential loss of any of our dozen or so sub-post offices. I hope that the Minister will accept the petition as a sign of the genuine anxiety that our local voters have about the provision of post office services.

That anxiety is also noticeable in the polls. I am grateful to Living Streets for drawing my attention to the flipside of the data. If people are asked, "What are the big issues facing the country?" they talk about the national health service, schools and—perhaps less, because of our success—the economy. However, if they are asked the similar question, "What are the big issues that affect you?" they talk about their local community and what affects it, whether it is safe and the importance of local services. When asked about local services, they cite whether it is easy to get to, or possible to walk to, the local doctor's surgery or library and, above all, whether the post office, which they believe to be a crucial part of a viable living space, is in walking distance.

I hope that an objective of the debate is to push up the Government's agenda the findings from such polls. Although it is important to ask about the big national issues that affect voters, in the age of, sadly, the alienation of voters we need to pay a great deal of attention to what they regard as the big issues that they face locally.

My third point in explaining why sub-post offices are so important to viable local communities is that, just as Governments are, I think, realising that it is not possible to have happy families if the economy does not pay family wages that support a family with children, so it is not possible to have safe and strong communities if the essential services of those communities are ripped out. I do not believe that the Government's entirely genuine commitment to building up strong communities is consistent with what I fear might be the policy of another wave—a significant wave—of the closure of sub-post offices.

This debate looks to the future. In a moment, I shall ask for the Minister's help in looking to the future and making it more secure for our sub-post offices, thereby making our local communities stronger. The debate has centred on Birkenhead but my guess is that we could talk about any of our inner-city areas. What I say about Birkenhead is true of them, too.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on raising the issue of Birkenhead in particular. Does he agree that this is a serious problem for all our urban areas and that all our communities, as represented in the House, are affected by closures? Is he worried about the important role that post offices play in the lives of our pensioners? Is he worried about how the Government are increasingly moving towards making—although they say that there will be a choice—pensioners not use the post office to collect their pension? Does he agree that many pensioners will be extremely worried if they have to deal with a bank?

Mr. Field: Those comments are so relevant to what I want to say that innocent passers-by might even believe that there was collusion between the two of us. My hon. Friend is right to say that it is an issue for pensioners, as

[Mr. Field]

I shall emphasise in a moment. However, it was noticeable when Mary Powell brought people together to greet me to present the petition for the Minister that not only local businesses, such as the barber, the chemist and the charity shop, but a huge number of mothers were present. I had to comment that, sadly, if the Labour party had called that meeting, very few people would have been there. The sub-post office called the meeting, and the street was full of people who were interested in the issue.

I shall pose two questions to the Minister. First, can he recall whether progress has been made on the introduction of the universal bank? Yesterday, I saw in the press that the person brought into the Post Office to spearhead the introduction of the universal bank was leaving. Is that good or bad news? Secondly, the Government—quite rightly—know that some sub-post offices will have to close; it would be foolish to think that we can keep every one open. However, the network reinvention programme is key to the survival of more, rather than fewer, of those sub-post offices. I should therefore be grateful if the Minister, either in debate or in correspondence, could report progress on that programme.

I ask the Minister for help on four matters. The first touches on an issue raised by my right hon. Friend—I am sorry, my hon. Friend; she should be right hon., and will be soon no doubt—the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey). She mentioned the changeover from books to automated credit transfer payments. My worry is that the Department for Work and Pensions will consider the changeover an opportunity to make massive savings in its budget. Pensioners and others who draw their income over the counter in cash may be pushed into using a bank account.

I fear that when the changeover comes people will be asked about their banking arrangements, and that if they wish to continue to draw cash over the post office counter they will have to ask for an interview to explain and justify that choice. Will the Minister give an assurance that those who currently draw cash will be encouraged to continue that practice?

Secondly, will the Minister take up my comments about the fear that the Department for Work and Pensions may try to push people into the banking system when they would prefer arrangements similar to those that they already have? Thirdly—this was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall—will the Government ask the National Audit Office to undertake a study on the real total costs to local communities of closures of sub-post offices? What are the extra costs in fares and in home helps, who have to cover greater distances to post offices to draw money for some of their customers? Who looks after the children when those journeys are being made, and what is the cost of that?

What is the cost to the national health service of people feeling more isolated and depressed and going to the doctor's to get anti-depressants? That clearly relates to the point that my hon. Friend made about post offices playing a social role. People turn up and meet one another, and so become the eyes and ears of the local police force. They help to police an area. Also, where there are viable local sub-post offices there are other viable local shops, and where there are such shops there are people shopping, watching and listening. That is the basis for a proper community.

If we remove the sub-post office, we make other businesses vulnerable. We all know the problems caused by vandals when businesses close and shops become derelict. Will the Government consider being the first Government to ask the National Audit Office to do a proper costing of the closure of a sub-post office to a local community?

Fourthly, will the Minister refer this debate to Lord Falconer, who co-ordinates the group on liveability, which the Prime Minister established? Will he also forward a request for the National Audit Office to carry out a proper, comprehensive costing of what losing a sub-post office means to a community?

Those are the points that I wanted to make. While sounding a note of caution, I wanted to look to the future. The dozen or so sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses in Birkenhead do not believe that they will secure their futures merely by looking to the past. In looking to the future, however, they recall the clear statements that we made before we were elected in 1997 about the importance of sub-post offices to the viability and life of local communities. In the quarter of an hour that remains, I hope that the Minister will look to the future in a positive way. What he says will be followed closely not only by sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses in Birkenhead, but by those elsewhere, who know that his words affect their futures, too.

I am immensely grateful to you, Mr. O'Brien, for allowing me to introduce this debate.

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on securing this debate and on the courteous and coherent way in which he presented his arguments. I believe that his strong support for the post office network and his concerns for its future are shared by the whole House.

My right hon. Friend has taken a particular interest in this subject because of the social role that sub-post offices play in the communities that they serve. As a distinguished former Social Security Minister and an author, he knows better than anyone the issues that affect poorer claimants in deprived communities and the vital need for such people to have local resources such as sub-post offices.

I have just returned from a ministerial visit to the north-west, during which I toured small businesses and came close to my right hon. Friend's constituency. I have been greatly heartened over the past two days to see a revitalised economy and low rates of unemployment. Those developments will allow us to concentrate our energies on areas that have not quite caught up and to which we need to devote resources.

My right hon. Friend made several thoughtful points, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), and I shall respond in some detail. I wholly endorse my right hon. Friend's view that we need a viable network of post offices to serve the needs of every community. I applaud his efforts and those of his constituents in collecting 19,000 signatures in support of

Oxton village post office, and I am sure that such customer loyalty will guarantee its commercial success. I hope that the same is true of other post offices, whose customers are rallying behind them. I also endorse my right hon. Friend's stress on the need to maintain a network of sub-post offices to meet the needs of customers who depend on them for ease of access to their pensions, benefits and many other services.

I agree that post offices provide a focal point for their communities; indeed, the sub-post office network plays a vital role in society. Many of the vulnerable and the elderly rely on the sub-post office to deliver services to them, and it is a convenient place for the community to access Government services, financial products and, of course, postal services. It is much more than just a retail outlet, particularly in rural areas, although it also plays a vital role in urban areas. I should also stress that it is a public service.

Local sub-post offices provide vital human contact for many of their customers, serving 28 million people every week. They are a trusted point of contact with government services and a wide range of other services, and I am sure that all hon. Members will join me in placing on the record our thanks to the dedicated service that sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses perform. As hon. Members know, sub-post offices are a vital part of the social and financial fabric of the country. I know that everyone—Post Office Ltd., sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses and post office customers—wants the post office network to survive and, better than that, to thrive in the 21st century.

My right hon. Friend focused on two areas and asked me to consider four other important matters. In particular, he asked about the network urban reinvention programme. This debate is about urban post offices in particular, and I know that my right hon. Friend will share my pleasure that there have been only five net closures in the north-west in the year to March, leaving 1,848 local post offices and sub-post offices delivering an excellent service. Although I do not want to trade figures—and I know that my right hon. Friend will diligently check the figures with the Library—the latest figures for the country as a whole show that his area heads the league tables for the number of post offices retained. That is important, but in the past year the number of closures totalled 262. That is all very regrettable, but in 1991-92, 478 post offices closed, and I was shaking my head because there has been a decline, rather than an acceleration, in closures. We need to take on board my right hon. Friend's comments, as well as those of my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall and other hon. Members, to ensure that post offices have a viable future.

In respect of urban reinvention, in the year 2000 the Cabinet Office carried out a detailed study of the future of the post office network and made 24 recommendations. In the subsequent comprehensive spending review, the Chancellor allocated £270 million to start implementing the key recommendations. That has been the subject of extensive consultation with the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters. Following that consultation, letters were sent out last month, inviting the views of every urban sub-postmaster and sub-postmistress. Detailed discussions with each one of them are now being held, which will be followed by a public consultation. There will also be detailed public consultations on each restructuring proposal. I can confirm to the House that that will involve hon. Members, local authorities, Postwatch, the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters and other relevant bodies. The objective of Post Office Ltd. for the urban network is clear. It is tasked with establishing better, brighter post offices as viable businesses that deliver adequate returns to sub-postmasters and a full service in their communities. Extensive work is being undertaken to determine how best the urban network should adapt to commercial changes in the marketplace and how funding should be structured to assist in that. In some areas there are up to 10 post offices in a square mile, often located within a few hundred yards of one another. Nationally, some two thirds of the urban population, perhaps some 30 million people, live within half a mile of two or more sub-post offices. I welcome the realistic note that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead injected into the debate when he said that it would be foolish to think that we could keep every post office open.

It is important to recognise that the programme on which we are embarking has the full support of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters. I am grateful to Colin Baker, its general secretary, for regarding the talk of mass closures as scaremongering and wide of the mark. Regarding his criticisms of those who criticise the industry for being out of date and in decline, I take to heart the advice that my right hon. Friend gave some years ago about the quality of management in the Post Office. However, I am delighted by the quality of the managers whom we have brought in. These include David Mills, who has great plc expertise gained at HSBC, and Alan Leighton, who is one of the most successful retail entrepreneurs ever seen in this country and has the practical background and great leadership qualities that are needed to enable the Post Office to turn the corner.

On universal banking, I welcome the support that my right hon. Friend has given to the general principle of the automation of benefit payments to tackle fraud and reduce unnecessary administrative costs. Some of that money has probably found its way, although not hypothecated, to the good things that have been done for claimants, such as the minimum income guarantee for senior citizens and the rises in child benefit—but we could have a separate debate on that.

Hon. Members do not need to be reminded that the number of people choosing to have their pensions and allowances paid into their bank account has risen from 23 per cent. to 41 per cent. in the seven years since 1994. More than 80 per cent. of recipients have bank accounts. However, we must ensure that the remaining recipients are not penalised because of the measure. That must be taken into account in the move to paying all benefits direct into bank accounts via the existing automated credit transfer system, which is due to start in 2003 and be completed in 2005.

The Department for Work and Pensions' agencies will continue, up to that time, to provide customers with the information that they need on benefit payment options. On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, I assure right hon. and hon. Members that there can be no compulsion—no one can be called in to be bullied. That would cause great resentment and would not go unnoticed in the House.

[Nigel Griffiths]

The Post Office Ltd. is rightly seeking to extend its existing network banking arrangements to more high street banks and to offer a wider range of services to customers. I hope that that will allow as many people as wish to to take advantage of that, and that the transitional and other arrangements will be adequate. I am happy to write to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead if he would like more detail on that, but time is too short to cover it in more detail now.

My right hon. Friend also asked about the possibility of the National Audit Office's undertaking a study of the impact of closures on local communities. As a recently discharged member of the Public Accounts Committee, I support and endorse the excellent work done at the National Audit Office by Sir John Bourn and his team. He is always keen to receive the views of right hon. and hon. Members on possible future National Audit Office investigations and I know that he will pay close attention to any representations from such a distinguished, honourable colleague.

However, my right hon. Friend will know that Sir John acts independently of Ministers. He does not take instruction from us about topics that may be suitable for further investigation, but he is always willing to give the closest consideration to suggestions such as those made by my right hon. Friend.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for drawing Members' attention to the Prime Minister's excellent speech in Croydon. The Prime Minister spoke for us all when he stressed the need for stronger local communities and an improved local quality of life. My right hon. Friend quoted line 6 of that speech. I shall quote line 18:

"Indeed, one of the failings of Thatcherism was to misunderstand how 'public goods' such as clean, safe and attractive streets and public spaces need investment alongside growing private affluence."

Perhaps we can add post offices to that list.

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), reported the most recent developments to the House last week. I shall ensure that she and Lord Falconer are aware of the views expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead. I commend him again for raising this important subject, which is of interest to every hon. Member.

Endangered Species

1 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): This is a welcome opportunity to discuss endangered species. That the Minister for the Environment is replying to the debate is especially welcome, as, judging by his utterances in this House and elsewhere, he may agree with much of what I say. I hope that he will communicate his enthusiasm to other Ministers who may be more reticent about the subject.

There is no more heinous crime than to stand by and watch the extinction of a species. It is estimated that species are disappearing at 1,000 times the background rate. That is a terrible indictment of the human race: we are in the dock, and any court would find us guilty of causing that massive increase in the disappearance rate. It has been said that forests precede man and deserts follow him. That is a sad truth, as we can see when we look around the world. Bearing in mind how long the planet has existed, we must accept that in the past 200 years, since the beginning of the industrial revolution, we have done untold damage to our natural environment. That damage is occurring at a rate that cannot be sustained; it must be halted and, if possible, reversed.

The Born Free Foundation, an organisation for which I have tremendous admiration, states that there are 2,155 critically endangered species in the world. Cautious estimates from other sources suggest that 20,000 species a year are disappearing—about two an hour, which means that, by the time that the Minister and I have finished speaking, another species will have become extinct.

Among the species at risk are Californian condors, of which there are only 120 left in the world, and Cross River gorillas, of which there are 200. The Majorcan midwife toad is Europe's most endangered species. The Minister may have seen articles in the press about the potential disappearance of the lynx from Portugal and Spain; there is a real prospect of that happening in the next three or four years. Species such as the black-footed ferret are alive only in captivity. Of cuddly animals—although tigers may not count as such—it is estimated that there are only around 400 Siberian tigers left, 40 to 50 of the South China tiger and 400 of the Sumatran tiger. The Caspian, Java and Bali tigers are all thought to be extinct.

That is a terrible indictment of the human race. If any hon. Member feels that the problem exists only in other parts of the world, let us reflect that in the United Kingdom alone, 134 species became extinct during the last century. We have our own work to do in our country. I find appalling the way in which the human race acts towards other species and the environment as a whole. When I lived in Beddingham in Sussex opposite the Mount Caburn national nature reserve, it was a delight to see a carpet of trumpet daffodils and other species of daffodil covering the hillside each spring. One day—literally one day—someone came and cleared the whole lot off, and they have not been seen since. The activities of one person can have a dramatic effect on our environment and on species propagation.

Why does it matter? A Christian would say that we have stewardship of the planet and therefore a duty to look after it. Those of a more Gaian propensity would

say that we must coexist in harmony with all species, and that what happens to one species affects another. Everything is connected to everything else—I think that Lenin said that, and in an earlier incarnation the Minister may have been familiar with the quote. I do not think that Lenin was thinking about the environment, but it is an appropriate saying to introduce into the debate. Respect for humans and for animals is interlinked. A person who does not respect animal life probably does not respect human life. The Royal Society for the Protection of Animals has done some interesting work to demonstrate that those who are cavalier with animals tend to be cavalier towards children—and with human life in general.

Respect for the environment matters from a selfish point of view, because untold benefits that could help mankind can be derived from the natural world, and we are in danger of losing them if the loss of species continues at the current rate. How many medical benefits could be obtained from rain forests in Brazil and elsewhere? Many have already been identified, but many others will be lost as species become extinct. It is a crime that, for profit and gain and regardless of the consequences, some people are destroying everything in their sight in the tropical rain forests, simply to reach two or three trees many miles inside the forest. They want only to realise the value of a few trees, but we lose everything else in the process. We all have a duty to do what we can to bring a more responsible attitude to bear among human beings and improve the way in which we human beings deal with our environment and other species.

I have identified a number of problems. Ministers are well aware of the issue of climate change and carbon dioxide emissions, and I pay tribute to the Government for the work that they have done in that respect, particularly the Deputy Prime Minister and others for identifying the problem and for committing themselves to achieving significant and real carbon dioxide reductions. The attitude of the Government and of the European Union generally contrasts markedly with that of the United States of America. Like most hon. Members, I am appalled that the USA has repeatedly repudiated the Kyoto protocol on climate change and given in to the big guns of the US oil industry. That short-term political gain will cause long-term human loss. The USA should be ashamed of itself.

I understand that by 2010, global carbon dioxide levels are expected to have risen by 31 per cent. since 1990, which contrasts with the 7 per cent. drop that we envisage. Will the Minister confirm that figure? I hope that he will tell me that it is wrong, because such a figure, if correct, would be horrendous. Other statistics make it clear that global warming is happening and that it is affecting species. The world was warmer in the first three months of this year than at any time in the past 1,000 years. The 1990s were the hottest decade of the last millennium. One consequence of that is that species are having to adapt to fast-changing temperatures—a rise in temperature far beyond what nature would normally generate, and way beyond what species can necessarily cope with.

Climate change on its own could lead to the extinction of certain species. Some countries such as Russia, Canada, Norway, Sweden and the Arctic countries are likely to lose as much as 45 per cent. of their habitat. As many as 20 per cent. of species could be lost in the most vulnerable Arctic ecosystems: for example, it is expected that snowy owls in Canada will lose up to 60 per cent. of their habitat. In Russia, spoonbilled sandpipers, the red-breasted goose, the emperor goose, the tundra goose, the bean goose and others are under threat for the same reasons. Other natural organisms, such as coral reefs, will also be affected. Warming oceans are killing sources of food from plankton to the polar bear. We may not be terribly familiar with it, but the humble plankton is a key to the whole ecosystem and we disregard what is happening to it.

The problem is global and it can be dealt with only globally. I recognise the efforts that the Government are making, but they need to find a way with other partners to do more. It is not sufficient for one country—or even half a dozen—to pound the drum. We need to deal with the matter internationally, and if countries such as the United States opt out of key protocols, we are in difficulties.

The second issue that concerns me is the trade in endangered species in the United Kingdom. For example, 88 per cent. of parrots imported into the country are caught in the wild. That is improper and unsustainable. We have a recognised problem, in that UK Customs dealt with 570 wildlife items every day last year. That is a huge number. We hear all the stories in the newspapers about bushmeat coming in. Few planes are checked, yet illegally imported meat is found nearly every time a check takes place. We need to increase the number of customs officers who deal with checks on the trade in endangered species.

Wildlife smuggling is thought to be worth £3.7 billion a year, which makes it second to only the drugs trade in terms of profitability. Between 1996 and 2000, more than 1 million wildlife items were seized in the UK by Customs and Excise. The trade is gigantic and unethical and we must deal with it. I understand that under UK law criminals can be arrested for importing or exporting illegal wildlife products, but not for trading in them. If that is true—the Minister will correct me if it is not—that loophole needs to be closed.

On 10 April, I asked a parliamentary question about prosecutions since 1997 under legislation on the control of trade in endangered species. In 1997, there were 495 seizures but no one was successfully prosecuted. In 1998, there were 498 seizures and no one successfully prosecuted. In 1999, 336 seizures took place, but no one was successfully prosecuted. In 2000, there were 441 seizures and only one person was successfully prosecuted. In 2001, 434 seizures were made, and two people were successfully prosecuted. I hope that the Minister will not say that those figures, having gone from nought to two over that period, are improving. Something is wrong with a system in which so many seizures can be made and so few people successfully prosecuted.

Under the legislation, although the maximum prison sentence is two years, offences are non-arrestable. The police therefore cannot caution people involved in such crimes. Suspects can be invited for questioning at a police station, but they can refuse, and the police have no power of entry without a warrant. When offenders are caught, they are given minimal fines and rarely sentenced to any terms in prison. For example, a company was fined only £1,500 for possessing 138

[Norman Baker]

shawls made from the fleeces of slaughtered Tibetan antelope, which the Minister will recognise is a highly endangered species. The shawls were worth more than £350,000 and estimated to represent 2 per cent. of the entire species. Although more than 1,000 antelope were killed to make the shawls, the result was fines equivalent to only £10.87 a shawl, despite the fact that each shawl would sell for between £3,000 and £12,000. What incentive is there in that for people to abandon the trade? They are unlikely to be stopped or caught and, even if they are prosecuted successfully, they are unlikely to be fined significantly.

I refer the Minister to David Cowdrey, the WWF campaign director on wildlife trade, who said:

"We are losing the fight against wildlife crime in the UK. The unfortunate reality is that low penalties and lack of resources for detection mean that most criminals get away scot-free. Prosecutions are infrequent, court fines are low, this has to change."

The Government can do something about that, so I look to the Minister for an assurance that he will take action.

We must also consider inappropriate use of natural resources such as overfishing and whaling. Stocks of once popular North sea species such as cod have plummeted, and fishing for them is subject to strict controls. Overfishing is a misuse of our environment. Our approach to fisheries is not sustainable, and is symptomatic of how we deal with our natural resources generally. After decades of protection, seven of the 13 great whale species are still endangered or vulnerable, yet thanks to the exploits of Japan and Norway, more than 1,000 whales are killed each year for the commercial market.

I do not have time to go into that subject in great detail, but I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that Japan clearly seems to be spending its way into legalised whaling. It is known to have spent $275.7 million on support for countries that will vote with it in the International Whaling Commission. Japan's fisheries aid grants to five Caribbean countries—Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines—between 1987 and 1999 totalled $100 million. The Solomon Islands got £10 million from Japan over a six year period. Morocco received $45 million from Japan: as the Minister may know, Morocco was an observer at the IWC between 1994 and 2000; it joined in 2001 and voted with Japan. Japan gave $7.5 million aid to Guinea in 1998: Guinea joined the IWC in 2000 and voted with Japan. This is about vote buying by the Japanese in order to legalise whaling. The Minister and his colleagues have been resolute in their opposition to whaling and the Minister with responsibility for fisheries has done a splendid job, but we have to deal with a situation in which Japan is buying votes in order to bring back whaling.

We need to deal with sustainable development on a broad basis. We will not be able to protect our endangered species unless we take the view in the round that people across the planet should have access to clean water, food and decent shelter and should not feel obliged—as many do in order to survive—to destroy the very resources that should provide them with sustainable living for many generations. We need to deal with the fact that such people destroy their resources in one generation to stay alive. We must deal with the inequalities in the world. I recognise that that is a big agenda, but 82 per cent. of the world's wealth is held by 20 per cent. of its population, whereas the poorest 20 per cent. have only 1.4 per cent. One billion people live on less than $1.50 per day—while each person in the US generates three quarters of a ton of waste each year to go into landfill sites or to be burnt. We must deal with that nationally and internationally.

My last point is about international agreements. We have the convention on biological diversity and the climate change convention, but they are not legally binding, as the Minister knows. However, in parallel we have the World Trade Organisation, which is legally binding. I recognise the danger, but without being protectionist we must change the rules of the WTO to enable countries to resist imports from countries where the natural environment has been degraded unsustainably and animals have been treated in a way that is not acceptable—either species have been eliminated, or their treatment in welfare terms is unacceptable. The WTO agreement needs to be changed to achieve that.

I want the Minister to have plenty of time to respond to the big agenda that I have laid out. Without wanting to overplay the matter, respect for the environment is one of the most important issues faced by the human race; we are not doing very well with it so far.

1.17 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I have rarely listened to a more passionate or better documented speech of just 15 minutes. It contained an enormous amount of detail and a very compelling argument, put forward persuasively. It will not surprise the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) that I agree with virtually everything that he said. He was generous enough to say that the Government have made serious efforts in many areas—I shall try to detail some of my own issues in a moment—but he is right that a great deal more has to be done. We have scarcely scratched the surface if we really are to arrest serious trends.

The hon. Gentleman started with a point that I reiterate. The rate of biodiversity loss is so huge that experts say that it can almost be regarded as the sixth extinction in the history of the earth. There have been five major extinctions, the last of which eliminated the dinosaur 65 million years ago. However, the rate of loss is so extensive—and accelerating—that it can be considered on that scale. He is also right that people who are cavalier with other living creatures are also cavalier with human life. We are the dominant species on the planet—at the moment. The idea that because of our dominance we can disregard the right of other species and other creatures to have their share of life on this diverse and bountiful earth is important: no one has a right, particularly not an enthusiastic Gaian, which I am, to believe that one race can dominate all the others without serious long-term consequences that, in the end, may rebound on our survival.

The hon. Gentleman said a great deal about climate change. I do not have much time to talk about that, but it will unquestionably affect habitats. It has already begun to affect them. We have all read press articles

about the rapid decline in the number of polar bears in the arctic, which is due simply to the decline in phytoplankton and krill on which they depend. The Larsen iceberg is breaking away, which is having a drastic effect on the capacity to survive of creatures such as the polar bear. The United States is responsible for a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions, although it has only 4 per cent. of the world's population. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is essential that it returns to the Kyoto protocol or takes equivalent measures. The United States has an important role, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are maintaining the pressure to make it recognise its responsibilities.

We are making progress. I shall concentrate on the loss of global biodiversity and combating illegal trade in endangered species. I have just returned from the sixth meeting of the conference of the parties to the convention on biological diversity in the Hague, where some useful conclusions were drawn. For the first time there is a strategic plan, which aims to achieve globally, regionally and nationally a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Guiding principles were proposed that aim to reverse the expansion of alien invasive species—the second greatest threat to biodiversity after loss of habitat.

There is an action-oriented work programme on forestry, which includes action against the loss of forest biodiversity. There are also guidelines on access to and benefit sharing of genetic resources—the so-called Bonn guidelines. I take the hon. Gentleman's entirely correct point that they are voluntary guidelines. All I will say is that there are 182 countries, and it is difficult to get their agreement. An agreed framework and guidelines may not be adequate. We intend to monitor them. If there are significant breaches of the guidelines, or if countries fall significantly short of them, we will have to demand at future meetings that the guidelines are made mandatory. It took seven years to negotiate the Food and Agriculture Organisation proposals that form an international undertaking on access to and benefit sharing of plant genetic sources. I accept that mandatory regulations may be the only way to ensure that action is effective.

The British Government are taking several initiatives. The Darwin initiative is a collaborative grant programme that uses British expertise to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in less developed countries. Since 1993, the Government have also provided £27 million to more than 230 Darwin projects with links to some 80 developing countries. That is a relatively small, but not insignificant, sum. If other countries did the same, it would have a serious impact.

We are also one of the first to signal support for the new great apes survival project—otherwise known as Grasp—that was launched by the United Nations Environment Programme last year. The project seeks to raise funds for great ape conservation, and to develop a global conservation strategy for that species. This year, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office contributed £175,000, which is a substantial proportion of the $2.9 million sought by UNEP. I hope that other countries will follow that example in order to strengthen and extend that sort of work.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need more checks on aeroplanes. It is true that food such as bushmeat is confiscated even today. The problem lies with the number of Customs officers and the fact that they must deal with drug smuggling, arms dealing, tobacco fraud, and preventing the spread of animal diseases such as foot and mouth. I take the point that it is vital to protect species as well as people in this country. The trade in illegal species and illegal meat must be stopped.

The Government are fully committed to the fight against wildlife crime. It is the second largest form of illegal trading in the world after drugs. One informed reckoning states that it accounts for $20 billion a year, of which a quarter is illegal. We are trying to raise awareness of the controls on the import of wildlife to the UK as tourist souvenirs or through the pet trade. Unfortunately, too many tourists return from their travels, often unwittingly, with souvenirs made from endangered species.

Extensive powers are already available to deal with illegal imports or exports of species listed under the convention on international trade in endangered species. I agree that we need more prosecutions and higher penalties. We must also ensure that potential criminals understand that there will be deterrent fines and that they are likely to be apprehended. That is not the case at the moment, but I met representatives of the World Wildlife Fund and other Departments, including Customs, this morning and I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am determined to increase the numbers of prosecutions and the level of fines or introduce imprisonment.

Under the provisions of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, people found guilty of smuggling endangered species face up to seven years in jail. Unfortunately, there are not many examples of when that ceiling has been used. I want it to be used more often. Earlier this year, a person found guilty of illegally importing birds of prey into the UK from Thailand was jailed for six and a half years. That is a significant penalty, which sent shockwaves through some parts of the criminal community, and I would like to see many more such examples. In June 2001, two London shopkeepers were sentenced to four months in prison for smuggling and selling illegally imported bush meat. That is a low penalty, but it is imprisonment, not a fine, which is significant. In March 2000, a parrot breeder was sentenced to two and a half years and fined £5,000 for smuggling rare parrots, including three Lear's macaw, of which fewer than 150 pairs remain in the wild. The penalties are beginning to be increased, but we still have a long way to go to dissuade the criminal fraternity.

We are about to begin a review of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997, and as part of that we will consider whether the current maximum penalty of two years for such offences remains appropriate. In my view, it is not. Although it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that the penalties attached to offences are commensurate with the seriousness of the offence and compatible with the general sentencing framework, we must seriously consider increasing the penalties for COTES offences and making them arrestable. At the moment, people cannot be arrested once they are through customs, which is a clear loophole.

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

As part of the work to take forward the recommendations of the Halliday report on the review of the sentencing framework, we are also examining the scope for a new set of sentencing guidelines under the auspices of a statutory body. I am keen to pursue that, and we will publish a White Paper this year. We are also working hard through the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime, which is sometimes known as PAW, to find further opportunities to increase awareness of wildlife crime and its implications among the judiciary.

Finally, our work to combat illegal wildlife trade took a significant step forward when I announced the establishment of the national wildlife criminal intelligence unit. The Government are committed to ensuring that the unit will be a success. I was very impressed by the police officers whom I met on that day, and we are providing some £440,000 to support the unit until March 2004. Together with the £100,000 provided by the police chief constables, which is a lot of money out of their constrained budgets and shows their commitment, our investment will get the unit up and running. It will work at national, international and strategic levels to collect and analyse intelligence from a wide variety of sources. It will then refine that information into operational and manageable packages to be passed to the appropriate police or Customs officers to investigate jointly with the unit. It will not take over from the police and Customs officers in the field: they do a great job and need more support. It will not carry out investigations and prosecutions in its right but it will work at the strategic level.

I thank the hon. Gentleman very warmly for his outstanding speech that was delivered with real passion. There is a case to answer. I am determined to ensure that we answer it.

Magistrates Courts (Essex)

1.30 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I am pleased to have the opportunity to bring this matter before the House. Before I go any further I refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests as a partner in a firm of solicitors in Essex, practising in the magistrates courts.

The Minister and, I suspect, his predecessors are well versed in responding to these debates as a result of the number of times that they appear here in Westminster Hall and in the main Chamber. As recently as 17 April the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) secured an Adjournment debate to oppose the closure of Larne magistrates court. To research the debate I could have gone back through *Hansard* to see how many times the closure of magistrates courts appeared. While it is not the most frequent topic, it appears very regularly.

My reason for raising the matter at this time is the remorseless advance of the private finance initiative in Essex. Private finance offers the opportunity for the magistrates courts committee to seek private capital and private funding for the restructuring or rebuilding of courthouses in the county. I do not propose to debate whether the PFI is the right or the wrong approach; that is a debate for another day. But it is the impetus for the prospective closure of a number of courts in Essex, and a scheme was approved by the Essex magistrates courts committee at its meeting on 25 February 2002.

If the PFI goes ahead it will result in the closure of the court at Witham, in my constituency, following the closure of the court at Braintree some four years ago. In addition courts at Harwich, Epping and Grays are scheduled for closure. As a result, Essex, one of the larger and most populous counties, will have only five courthouses. I have practised in the magistrates courts in Essex for more than a quarter of a century. Over that time courts have been closed in all parts of the county. In the last 20 years we have lost courts at Halstead, Maldon, Brentwood, Billericay, Southminster, Castle Hedingham, Braintree, Saffron Walden, Clacton and Dunmow. That is before we reach the latest round of court closure.

Soon after my election to this House in 1997, the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), a near neighbour of mine, initiated a debate on the then most recent round of closures. Notwithstanding the united opposition of the county council, the district council, the town councils for neighbouring and potentially benefiting towns and the police, three further magistrates courts were closed, including Braintree. In that debate, the hon. Gentleman proved himself to be an adept soothsayer. He said:

> "In the fulness of time, we in Essex will be left with five super-courts and a pick-and-mix magistrates bench."—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1997; Vol. 300, c. 686.]

Unfortunately, time has not proved to be very full. In less than five years the five courts that he predicted are now envisaged.

My concerns as to the intentions of the magistrates courts committee were alerted in 1997–98. As a result of my fear about its intentions regarding the courthouse at Witham, I wrote in early 1999 to the then and present

chief executive of the magistrates courts committee, Mr. Peter McGuirk. I shall quote his reply at some length or I may seem to be unfair. In 1999, he told me:

"I must first go straight to the heart of your concern and assure you that the MCC"—

the magistrates courts committee—

"has no plans in the medium term to close Witham Courthouse. The background to the MCC decision to close three courthouses"—

in 1997–98—

"was the need to reduce excess courtroom provision. With those closures the MCC now has the number of courtrooms it needs in the medium term and has no plans for further reductions. As we made clear to all interested parties in 1997 when we consulted on the courthouse closures, our next step would be a private finance initiative project to secure accommodation for a proper modern standard for the long term. It is by no means certain that such a deal would result in the closure of Witham courthouse but there is in any case no prospect at present of the MCC being allowed in to begin the PFI procedures for several years".

The medium term was referred to only three years ago, but the current proposals were made at least by last summer.

The arguments against courthouse closures have been advanced in the House certainly during the whole time that I have been here and, I suspect, for the previous 20 years as well. However, Governments of both political persuasions have thus far appeared deaf to those arguments. I have yet to see a study that shows the savings that can be found by closing courthouses matched with the increased expenditure that results to other services. One does not have to be a high-ranking chartered accountant to understand that, if a courthouse is closed in one town, there will be additional expenditure for the police, the legal aid fund, social services, local councils and the probation service.

In 1997, my own council, Braintree district, which fully supported keeping local courthouses open, estimated that transferring its prosecution work to other courts would cost it some £10,000 to £12,000 per year. That was just one element in the additional cost equation, which always seems to be put to one side when the matter of balancing the finances is raised.

Also in 1997, the then chief constable of Essex, and my constituent, John Burrow, wrote about the closures at that time:

"This is not only a case where saving in one area of the criminal justice system will result in significantly increased expenditure in other areas, but also there is a very real issue of the loss of local justice across large swathes of the County".

Ultimately, the loss of local justice is at the heart of the objection to closing courthouses. That concept is lost as one ploughs through the jargon-ridden apology for the private finance initiative in Essex and the consequent closures of courthouses.

I should like to refer to a consultation document, although I suspect that hon. Members have almost no greater fear than the word "consultation". As one often fears, consultation takes place, but listening does not result. Objective No. 2 in that document refers to "reasonable accessibility" to courthouses. Then, of course, as is the trick of the trade, that phrase is defined so as to produce the desired result.

In the county of Essex, it has been estimated that it is reasonable for witnesses, defendants and others to be able to reach a courthouse after a journey of one and a half hours by public transport, plus a further 15-minute walk from the bus stop or railway station. Of course, that takes no account of the bus being cancelled, the train being late or someone having to walk down to catch the train at a suitable time. It takes no account of someone thereafter leaving the courthouse to return home. However, that is the definition, and a formula is then constructed whereby the closures will not be adverse to the benefit of the public.

A travel survey has also been commissioned, which seeks to show that most people who attend courts do not necessarily come from the district where the court is. However, one must go beyond the travel survey to discover the true position. Already, the magistrates courts in the county of Essex are allocated different kinds of cases; thus there are trials in one court and pleas in another court in another district. It is in the nature of that system that already people are being moved around the county.

I have been worried for several years about the diminution of local justice, which reduces the position of the magistrate in the legal system and in counties and boroughs. The essence of a magistrate is their familiarity with the locality in which they serve. Magistrates have an interest and a pride in their township or rural district and sit on the bench to serve local people by using their local knowledge. A magistrate from Chelmsford who sat in Basildon would probably not have an exhaustive knowledge of the street systems of Basildon; that would be difficult even if one lived in Basildon. In a road traffic case or a case involving a public disturbance in the street, it is most useful to know exactly how the streets lie in order to judge whether witness A's statement is believable, for example.

The local element is crucial to a magistrate's ability to serve, but it is not just a matter of knowledge but of pride in the position. People who serve on the magistrates' bench in their own locality know that they are carrying out a community function by serving their neighbours, friends and others who live there. The defendants who appear before them are usually based locally and might have some remorse or concern about their actions knowing that they are appearing in the midst of their own community.

In the mid 1970s, I frequently appeared at Southminster magistrates court—long since gone—which was out on the marshes on the Dengie peninsula. That tiny courthouse would not fulfil any of the criteria for a modern and convenient courthouse. It was next to the police station in a village on a railway line that, remarkably, escaped Dr. Beeching's axe in the 1960s. Most people involved in that little court knew each other and at the end of the proceedings on a Friday morning, which is when it sat, the prosecutor, the defence advocate, the magistrates, the clerk and the defendants would adjourn to a nearby pub for lunch. That gave one a real sense of what community was, and justice, too.

I was especially impressed by one of the magistrates, a kindly man who owned a local works, when a young man appeared before him who was, I suspect, not inherently bad, but in endless mischief. The magistrates were usually indulgent with him, but eventually they had no choice but to send him to prison. What may not happen today is that when the young man came out of

[Mr. Alan Hurst]

prison that same magistrate, who was chairman of the bench, offered the young man a job in his works. That shows the sense of community that is now being lost.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. My constituency, too, is in Essex. The hon. Gentleman will share my wish to pay tribute to the lay people who serve on magistrates' benches throughout the country. They do an excellent job and give their time selflessly.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the cost of the closures and to quality. Will he reinforce what he said about the impact of the closures on the quality and speedy administration of justice? They are essential not just to the witnesses and the community but to the defendants. Court closures tend to make justice seem more remote to those communities and, in some cases, have delayed the administration of justice. They have not served justice well. I entirely support the hon. Gentleman's theme.

Mr. Hurst: I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman. I have described a courthouse in the country that I visited regularly in the 1970s. Within the past two or three weeks, I visited Southend magistrates court. I went into the main remand court and was faced with a dock that was made from reinforced glass to the ceiling. It had slits in it for the defendant to whisper through to his advocate or to the magistrates. I was put in mind of the trial of Adolf Eichmann and the special booth that was constructed for his trial in 1960-61, as those of my generation and older will remember. The appearance of the reinforced dock in Southend was more reminiscent of a war crimes tribunal than a magistrates court. Indeed, the only hearing at which I was present was in respect of a defendant who had pleaded guilty within that dock to not wearing a seat belt.

We must try to refresh ourselves with the spirit of what local justice is about. I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to speak to his colleagues to see whether we can stop going down the road that we have been going down for the past 25 years. Mr. O'Brien, you heard an earlier debate in which the Prime Minister was quoted, referring to the importance of strengthening local communities. Here is an opportunity to think again about how justice can become local justice and, thus, real justice.

1.46 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): I start by extending my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) on securing the debate. The issue of magistrates courts is emotive and I well understand how important it is to his constituents and to those of the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink). The debate comes at a time when magistrates courts are undergoing a huge change. More change is likely to come. Sir Robin Auld published his report at the end of last year; the Government will be announcing their conclusions and how they intend to proceed on the basis of that report imminently. Undoubtedly, there will be implications for the future of magistrates courts in that [illegible]

Before I deal with the specific points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree, it may help if I clarify the basis on which we proceed in such matters. Magistrates courts are managed by locally based magistrates courts committees, as set out under the Justices of the Peace Act 1997. Each committee is solely responsible for the efficient and effective administration of the magistrates courts in their areas. It is for the MCCs, in consultation with their relevant paying authorities, to determine how many courthouses—whether urban or rural—and what other accommodation is needed locally. In discharging their statutory responsibilities, we expect MCCs to undertake regular reviews of their accommodation requirements. That may account for the timing of the MCC in Essex, to which my hon. Friend referred earlier.

The strategic aims of the MCC, the facilities that are needed and the results of user surveys are only some of the factors that the committees take into consideration when undertaking such reviews. They have to achieve a balance between providing an efficient and effective service to their users, while maintaining secure, well-equipped court accommodation, and ensuring, when reasonably possible, full utilisation of court facilities. All magistrates court users, whether victims, witnesses, defendants or professional people, deserve an efficient service that is delivered in well-equipped and secure buildings, in accordance with basic standards of accommodation that people would expect today.

My hon. Friend gave a powerful and evocative description of the early 1970s and local justice as it was delivered then. Sadly in many ways, the world has moved on in the past 30 years. To pick up on one of his points, security is a real issue in our courts, and it would be remiss of both magistrates courts committees and the Government if we assumed that the world had not changed and that the same security provisions were appropriate. Sadly, they are not. Security is a concern for the Government, and we expect magistrates courts committees to consider that.

Most of the magistrates courts that have been closed—my hon. Friend referred to some—are those that magistrates courts committees could no longer justify keeping open, because they lacked the necessary facilities. Improvements in accommodation must be balanced against other factors, and local transport difficulties are important. My hon. Friend cited telling examples of the problems that concerned him and his constituents; we expect magistrates courts committees to take those into account.

As a Government, we are particularly concerned that courtrooms are provided that are best suited to enable cases to be listed and heard in a manner that will achieve our core aim of reducing delays in the criminal justice system. Court users want and expect their cases to be heard on the day that they are listed. Transferring work load to better equipped centres is one way of modernising and improving the overall service. The magistrates courts committees have the local knowledge and are best placed to make the judgments about how to use their resources—finance, staff and buildings. The Lord Chancellor becomes involved only in the event that a decision is challenged by the paying authority.

This is not a court closure programme, but where, for example, two courthouses are close together and the work can be accommodated in one, it makes sense to

have only one. In that way, we can maintain access to justice and release funds to improve the facilities and efficient use of our estate assets. The Lord Chancellor is committed to making better use of the court estate, which includes magistrates, Crown and county courts, and there is considerable scope for greater joint use of courthouses to create more justice centres.

Inevitably, some hard decisions will have to be taken, and we appreciate how difficult it can be for local communities to confront them. However, we also know that the public expect well-equipped and secure courthouses, and we are determined to deliver them. In the year 2000 spending review, additional money was made available to address security, health and safety, the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the maintenance backlog that many magistrates courts were experiencing. Those areas have been, and will continue to be, treated as priorities.

In 2001–02, the Department spent £25.5 million on improving magistrates courts. Interview rooms and custody areas were fitted at seven courthouses, some 10 courthouses were made compliant with the 1995 Act and custody areas in 19 courts were refurbished. We intend to spend a further £40.5 million in 2002–03. So far this year, we have provided funding to undertake extensive refurbishment of two courts, improving access to 28 courthouses for the disabled, and improving or installing closed circuit television provision in 16 courthouses. In 2001–02, some £137,458 was allocated to Essex magistrates courts committee to undertake work such as the installation of secure docks at Basildon and Southend, the removal of ligature points and cells at Colchester, and the replacement of air conditioning in the information technology room at Southend. One bid has been approved for Chelmsford in this financial year to secure a dock.

We are investing real money to improve facilities, and I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise the Government's commitment. That is in addition to the continuing court-building programme, which is procured through the public-private partnership. My hon. Friend referred to the "onward march" of the private finance initiative in Essex, but we must accept that it is a way in which Government can provide more modern courtrooms. We have £70 million of credits allocated in each of the next three years, and we can now build new courthouses for the first time for many years. The Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service are committed to using public-private partnerships as a main element of our investment plans to improve court facilities and services. However, that approach will be adopted only where it offers the prospect of better value for money, and more effective management of risk than other methods of procurement.

Bob Spink: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Wills: I should point out that I have little time left to make my remarks.

Bob Spink: I will be quick. On value for money, would it be better to apply the money to small, local, less formal courts that could deal with appropriate cases more quickly and efficiently, so that justice appears to be less remote?

Mr. Wills: That may always be more appropriate in certain circumstances, but not as a point of principle, which I believe was the hon. Gentleman's point. Public-private partnerships are the way forward if they offer a more effective management of risk and real value for money. The form that they will take is largely a matter for the magistrates courts committee to decide, as it has knowledge of local circumstances.

In February 2001, the Essex magistrates courts committee secured a place in the public-private partnership scheme. In July 2001, there was consultation on its proposals, and in January 2002, a second consultation exercise was undertaken on its preferred option. A package of court and office accommodation was then identified that would be provided under the scheme. During that period, the magistrates courts committee gathered information by means of feasibility studies, travel surveys and so on.

On 8 April 2002, the Essex magistrates courts committee made a final determination, under section 56(1) of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997, that its paying authorities should provide new magistrates' courthouses, in accordance with section 55(1) of the Act, in Colchester in north-east Essex, Basildon or Grays in mid-south and south-east Essex, Southend in south-east Essex, and Chelmsford in mid-north Essex. It is anticipated that the new accommodation will be available in 2006–07. The programme could include court closures, and I am sure that we are all aware that the magistrates courts committee's determination includes a new courthouse in Chelmsford to replace the Chelmsford and Witham courthouses.

The three paying authorities in Essex have until 10 May to appeal against the determination. If appeals are lodged, I will be asked to take a decision that will be final and binding on all parties. I am happy to meet all interested parties if an appeal is lodged, and to discuss points that have been raised in debate in more detail than I have time to supply today. If no appeal is submitted to the Court Service, the outline business case can be submitted to the Court Service. Once an agreement has been reached between the Court Service, the magistrates courts committee and local paying authorities on where the courts and offices should be located, the outline business case will be submitted to the project review group for formal endorsement. Once endorsed, the project will be put to the market.

Critically, the outline business case cannot be submitted to the project review group for endorsement without the full support of each of the three paying authorities that my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree knows are involved. The magistrates courts committee is endeavouring to secure agreement on a positive way forward, but with full local involvement. I cannot confirm at this stage where new courts will be located and which courts may close.

I hope that I have outlined the processes involved in the weeks ahead to the satisfaction of my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Castle Point. They will see that

[Mr. Wills]

there is time and scope for further representations to be made about points that they raised. Whatever happens during the process, I hope that we shall be able to reassure them about the provision of local justice in Essex. Above all, I hope that in turn they will recognise the requirement on Government to provide an effective and modern system of justice that is delivered locally, but with full account taken of the expectations of those who use the courts. People who use courts expect modern facilities, secure accommodation, and facilities for victims and witnesses that are segregated from those for defendants wherever possible. People expect and deserve that sort of justice, and I hope that hon. Members will understand that that must be our main concern if progress is to be made in Essex.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 2 May 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Women and IT

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

2.30 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Government welcome the opportunity to debate this important issue. Information and communications technologies are perhaps the defining technologies of our generation, and to an increasing extent they pervade our lives and work.

Current estimates suggest that servicing the nation's ever-increasing demand for ICT provides jobs for more than 1 million people in the United Kingdom, but when one examines the profile of the IT work force, one is immediately struck by how few women work in the industry. Women comprise nearly half of the overall work force and slightly more than half of the population, but they account for only one fifth of the work force in IT—sadly, that is a declining trend—and for less than 10 per cent. of high-value-added jobs such as software engineering.

That is highly disadvantageous to women, because it means that they miss out on opportunities to earn the higher wages available in the IT sector. That is arguably another facet of the digital divide that, unless it is bridged, threatens to entrench inequalities between the sexes and within communities. It is also disadvantageous to business and to the wider economy.

An IT industry dominated by men harnesses only half of the talent and creativity available. That is a cause for concern in an industry that, despite current economic conditions, will in the long term have a growing demand for skilled labour. The Institute for Employment Research has forecast that, through a combination of expansion and replacement demand, the IT, electronics and communications industries will need more than 1 million people to fill jobs between 1999 and 2010.

Addressing the under-representation of women in IT is a top priority for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry both in her departmental capacity and as Minister for Women. However, in describing the Government's response, I shall talk as much about what other Departments, particularly the Department for Education and Skills, are doing as about what the Department for Trade and Industry seeks to achieve. That reflects the Government's view that we face a complex challenge that demands a joined-up response.

The Government are determined to play their part in helping to reverse the serious under-representation of women in IT jobs, working with partners in business and education. In "Opportunity for all in a world of change", last year's enterprise and skills White Paper, we stated our ambition that the UK should match the best of our competitors with regard to women's employment in IT. We want to open up to women the same opportunities in IT as are enjoyed by their male counterparts. We want them to be able to seize those opportunities on an equal footing. However, we do not underestimate the extent of the challenge.

I draw hon. Members' attention to recent research commissioned by the DTI, the Department for Education and Skills and the women's unit on women's participation in IT learning and employment, entitled "Women in ITEC Courses and Careers". The study covers women's participation in IT, electronics and communications. It reveals that compared to a number of other countries, including the USA, Canada and Ireland, the UK is not performing especially well in terms of the proportion of women working in IT and related high-tech industries: for example, in the US, women account for a fifth of the high-skill, technical roles in those industries, whereas the figure for the UK is only 9 per cent., with far more women taking lower skilled, non-professional occupations.

We must take a comprehensive and long-term approach if we are to be successful. High impact, sustainable solutions are required if we are to persuade more girls and women to consider IT as a career option, and we need to support them through appropriate education and training relevant to their particular circumstances. I shall now set out some of the major elements of our holistic approach to the challenge.

Within our communities, we must first ensure that everyone has equal access to IT. We cannot afford to allow any section of society—whether women, the unemployed, lower-skilled workers or people who face language or cultural barriers—to be excluded from those technologies. We are on target to have 6,000 UK Online centres in operation by the end of the year to provide training in and access to ICTs, in particular to deprived communities.

Recently, I visited a family centre in my constituency, Paisley, South. It has child care facilities in one room and computers with direct access to the internet next door, where training is provided, primarily for single mothers. I was struck by their hunger to learn, their interest and their appetite to engage with the new technology, but it became clear from my conversations with those women that if the child care facilities were not in the same building, they would not be able to gain access to the technology, despite their determination to do so.

We need to encourage more girls and young women to consider careers in IT and to develop the knowledge and skills needed to succeed. In England in 2001, about 24,000 girls achieved A to C grades in GCSE computer studies, compared to 32,000 boys. In the same year, about 4,000 girls achieved an A-level in computer science, compared with a little more than 13,000 boys. However, girls out-perform boys in the subject at GCSE and A-level. The position is similar in higher education, where only a fifth of computing graduates are women. Women make up only 15 per cent. of engineering graduates, but they perform especially well in that discipline, women having come top in the British Computer Society professional examinations for the past two years.

A factor that needs to be recognised is that too many talented girls are put off by male stereotypes of science, engineering and technology. That is why it is important

[Mr. Douglas Alexander]

that successful women in science and technology-based careers are highly visible, to act as role models for the coming generation. We are providing core funding to the WISE—women in science and engineering—campaign for the next three years, in partnership with the Engineering and Marine Training Authority, the Engineering Employers Federation and the Engineering and Technology Board. Our aim is to help enhance the impact and effectiveness of WISE by, for example, bringing the gender issue into the mainstream of science and engineering initiatives, especially in relation to young people.

The DTI and the DFES are also working to establish an extensive network of science and engineering ambassadors seconded from industry to act as role models and mentors in schools across the country. We want as many female ambassadors as possible to enthuse girls at school about IT, science and engineering. Given that the challenge is for industry as well as the Government, I am pleased to say that business is responding well. At the DTI's "Women in IT" conference earlier this year, IBM and Dell—two major employers—pledged to support their employees in becoming ambassadors. IBM alone is targeting 200 of its staff to work within the programme. We hope that other businesses will rise to the challenge and follow IBM and Dell's example.

We also need to ensure that schools and teachers have the tools and equipment they need to help girls to develop IT skills. We are already investing massively in IT for schools: more than £1 billion is available between 2001 and 2004 to equip schools, colleges and other places of learning across the country with ICT, including assistance to purchase computers, but we must go further. As part of our wider strategy to raise standards at key stage 3, which covers 11 to 14-year-olds, we are piloting a new programme to improve the teaching of ICT, with a view to rolling it out across England in the coming academic year. We are focusing on strengthening teaching and learning in ICT as a discrete subject in its own right, and will work to enhance teachers' pedagogic skills and subject knowledge. That investment needs to be maintained if we are to achieve our ambitious targets for 14-year-olds. We expect that, by 2007, 85 per cent. of 14-year-olds will achieve level 5 or above in ICT.

We know that girls are more likely than boys to turn away from IT, even after achieving good results at GCSE, so we need to find new ways to engage girls and to persuade more of them that IT is worth pursuing. That is why the DTI and the DFES have supported e-Skills UK to develop what we call the computer clubs for girls programme. Through a set of CD-ROMs delivered directly to the school, the clubs will provide a learning environment for girls that enables them to develop professional IT skills while undertaking tasks and projects that are of interest to them, such as creating magazine front covers with their photographs on them.

The clubs are a worthwhile development and the IT industry is excited about engaging in the programme. One company from the United States, Macromedia, has agreed to make its Flash web animation software free to schools when used in the club activities. I understand that e-Skills UK is talking to other software providers about donating software to the clubs. The clubs concept will be rolled out initially in several schools in the south-east with the support of the South East England Development Agency, which is to be congratulated on the initiative. That is an important first step in making the clubs a reality across the country.

The DTI has also funded the development of workshops to inspire 13 and 14-year-old girls to consider careers in IT. The workshops are hosted by IT businesses, and 10 companies have so far agreed to be involved as part of the ambassadors programme, which I mentioned earlier. The girls get to meet employees and to see that IT professionals do not in fact conform to some of the stereotypes that one reads about in the newspapers. Feedback from the girls has been enthusiastic and positive. The success of several pilot workshops in the south-east means that we are thinking about rolling the programme out more widely.

We have already supported an industry dialogue with the makers of television soaps and dramas. The idea is to show programme makers, who can influence public perceptions, that IT is not solely the domain of men. In time, we may see more realistic television portrayals of the IT industry and of the people who work in it, in all their diversity.

Girls and boys need to be able to access high-quality careers advice to find out what opportunities a career in IT offers and what skills and training they will need. With the support of DTI and the DFES, e-Skills UK has developed an online resource to fill exactly that need. The IT Compass website, which has been promoted through the media and specialist magazines, contains information about IT careers. It describes how to get relevant work experience, and there is a special section for women who are interested in jobs in IT.

IT Compass connects young people with role models and with case studies of people who already work in the industry. It seeks to break down some of the stereotypes and to show what opportunities are available to people with different talents and aspirations. There are also advice and support materials for careers advisers, so that they can offer students the best and most up-to-date guidance on working in IT. I am pleased to say that there have been more than 500,000 hits on the site since its launch in January 2002.

The site will complement and support the Connexions service, which is the new support service for all 13 to 19-year-olds. Connexions will offer young people integrated advice, guidance and personal development opportunities to help them make a smooth transition into adulthood and working life. It will also help to tackle gender stereotyping, which can drive women and men to think too narrowly about their career options. Several Connexions partnerships have linked up with the Equal Opportunities Commission to launch the "What's Stopping You?" campaign, which will highlight the damage that gender stereotyping can cause and work to change people's perceptions of men's and women's jobs.

We are taking action to encourage women to join the next generation of IT professionals, but there is a generation of women of working age who already have IT skills or want to develop them. Many are mothers who want to work but cannot find IT jobs with the flexible working arrangements they need to balance

work and their responsibilities as parents. The industry is, after all, often characterised by a rather macho image and a 24/7 culture. Business must face up to its primary duty to introduce working arrangements that enable women and men to balance work and family responsibilities.

The Government, too, must play their part. We are introducing a light-touch regulatory framework through the Employment Bill, which supports our commitment to create highly productive, modern and successful workplaces through fairness and partnership at work. The Bill will deliver a balanced package of support for working parents, while reducing red tape for employers by simplifying the rules governing maternity leave and pay. It will also make it easier to settle disputes in the workplace.

In particular, the Bill will help working mothers by affording them an entitlement to six months paid maternity leave and a further six months unpaid maternity leave. It will also provide for a total increase of more than 60 per cent. in the rate of statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance from £62 to £100. More than 300,000 mothers each year will benefit from the increase in maternity pay to £100 per week and from the increase in the period of maternity pay to 26 weeks.

The Bill will also introduce for the first time new rights to adoption leave and pay and to paternity leave and pay. Paternity leave will be available to fathers following the birth of a child, or to one parent when a child is newly placed for adoption. A married couple who adopt will be able to choose which partner takes adoption leave. Adoption leave' will reflect maternity leave, with six months' paid leave and six months' unpaid leave. Paternity leave will be two weeks' paid leave.

The measures in the Bill will also facilitate flexible working. The Bill will give parents of children aged under six and those of disabled children aged under 18 the right to apply to work flexibly, and it will place a duty on employers to take requests seriously. That new right will take effect in April 2003.

We are also helping to develop and disseminate good business practice in work-life balance arrangements. Our work-life balance campaign has amply demonstrated the business case for introducing work-life balance arrangements. Improved productivity, greater staff retention and reduced absenteeism can all flow directly from effective work-life balance policies. BT, for example, instituted its "freedom to work" pilot project, which allowed employees to propose their own working patterns. The patterns piloted included occasional home-working, working full-time over four days, and working a combination of long and short days. Employees also tried banking time to qualify for longer periods of leave to meet their caring responsibilities. The company has reported improvements in productivity and greater retention of skills as a result of its initiative.

The work-life balance challenge fund provides funding to businesses to help them to understand and introduce successful arrangements such as part-time, term-time and other flexible working practices. In January, we announced moneys of up to £1 million in addition to the existing fourth round of the fund, specifically to support flexible working in the IT, telecommunications and electronics industries. I am pleased to say that we received a good number of interesting proposals and will make the final selection of successful projects shortly. We hope that the lessons learned by individual businesses will be adopted by the IT sector more generally in due course, and we will work with partners to disseminate information, key messages and good practice.

It is vital that we get our approach right and provide women with the opportunity and motivation to work. As many as 50,000 women in the UK, with a degree relating to science, engineering or technology are currently not working. Of the women scientists and engineers who return to work each year, many will not take up a related occupation. That represents a massive waste of potential and talent and a serious blow to the nation's productivity and competitiveness. To help we have introduced a pilot mentoring scheme to support women scientists and engineers in the workplace, particularly those women who return to the workplace after a career break. The programme involves the direct participation of major companies, such as Ford and AstraZeneca.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Does the Minister accept that many highly qualified female scientists and engineers might consciously choose to stay at home with their children? I hope that he does not regard that as a waste. They benefit the nation by raising their children.

Mr. Alexander: The Government's principal objective is to give people a realistic choice. We are determined to break down any barriers that inhibit women from returning to the workplace, so that they have a realistic choice and can exercise their judgment depending on their individual circumstances.

Like other sectors, IT suffers from a pay gap between men and women. That is not good for the economy or for the interests of employers or employees. Last year, the Government asked Denise Kingsmill of the Competition Commission to undertake an independent review of what actions business and others could take to close that gender pay gap. The Kingsmill report was published last December and makes an important contribution to tackling the pay gap challenge. It chimes with existing measures, including key elements of the Employment Bill and the work of the fair pay champions in supporting equal pay initiatives in their sectors. We have accepted and are taking forward the bulk of the Kingsmill recommendations, although we do not want to introduce any new regulations on the back of the report.

We also recognise that some women and men may require particular support if they are to capitalise on the opportunity that IT affords them; for example, the unemployed, disabled people, and ethnic minorities. Ambition: IT is the Government-business partnership aimed at unemployed people through the new deal programme. It encompasses a range of initiatives, including a national pilot that will train unemployed people as IT technicians. The training provision is just being set up, and we hope to see the first of Ambition: IT new dealers begin their courses later this year. We want as many unemployed women as possible to take part. Training will be made available in such a way as to enable participants to accommodate their child care and other family responsibilities.

[Mr. Alexander]

Courses provided through learndirect give adults easy access to ICT learning opportunities, including ICT skills, at home, in the workplace and at learndirect centres nationally. There are currently more than 1,300 centres nationwide, offering more than 500 different courses. Last year, more than 55 per cent. of learndirect learners were women. That is more than 136,000 women, of whom 113,000 were studying ICT courses.

The further and higher education sectors are also playing their part. Hon. Members will be aware of the Government's £100 million investment in developing vocational centres of excellence in further education colleges in England. The network of centres will comprise a strategic mix of high-quality local, regional, sectoral and national specialisms, including IT, to offer young people and adults the enhanced vocational learning that they need to succeed in the modern knowledge-driven economy. The DFES announced a further £40 million of new money for the network only this week.

Let me give an example. Lewisham college in south-east London is a beacon college which last year was also designated one of the first pathfinder centres of excellence in IT. The college's school of computing and IT caters for 4,000 learners every year: 40 per cent. are women, 60 per cent. come from ethnic minorities, and 60 per cent. are aged over 25. Lewisham has looked hard at its provision for women and has increased women's take-up of courses by providing courses during school hours and offering personal development sessions for learners, supported by an all-female development team and coupled with help in job-search techniques and work experience.

To increase the availability of high-quality ICT learning still further, the Government have now invested £25 million in encouraging regional consortiums of universities, colleges such as the one I mentioned, and businesses in England to establish new technology institutes. They will offer ICT courses, mostly at technician or intermediate level, but with progression routes to degree level and beyond. The Higher Education Funding Council for England has been considering applications for NTI status from various regional consortiums and I understand that the successful bids will be announced shortly. We expect there to be two new technology institutes in each English region by 2004–05.

I hope that it is clear that the Government are investing in a comprehensive package of measures to give women equality of opportunity in IT, as in other high-tech sectors of the economy. However, I do not want to leave the impression that Government can overcome such challenges alone; business, schools, colleges and universities have an equal responsibility to do all they can to engage women in IT. Time does not permit me to cover the many excellent regional and local initiatives supported by industry and education that are making a vital contribution—I am sure that hon. Members can cite examples from their constituencies; nor can I pretend that our work is near completion. Much has been done, but much remains to be done. However, our co-ordinated and joined-up approach represents a real chance of long-term success for women in IT.

2.50 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): First, I have to admit that I was surprised by the title of the debate. When I was asked to contribute to it as my party's spokesman on women, I could not work out whether it was to be a celebration of women's equality in IT skills or a lament for the opposite. I now have the curious impression that it is to be a debate about a perfect world in which, if all the women were shackled to a computer, everything would be rosy in the garden. Speaking on behalf of my sex, I do not see things that way.

The title struck me instinctively as rather patronising—we would not, for instance, have a debate about women and telephones, so why have one about women and information technology? I have noticed that the researchers in my office, whether female or male, seem to have identical IT skills. Those skills are a function of the fact that IT was automatically part of their education, which took place 20 years after my own. Young men and women do not see any difference in their respective skills. I test marketed my theory that this was a rather spurious debate on my husband, who is a management consultant. He looked blank and said that information technology is, quite simply, gender neutral.

However, I dutifully did my research and most of it pointed to the fact to which the Minister has alluded, that fewer women than men choose to specialise in computer studies. It is important to recognise the distinction between those of us whose IT skills constitute managing—or not—that piece of equipment in the office that could transform our lives and those who want to study, work and advance the science and the industry.

Fewer women than men are employed in information technology, electronics and communications after graduation. The proportion of women employed in the industry has fallen from 16 per cent. a couple of years ago to 13 per cent., as the Minister said. We can only guess at the reasons. It could be choice. My party favours choice, which is why I underlined the fact that women who are highly qualified in IT might choose to have a career break so that they can raise children. They might feel at that point in their lives that raising children is as important—if not more so—than being at the cutting edge of the industry.

Perhaps the majority of women do not find IT very appealing. I do not know how many people of either sex would relish wrestling with such subjects as local loop unbundling, which is apparently on its last legs. None of my research suggested that women are worse than men at grasping IT skills; rather, it has traditionally been the fate of the sciences that women are not naturally attracted to them as a career. During my research, the expression "computer nerd" came to mind. I hesitate to say whether it conjured up a masculine or a feminine image—that is best left to hon. Members to surmise.

Women have traditionally been attracted to jobs that involve interacting with people rather than with machines. To many women, working at the cutting edge of IT and the computer industry can appear a cerebral and lonely activity, and not one that women who enjoy socialising, mixing, conversing and generally interacting with people might choose to pursue. I only speculate about reasons why women might choose an alternative career to IT.

When the debate was announced, I heard from a company that has taught IT since 1964. That company states:

"Our experience regarding the proportion of women taking our training courses with the aim of entering a career in IT has been consistent with the industry as a whole. Our latest statistics show that 27 per cent. of our initial enquiries are female—but only 11 per cent. of those who go on to enrol with us are female. Back in the 1980s when the industry standard for women in senior IT roles was 19 per cent. our proportion of enrolments was 19 per cent. We are now given to believe that the comparable figure now has fallen to 11 per cent."

The company could not offer any particular reason for that. The people at that company sounded a little bemused when I told them the subject of the debate. They wondered what had caused it to be raised, but were none the less grateful for an opportunity to air the subject of IT training. It has been mooted that IT is not female friendly because of the tendency of IT managers to recruit in their own image, and there is evidence from the training industry to substantiate that. Whether the problem is related to role modelling gives us food for thought.

The report from the Select Committee on Education and Skills on the Government's individual learning account debacle was published earlier this week. In theory, the scheme could have encouraged and helped women back into a career structure late in life. That was one of the aims of the account when it was announced in the Labour manifesto in 1997. The account was cheap, simple and accessible, but as the report says, it was open to the most appalling abuse from unscrupulous providers. The scheme was not regulated, which means that even now, five months after the Government suspended its operation, there seems to be no clear picture of the extent of the fraud.

The report's judgment on the way in which the account was monitored is damning. It suggests that the Government failed to learn from the mistakes of the past. No check was put on the providers to give good value for money, and there was no incentive for the customer to complain. There are four whole pages of conclusions and recommendations in the report, which totally condemns the notion that the problems arose from the delivery of the account. Where have we heard that criticism before? I feel sure that all hon. Members can cite constituency cases that alerted them early on to the problems that would ensue.

The ILA scheme seemed custom built to introduce people to IT—indeed, many of the courses were geared to computer studies and were attractive to women who had missed out on IT training earlier in their lives. The potential of the ILA brought to my mind the testimony of a contributor to a document called "Choices", which I prepared in the last Parliament. I shall read the lady's contribution because it may shed light on the disparity in the uptake of IT skills and suggests that the scheme could have assisted people in her position if it had worked properly. I shall not give her name because she asked to remain anonymous, but she likes to be known as Elizabeth. She wrote:

"My children have all grown up and left home and I became aware of the fact that there were basic skills I did not possess. Specifically, there was the new (to me) area of IT. I am not terrified of computers, I just can't use them as I have never been taught to! It seemed a sensible thing to try and learn. Obviously, these courses weren't available when I was at school and college, and I haven't had the opportunity since. It wasn't only finding a course, it was finding one I could afford as a non-earner and that was at a convenient time and in a convenient place. My voluntary work commitments meant I was unable to take up the one I did find and I have had difficulties finding another. I am not looking forward to becoming a technical wizard, I just want to be able to do useful things, such as writing letters and typing lists. This would be very useful within my work."

That is an illustration of another problem that has so far not been mentioned, which is that the differential between men and women in mastering information technology has less to do with gender than with age.

I do not want to sound ageist. Like Elizabeth, I had no information technology training at school, and I am sure that I am not the only Member of Parliament who sometimes has to rely on her children to set the video recorder and get the most rapid results from the computer at home. My 11-year-old daughter is a far better desktop publisher than I am. It is a plain fact of life that the younger generation who have grown up with the new technology can learn and retain the skills that they need more effectively than others can. To them, information technology is second nature. That is good, because those skills will become increasingly important at home and in the workplace.

It is essential that women are not left behind in learning IT skills, because those skills can be used in many different professions. However, it is not desirable that women should be encouraged to work in IT industries if that is not where their natural inclinations lie. They should have a genuine choice.

Mr. Alexander: I hesitate to disrupt the congenial atmosphere of the debate, but does the hon. Lady accept that there are any structural barriers to women exercising those fundamental choices? She suggested that the tenor of the debate was patronising, but passed over the statistics I quoted that show that even young women taking GCSE and A-levels show a disinclination to enter the profession? Does she accept that there are any structural inhibiters, or are we merely seeing the outcome of the exercise of a multiplicity of independent choices?

Mrs. Spelman: I am simply concerned that the Minister wants to explain away the differential in factual terms. He may be overemphasising the structural barriers. In matters of choice, it is right to stand back and say that in some respects women are better adapted to some professions than to others. There are many examples of women predominating in other professions—nursing, for example. There are male nurses but generally women find themselves in the caring roles; such roles come naturally to them, and they enjoy doing that kind of job. We should not fight like crazy to strive for a 50:50 balance between male and female nurses.

Mr. Alexander: The hon. Lady said that the topic of the debate came close to being patronising. Is not the suggestion that women have an inclination towards caring professions and a disinclination towards working with machines news to the many outstanding female scientists in this country? Does she accept that although a multiplicity of choices is being exercised by women as to the jobs they take, the endurance of the pay gap

[Mr. Alexander]

between men and women alerts us to the existence of structural inhibiters in terms not only of pay but the choice of profession?

Mrs. Spelman: I do not know whether the Minister is married, but I suggest that he goes home and talks to the female members of his family about their preferences. He will find, on the whole, that the women in his extended family have chosen or have been expected to perform the caring role. The fact that society does not sufficiently appreciate the value of women's caring role in society is a separate matter for debate.

Mr. Alexander *rose—*

Mrs. Spelman: I will not give way again on that point, but I will take up a matter that the Minister mentioned in the first of his two interventions—the equipping of women.

The theory underlying the debate is that providing women with additional IT training will definitely lead to better job prospects. We must be careful with that theory. There is no question that some of the access courses provided for younger women, especially those who have missed out earlier in their education, can play a beneficial role in getting them on to the first rung of employment. In my constituency, which contains four of the most deprived wards in the country, programmes run alongside crèche facilities, to enable young women who do not have any qualifications to take the first step in mastering the use of a personal computer. However, that is a long way from the reality of a well-paid job at the cutting edge of IT. I spoke to those women, and it is clear that they recognise that the first step towards understanding IT—something as simple as word processing—is the one that might get them a relatively simple clerical job. It is the means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): The hon. Lady is in danger of being complacent. Earlier, she stated that women are naturally drawn to the caring professions. Are not women encouraged to enter such professions because they are relatively low paid, and discouraged from entering ICT jobs because they are well paid?

Mrs. Spelman: I do not see it that way. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should consult his male friends. Men do not usually volunteer to undertake caring roles within the family; on the whole, it is the woman in the relationship who takes the children to the doctor's surgery or the playground and picks them up from school. Such tasks have tended to fall to the female in the partnership, and that is not a choice related to pay. Women consciously prioritise looking after those for whom they feel responsible within their families.

I am far from complacent today. A serious problem is looming. I can see where the Minister's is coming from, and there is no doubt that the IT revolution has opened up jobs for women. Call centres that have been the salvation of some domestic incomes—in the north-east, for example. However, I am deeply concerned about the consequences of that.

During a recent visit to India with Oxfam, I witnessed the incredibly rapid increase in the outsourcing of call centres. All British Airways complaints are now dealt with in Bombay. In the back office of HSBC bank, I saw for myself how all banking inquiries are dealt with in Delhi, although they appear to be answered and settled in the United Kingdom. At the height of sophistication, it is possible for one end of the office to be handling calls from New Orleans, with the Indian operator speaking in a true New Orleans drawl and knowing the day's weather conditions in that town. The customer would have no idea that the call had been taken in the heart of central Asia.

The serious underlying problem is that those call centres are manned by Indian graduates who earn between £2,000 and £3,000 per year. Graduates in the United Kingdom would have enormous difficulty competing with those rates of pay. I fear that it is inevitable that more and more of our computer-based service operations will be relocated to countries such as India. At a conservative estimate, 20,000 such British jobs have been outsourced to India in the past year.

Mr. Alexander: I appreciate the hon. Lady's generosity in giving way for the third time. She raises an important point about the call centre industry—a focus of continuing interest and application for me. I recently met representatives of the Call Centre Association to discuss the issue. Does she accept that her position is not wholly logical? There is great merit in having this debate, because if there is a risk of low-value call centre jobs moving offshore because of competition based exclusively on cost per employee, the only sustainable future for the UK's call centre industry is to continue the evolution that is already under way and move up the value chain. People must have great familiarity with ICT if they are to work in the contact centres of the future.

Mrs. Spelman: I believe that there is consensus between the Minister and myself on that point. However, the Government should take a long, hard look at the realities of the marketplace. We must not fall into the trap of training people—women, in this context—for jobs that will ultimately disappear. There is no disputing the logic of that. The only way to recover from the marketplace revenue sufficient to meet the cost of living in this country is by constantly upskilling. The underskilling of many parts of our work force will condemn many families to a significant loss of income unless an important shift is made.

In my view, learning should start at school, right at the grass roots. There is no better place to learn information technology skills. They are a great deal more difficult to grasp and retain the older one gets, as I well know. I question whether women and IT is a clearly definable subject or a rather spurious combination that overlays more deep-seated problems of underskilling, underachievement and underperformance in school. I suspect that if debates like today's are still taking place in the House of Commons in 20 years' time—we will probably have a virtual House of Commons by then—the title is more likely to be "Women and Pencil Skills—a Lost Art?"

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. Before I call the next contributor to this important

debate, I must say that not only shall I chair the debate for the rest of the day but I shall listen carefully to what is said, because I am an honorary vice-president of the Royal College of Midwives. So, too, is the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen), and we both attended the college's conference this week. I will take great interest what right hon. and hon. Members say.

3.11 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). I agree with much of what she said, but not with her introduction and conclusion, because I do not believe that the debate is spurious. I think that it is important because, as the Minister said, the issue of women and information technology presents challenges for the Government. I am here to challenge the Minister. My speech is half a page long; that tells hon. Members what I know about information technology. My hon. Friend the Minister has to convince women like me to get involved in IT.

I notice that there are few women here. I know that today is a very important day, but this is an important subject, and we need to attract women to debates such as this. More years ago than I care to remember, when I graduated in history after having specialised in ancient and mediaeval history, I thought that the quill pen was far too advanced an innovation. Using computers and all the other equipment to which we now have access is therefore not one but two, three or even four steps too far for me. There are many women like me.

The debate is important because I complacently assumed that things were getting better and that younger women and girls in schools were learning more about information technology. I am sure that there were computers when I was a girl, but one of them would probably have filled the whole Chamber while being able to do as much as a modern PlayStation. I never had access to computers. I thought that girls would now know how to plug them in, switch them on, and do all the other things that we are supposed to do with them—and I am sure that the Minister will tell me what those things are.

When my daughters were at school, they learned how to use computers and they feel at ease with them, so I was surprised to hear the Minister's statistics. I, too, have some statistics that show that all is not rosy in the garden. We need to be aware of that and not assume that young girls and younger women have more opportunities than I had. We must encourage them, for the reasons outlined by my hon. Friend the Minister.

In 2000, only 13 per cent. of workers in information technology in this country were women—down from 16 per cent. in 1999, and a lower proportion than in Canada, the USA and Ireland. Women's participation in IT education and employment is now declining in many areas. We must not be complacent; we need to ask why that is happening and see what we can do about it. As my hon. Friend the Minister has said, women are missing out on job opportunities, so I welcome the fact that the Government are tackling the issue cross-departmentally.

Many under-16 girls still in education continue to have a negative attitude toward computers. That attitude is not apparent in primary schools, nearly all of which now seem to have a room devoted to computers, and boys and girls use them equally. However, in IT and computer studies in secondary school, just as they do in many science subjects, girls feel that they cannot participate equally with boys. We need to make sure that girls in secondary schools are encouraged to participate.

We must involve IT training and education in the learning and career choices that young women make post-16. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will discuss that with colleagues involved in the new Connexions service, especially as that service will offer a much more intensive package of support and advice to young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, who need extra support. I hope that no assumption will be made that young people cannot access jobs and training in IT; they should be encouraged to do that.

Like the hon. Member for Meriden said, with each passing birthday I feel more sympathy for women returners. Many have never had access to computers or learned the skills that today's children take for granted, but I agree that they have developed other skills. Many older women acquire interpersonal skills through looking after their families and juggling family life and work. They develop organisation skills and transportation skills—finding out how to ferry half a dozen children from A to B while simultaneously cooking a meal. Those are valuable skills but, unfortunately, not many employers accept that: they want to see a certificate—some proof that an examination has been passed.

Women need to be encouraged to explore the many learning opportunities that are available to them. Blackpool and the Fylde college—my local college of further education—now has many courses that enable women to learn basic and more advanced computer skills. The college does not set up courses specifically for women, but more and more women are attending the courses.

Older women and returners to the employment market need to know how to operate a computer, but they also need to learn skills to read a computer screen. That might sound absurd to a person who regularly uses a computer, but sometimes people read information from a computer screen and say to me, "Look—you can see X," but I cannot see it. I am used to reading books and papers. Reading information from a computer screen is an acquired skill, especially from screens that have blocks of information in different parts. The skills required are much broader than simply knowing how to plug in, switch on and log on—if that is a correct term—to the computer to access information. People should be taught not to be frightened of computers and to understand that modern information technology can be useful.

My secretary complains about the number of e-mails that she receives on my behalf, but she also tells me that e-mails are very useful. My husband told me recently that he corresponded with a university in America. Once, he would have had to check time differences to see whether the person to whom he wished to speak would be awake when he telephoned. Now, my husband can send e-mails whenever he likes and the man in America can read them when he is in his office.

[Mrs. Joan Humble]

Modern technology has many uses and women should be made aware that it can make their jobs easier—it should not be a threat. However, training is vital if women are to get through the front door. Recently, BBC Radio Lancashire organised a community bus that is a bit like a mobile internet café. Radio reporters take the bus to small communities and towns in Lancashire and discuss various local issues with people. People are given the opportunity to climb on the bus and see a computer. They are told, "This isn't scary. Come in. We're your Radio Lancashire presenters. You know us and we're not going to frighten you. You can switch this on and we'll show you how you can access information."

There are many initiatives, and, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, they are not only for the Government to organise. Other organisations can encourage more people, especially women, to get involved in IT. That is why I welcome the initiatives that he outlined to use women who work in the IT field as role models and mentors. If girls in schools see women who work in the information technology field, they might think, "Yes, I can do that as well." There are more computers clubs for girls and we should encourage girls to use them. The women in IT champions will perform a useful role. The Minister gave us several statistics on the number of women and girls who pass GCSEs and who go on to university. We must monitor that and ensure that more girls are encouraged to enter for such examinations.

I agree with the hon. Member for Meriden that the debate should not focus solely on IT jobs for computer experts. Young girls know that they will need computer skills in almost any job. In the dim and distant past when I was a civil servant, everything was done on paper. We used paper files and filled in paper forms. These days, in any civil service outlet, such as the local jobcentre, more work is done with computers. Women who have language and basic communication skills now need IT skills as well to do clerical jobs in the civil service.

I am a member of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, so I have looked into the development of the new Jobcentre Plus. Lots of modern technology is going into that: more electronic claim forms are being developed, so that the clerk listens to the claimant over the telephone and inputs information to the computer screen. I never did that, but young women who seek that kind of career—and older women who are returners—will be required to do that sort of work, so they need training. The circle is complete.

There are increasing opportunities for women in the labour market, but many of those opportunities require them to have IT skills. They will need those skills for almost any job that they do. That is even true of shop work—take a look at modern shop tills; they are very complicated. There are also jobs for women in IT itself, and I hope to see more and more of them undertaking that sort of work.

If my hon. Friend the Minister can find a very basic course for me, I might step through the door and try it, but he will have to overcome quite a lot of reluctance on my part. In this context, my message is do as I say, not necessarily as I do. Nevertheless, there are lots of women out there in the country who want to do what he is saying they should do. They want to go through the door and learn how to get involved in information technology and computers. They want to do that not only for their own personal development, but because there are jobs out there for them to do, and they should be able to do them. I wish them good luck—and I wish my hon. Friend good luck, too.

3.26 pm

Sue Doughty: I stand here as a woman who used to work in IT. I have about 15 years' experience in project management, on both highly technical and very untechnical projects. I am pleased, therefore, that this debate is being held; it is taking place not a moment too soon.

When we talk about the problems facing women in IT, we should take a look at the Government's report on women in ITEC, because it has stacks of statistics that tell their own story. I fully agree with some of the things that the Minister said about the need for action.

I have employed women and men; I have been employed directly; and I have been a contract worker, so I have had lots of experience of dealing with some of these problems, and it is clear to me that, sometimes, being a woman in IT is like being a woman who goes in for politics—women in the Chamber may acknowledge some resonance in that. IT is not a naturally welcoming environment to women. It is not the sort of environment where women feel that they belong straight away. Sadly, I was reminded of that today, as I watched the Minister for Women, at Question Time. A Conservative Back-Bench Member put a sensible question, but she made a slight slip of the tongue: one might have expected the male MPs on the Labour Benches to do a bit of barracking, but it was the male MPs on her own Front Bench who did the barracking, when she was trying to make her message clear.

Sometimes, it is like that for women in IT as well. It is not an easy environment, and things need to be done about that. Women go into IT at their own peril, but taking up that career—or nursing, or anything else—should be a matter of equal choice. That should be the case, as regards the opportunity not only to enter a career, but to rise to the top in it, and to have parity in pay at every stage, because the Government's statistics show that women get fewer of the good jobs and that they have unequal jobs and lower pay at every stage. That is a big problem and I am glad that it is being recognised and highlighted.

Why does it matter so much? It is a real problem. The statistics show that there are 20,000 unfilled IT jobs in the United Kingdom; yet we have an untapped work force that should be pushed into such work, because women are jolly good at it when they do it. They have many skills to bring, some of which men do not bring. I do not want to introduce a gender argument, but women have special qualities, especially in working with other people. Those of us who have switched on a computer and tried to make it work have often wondered, "Who wrote this system? I bet it wasn't a woman, because she would never have done it like that." Some of our intuitive skills work jolly well in the discipline of IT, producing excellent systems that enable people who work under pressure in call centres, for example, to enter information quickly.

Another set of statistics shows that the number of IT jobs has grown by 50 per cent. over the past five years, creating 336,000 jobs, whereas there was only an 8 per cent. growth in the general work force. Twenty-two per cent. of staff are women, but in 1994, the figure was 29 per cent. That decline is continuing, yet everything suggests that it should not; women are receiving a better education, and more women are obtaining degrees in the field, but it is happening nevertheless. We talk about positive discrimination for women in politics, but we have the same problem in IT. I do not like positive discrimination. I like to think that everyone should get there and that equality will just happen. However, the reality is that it does not.

We must also recognise that as a country we do ourselves no favours. We do not have enough skilled staff and are increasingly reliant on people from overseas. I have worked in organisations that brought in teams of programmers from overseas who subsequently returned to their own country to support the programme once it was developed. That practice is not foolproof. When someone works on the opposite side of the world in a different time zone, the costs involved are different from those in this country. People with support in their own office in this country can pick up the phone to report a problem that, due to the level of service, is solved within a certain number of hours. The call centre may not be able to deal with the problem. Money is also lost when the matter must be dealt with on a night shift or is not tackled until people come in the following day. The circumstances are not always as simple as they might be, although I recognise that with globalisation such situations will occur more often.

Many employers would employ more people in this country if they had the skills. Women are flexible workers and want to do well; they like to do their best. Not everyone wants to work full-time, and not every IT job needs to be done full-time. One of the last big implementations that I undertook involved large teams of trainers and support staff, some of whom worked every day, and some of whom did not. There were more women in training, and guess what? Women in IT training receive less than women with the same skills providing support, but they are generally the same people.

IT is a good career for women, and there is no reason why women should not succeed if they have the right skills and are capable when they acquire the skills. They have to be a bit pushy, but the men are pushy, too. We have to get through the barrier of young men employing other young men when they do not need to. We want a mixture of people, which will result in better and more realistic systems being developed, because computer users are not all men; nor are they all young or all old. Greater mixing of teams results in better systems.

Curiously, women do not often enter IT through the graduate route. I worked in one field, curiously enough, coming in to assist, when project management skills were not strong in IT. I used skills that I had acquired in other work, and in other aspects of the project—for example, drawing up the time sheets.

That was a long time ago, but we are gradually picking up skills. Other women become involved because they are the most articulate in the user community. They complain, "Look, you've designed this for me. I don't understand a word of it, and it'll never work because you've ignored all the following points." Women are good at such communication. The best thing that an IT manager can do in that situation is to say, "If you can articulate what's needed in the system as well as that, you're doing the wrong job. Come and join us." Many women do, but we forget that that is only the first move.

We leave women in support or low-level jobs, instead of asking what they could do next. That is a problem, and sometimes it is a question of overcoming women's lack of confidence. They need to know that computing is not a black art and that, with training, they will progress. There is nothing to say that men have different brains and can learn computing but that women cannot. However, women sometimes need counselling, care and encouragement so that they can make progress.

What happens in the early years is an issue. We need only consider IT games and how kids play on computers to realise that. Who gets to go on the computer and what are the games about? They are generally about shooting and beating people up, and girls tend not to play them. I was interested to hear about the work for girls projects and I would like to know how they work, because not all girls lean towards computing in the sort of environment that I have described. As a result, they tend to back off, and the home computer gradually becomes dad's or the boys' domain.

The women whom I know in IT talk about a new phenomenon called "Dad's server room". In the old days, dad had model trains trundling round the attic, but now dad has spent £3,000—money that was not necessarily available to mum—on a computer that is set up as a client server. His friends come over to play an interesting game of "Doom" on it and they send messages all over the place, and again women are excluded. We cannot interfere in the family set-up, but we must recognise that compensating activities are needed to counteract some of the inequality that exists in the home.

Mr. Alexander: I am greatly sympathetic to the hon. Lady's remarks. She has highlighted an issue on which I might have spent more time in my contribution: the importance of content, rather than infrastructure. Does the hon. Lady agree that the problem may be not that women have a predilection to work in the caring professions rather than with machinery, but that the software available in the household may not be as attractive to young women as it is to young men?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Lady responds to the Minister's intervention, may I suggest that she moves closer to her microphone? Those who are seeking to take down what is being said are finding it slightly difficult to hear everything that she is saying. I should be grateful for the hon. Lady's help.

Sue Doughty: Thank you for that advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I agree with the Minister that content is important, because for many women it is not the gadget that is important, but what they can do with it to enrich their lives.

There are other problems: one of which is how easy or difficult it is for women to stay in computing. It must be recognised that IT has particular problems because the

[Sue Doughty]

skills move on constantly. It is not even the case that what someone knew last year will be good enough for this year or next year. Almost every six months—three months in some sectors—there is something new to learn, because most people in IT are problem solvers, and every day brings another problem, another system or another piece of hardware. Being away from the subject for any length of time is a major drawback.

Conversely, employers spend large amounts of money training people who then leave. In certain areas, that is a real problem. I shall cite an example, although I am slightly cautious about it, as it concerns a site that my husband set up when he was employed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to run its IT site at Guildford. I declare that as an interest, although it happened a long time before I knew him.

That IT department had a big problem with losing programmers, so the women who were leaving were asked, "Why are you going and what would it take to keep you?" People in the department had suddenly realised that if they could retain the women, they would not need to keep training new employees and investing in that training. The department wanted to know if it could do more to retain people. In the end, it set up a nursery and an after-school club, because as any woman trying to juggle children, family and career knows, it is not only care for the under-fives that is needed—the school holidays are a real problem. Unusually, the department managed to set up the facilities on-site so that mum or dad came to work and baby or holidaying schoolchild could go there and play with their friends. It was particularly good for the little ones because mum could pop along if there was a problem.

The unit worked well. Before it was set up, the average stay in the job was less than three years and turnover was 25 per cent. a year. The Guildford site was the worst of all the Government sites, but it had spare land and buildings, as Departments often do, unlike most organisations, which tend to buy and sell property as part of their normal activity. The unit was successful from day one in retaining women in the job.

Some women whose children have now grown up are still in the IT department doing excellent work for DEFRA. As the civil service pays lower rates for the same IT skills than commercial organisations, the unit was a vital factor in persuading key staff to stay on. It is worrying that DEFRA is considering outsourcing the whole of that department. Women who were able to pursue a good career knowing that their children were being well cared for are now getting extremely worried.

We have talked a little about training and some of the comments that have been made are very true. Curiously, when we were designing a training course to be used by lots of women, mousing and similar skills were important. The more we can get people designing systems and understanding the barriers between people and computers, rather than merely giving training at ridiculously low prices, the better will be the systems and the training.

The other issue is flexibility for women. I have a big criticism of the Government as regards the cost of keeping up IT skills and the situation with the independent sector, contractors and IR35. Women used to be able to work part-time and choose which projects to take up. I did that for some years. It was possible to work on a project, stop when one chose and then start again later. People often need to do that.

Under the current system people in IT are not taxed in the same way as in other businesses. They are independent. People who stay in a project for more than a year and work on-site are not paid to train. They are not paid to develop their skills, which can be expensive; they might have to attend an international training course. The employer does not pay for the computer that employees may have bought to get their skills up to speed on the next bit of hardware because they must always be right at the leading edge if they are to give added value in the project. They are taxed disproportionately compared with someone who describes himself as a business, brings in five people and sets that against his costs. That is a long-standing Government injustice against the IT contracting industry, and it should have been addressed.

We have to get away from the 24/7 culture. There is a temptation for businesses to exploit IT people, and women feel the pinch more than men when businesses try to bring in a project sooner than is reasonable. Instead of employing more people, companies hope that people will work longer hours. In those circumstances, women leave. They say, "That is the last project that I will do. Yes, we had a lovely dinner at the end and there was a bottle of champagne on my desk, but the next project that comes along will be 10 hours a day, day after day, and my husband will be pretty angry that I do not have time for the family." That is a pressure.

I welcome the Minister's comments about maternity and other leave, and the different models and their scope, but we have to remember the skill shift in IT. One of the problems that I experienced as an employer of women who were returning to work was that their previous job was almost certainly no longer in existence due to the reshaping and regrouping of IT projects in response to business needs. We need to recognise the additional work that is needed to bring someone back from maternity leave. Her job may have moved elsewhere and she will need something good to go to. She will also need a catch-up period to get her skills back, because her colleagues may have moved on to another programme or platform.

I agree that there are problems with individual learning accounts and we must get them sorted out quickly. It is an inexpensive source of training, especially for women who are wondering whether to return to work. It has been useful, but statistics show that women have not taken up ILA courses as much as men. However, if they are not available at all, no women will be able to take them up. It is a matter of urgency. I appreciate that the Government must not introduce something that has the same problems as before, but every delay is a delay in someone getting the training that they need for the job that they want.

We welcome the efforts to overcome stereotyping and would welcome more women in the IT industry. There is a challenge in the fact that many IT jobs are a bit anoraky, so women choose not to go for them. However, women must have the right to choose whether they want to be an anorak. Indeed, it might be good for some of the IT anorak clusters to have a few women

working in them to help them to deliver better systems. We must give women that choice, but we must also ensure that employers recognise that they will never have world-class systems if they overlook such a valuable resource as women.

3.46 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): I am delighted to take part in the debate. I should make two declarations. First, my initials are IT, and when I saw on the Order Paper that the title of the debate was "Women and IT", I wondered whether it was a forerunner of some headline in next weekend's *News of the World*. I declare that I have no knowledge of any connection between this debate and any salacious stories. Secondly, and more seriously, I have interests in the technology sector, which are fully recorded in the Register of Members' Interests. However, I believe that none of them has an influence on today's debate.

I have considerable sympathy for the Minister, not least because he has part of the portfolio that I had as a Minister for Science and Technology. I must be careful not to say that that was in the last Conservative Administration, because it was once reported in a newspaper that I was predicting that we had had the last Conservative Administration. I am sure that there will be many more to come, but in the previous Conservative Administration I had part of the Minister's portfolio and dealt with the same issues.

These will be brief remarks, and I must apologise because I had to put back a meeting to take part in this debate and must leave early to attend it.

We can examine the subject on different levels, a couple of which have been mentioned. One is whether women could enter the job market by having skills that young people who are currently being educated regard as natural. As the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) said, children in primary schools are having a wonderful time learning about IT. They do not regard computers as a threat or even breakable; they just work on them until they find what they want. That is important.

I launched an information technology for all campaign, which the Government have carried on in various forms. It was designed to demystify IT for all the population—not only women—and destroy the perception that computers are used only by other people. Access to the job market for women is a key matter that this debate could consider, and progress is being made on that.

I am concerned more by the problem that is felt throughout the UK of a lack of skills in research and development. That includes technology and, therefore, IT. There is also an under-representation of women in the adding of value in our economy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) rightly said, low-skill employment—whether it is men or women in call centres is immaterial to my point—will ultimately be outsourced to countries such as India. As a Minister, I visited Bangalore in India to see what was going on, and I am sure that the Minister has done the same.

My concern is that women are under-represented among technology drivers. This country still has an opportunity to take the lead in that area. Businesses need such skills, and we must develop them in our universities. However, women are generally under-represented among graduates in information technology, electronics and communications subjects, despite the fact that they form the majority and a growing proportion of university graduates. That is worrying, not only because women are under-represented—I do not want to patronise—but because it means that there is no proper throughput of skills due to the under-representation of a growing proportion of the population. Women move away from information technology, electronics and communications skills as they structure their education towards a career. In the UK, that starts before entry into higher education. Although similar proportions of males and females study ITEC-related subjects at school, a smaller proportion of women qualify at GCE A-level.

The problem is serious, but there are various ways to help. The Government have sponsored certain schemes—for example, the UK Online action plan contains various suggestions for continuing training for women who have opted out of opportunities to use their added-value skills in industry. There is a role for industry—the pay differential was mentioned—but industry must do more for lifelong learning. That is where the debate becomes almost circuitous, as new technologies facilitate lifelong learning. Computers enable women who must leave industry for pregnancy and the early stages of raising a child to keep in touch with what is going on, as they can access the network of the company that they left. Some companies are introducing family-friendly policies that enable them to do that.

Many organisations, such as the British Computer Society's women's specialist groups, are aware of the problem. The HighTech Women website provides a network for women, even if they have opted out for years. When I was Minister for Public Services and Science, I considered with the Royal Society how scientists could continue their postgraduate and postdoctoral work if they became pregnant. Many grants were structured around a continuity of research, which did not allow for the fact that the pregnancy might not coincide with the development of the research project. I am glad that Dame Julia Higgins has become foreign secretary of the Royal Society. She did much to try to restructure universities' thinking about how they could retain women by enabling them to continue their research and have children. That was important.

We should concentrate on initiatives to keep women in industry, research and the professions. Such initiatives are to be welcomed, not in a patronising "we must do something nice for women" sense, but because the UK will suffer if a disproportionate number of women in our communities are not making that contribution. We have flexible working, distributed learning networks and policies for extending broadband to the home. I used to have responsibility for broadband issues, with which we are wrestling. ADSL technology provides homes with a terrific opportunity to participate in learning programmes and still be part of business while raising a child. There is a new mentality and approach.

I agree with the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) that the Government must try to ensure that its taxation and regulatory policies do not prevent people from taking advantage of that working

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

flexibility. IR35 is a case in point. The Budget may have introduced a trend towards incorporation for taxation purposes.

Mr. Alexander: I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's argument in a speech with which I have great sympathy. His contribution seems to contradict that of the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), as he recognises that as well as a multiplicity of private choices that will affect the productivity of the British economy, there is also a role for society in the public choices that we make, such as the roll- out of broadband technology, access to the workplace and levels of investment, skills and technology. The issue is a profoundly serious one and not amenable to an accusation of being patronising.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend, who is one of the wisest contributors to the debate in our party, was making the point that there is a danger of it being patronising if it does not address the serious problems. I have tried to keep away from remarks about whether women can use a computer, which is a patronising approach. Some men and women do not know how to use computers, no matter whether games are more man-oriented. We could all recount sexist stories about whether women understand computers. My wife seems to have found much more interesting holidays since she learned how to go online—the tourist industry may have benefited from that, but I am not sure that the nation as a whole has.

I am concerned with how we retain women's interest in career continuity so that our economy does not suffer. We can do that by ensuring that technology is ubiquitous, and that the broadband revolution rolls out, so that people can work from home or at the company. There are many reasons why that is desirable, but one is because of the inevitability that a woman's place will for a time, if she is married and has children, be in the home. Women should not be cut off from productive work during that period. By using IT skills, they can contribute the added value of improving a product, presenting a company's activities or undertaking basic research. The motion is timely, and I am happy to have contributed to it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow), I should like to thank him for his co-operation.

3.56 pm

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The debate on women and IT is about women's involvement in technology in general, and in engineering, maths and science. For many years it has been difficult to get an adequate proportion of women involved in those areas at a professional level. Much of the problem is to do with gender stereotyping.

I shall begin by recounting a little of my family history, as an illustration of that problem. My mother went to grammar school and became a shorthand typist, and my father went to a secondary modern and, after an apprenticeship, became a fitter, assistant foreman and eventually a training officer at ICI, training apprentices and graduates on graduate training courses. His ambition for me was that I should be an engineer, so I did maths, physics and chemistry and A-level. However, I disappointed him greatly by opting to do economics rather than engineering at university. Ten years later, my sister became an engineer and now works in the engineering industry. That little tale shows the extent to which family expectations of boys and girls can affect their occupations. My father did not expect my sister to be an engineer.

In many ways, the problem of insufficient numbers of women in information technology reflects the lack of women in engineering and similar occupations in the 1960s when I was at school. When I did maths, physics and chemistry at O-level, there was a balance of boys and girls studying those subjects, but at A-level about 90 per cent. of the students were boys. At university, all the engineering courses were heavily dominated by men. When my sister chose to study engineering, there was an article in our local newspaper about how remarkable it was that a woman wanted to be an engineer. She was the only woman studying engineering in her year. Such stereotyping and assumptions that some occupations are only for males make it more difficult for women to enter them.

The statistics on education from pre-16 to graduate level clearly show that the problems in engineering, science and technology also exist in IT. For every three girls who do a GCSE in computer science, there are four boys, so the gap is not great at 16. However, by the time they reach their A-levels, there are slightly more than three boys to every girl, and by graduate level there are four boys to every girl. In the space of five or six years, the position changes from one in which there is not much of an imbalance between boys and girls to one in which 80 per cent. of computer graduates are male.

It would be easy to go along with the view that girls are not predisposed to computer sciences and IT, but the reality is very different. I am not particularly computer literate or very good with computers, but I had experience of them at the organisation I worked for before I came to the House. We installed a computer system to provide word processing and a database, which was quite an expensive and sophisticated operation. Most of my staff were female. All the women with clerical duties, such as typing letters and administering the database system, ended up using the new computer software, and they had little problem doing so. It was the professional staff, such as myself, who had problems mastering computer skills. Ours was a typical administrative office, and we were used to staff running around and typing letters for us. Suddenly, we had to acquire keyboard skills, which we had never had to do.

That taught me a valuable lesson: women have the skills to operate IT, so it is not women-unfriendly. The real barrier is between professional and non-professional jobs in IT. As other hon. Members have said, the majority of staff in numerous call centres, banks, shops and other organisations are female, and those women quite happily and competently operate word processing and database systems. The majority of the people in this country who use IT day to day are women. What barrier prevents them from becoming professional computer operators, instead of using

software that has been devised, written and prepared by someone else to use in the job that they already do? That is the key question.

I recently attended an engineering conference and listened to a presentation by a woman from the Association for Women in Science and Engineering, which was set up in 1984. At that time, 7 per cent. of engineering graduates were women, but that figure has now risen to 15 per cent. She went through a series of measures that could make the workplace more woman-friendly. One issue was networking. In professional organisations with very few women, the men tend to network among themselves, and the women need their own network to prosper within the organisation. There is also the issue of family-friendly policies.

We also need women who have been successful in IT to act as role models. From Bill Gates downwards, most of the role models in IT are men. The image we have is either of Bill Gates and his millions, or of an adolescent male, who is stuck in his bedroom, playing war games and designing computer software, and who suddenly gets a brilliant job at the age of 18 or 19 by producing a programme that is worth £500,000. If the problem is tackled properly, women will have a better chance of breaking into IT at a professional level than they do of entering a career in engineering, science or maths.

My constituency is heavily dominated by engineering. My father would regard himself as a craft engineer. The traditional image of an engineering company is oily rags, big machines and men with craft skills turning operations or working machines. Traditionally, few women have gone into that occupation, but the balance is shifting. There are fewer jobs at the craft end and more jobs in professional engineering, which require computer skills. There are no longer rooms full of draughtsmen designing things, because designing and testing is now done largely on computer systems, using sophisticated computer software, which allows someone to design an aeroplane, see if it flies, and then alter it a bit.

The whole image of the engineering industry is changing, but young people still grow up with the idea that engineering is all about oily rags and big machines. If under-16s are asked whether they think that IT is a male or female industry, it is clear that the image of IT is very different. In any school, girls are just as likely as boys to be using IT to access information for their projects, make fancy leaflets or play games. The traditional route from GCSEs to graduate level is through precisely the A-level subjects that have been the route into engineering, science and technology—maths, physics and other subjects that have traditionally been male dominated, and which it has been difficult to persuade large numbers of women to study. The challenge is to break the logjam, so that a similar number of girls who study computers, maths or physics at GCSE go on to study the same subjects at A-level and pursue a route into information technology.

Another crucial issue, which was mentioned briefly by the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty), is the barriers that exist in many industries between professional and non-professional staff. The idea that unless someone has a degree in a subject they cannot become a professional is crucial in respect of engineering and IT. In many organisations, large numbers of women operate sophisticated computer systems, but they are not encouraged to gain the qualifications or experience necessary to move from being a non-professional IT operative to a computer programmer or to take more of a leadership role in the organisation. That is holding women back.

It is possible to change the image of an occupation so that women feel that they can compete successfully in it. When I was a teenager in the 1960s, two occupations were perceived as male, one of which was journalism in its broadest sense. The image of a journalist tended to be of a guy with an old raincoat, who drank a bit, smoked a lot and spent time getting information in pubs, and would then be stuck in some garret in central Manchester typing up stories. Since then, journalism and media studies have become occupations that women see as much for them as for men. That has changed during the past 30 years.

The other occupations that come to mind are those in the legal world. In the mid-1960s, the image of a lawyer was of a man. One rarely came across women solicitors or barristers, but probably as many women now go into law as men.

Mrs. Spelman: Not at the top level.

Mr. Borrow: The legal world has changed because there is no reason for barriers. The image of what an occupation is important.

I am convinced that the problems of women working in IT at a professional level should be tackled seriously. Some ideas mentioned by the Minister are useful and helpful. He talked about £1 million towards a work-life balance challenge fund to make it easier for people to work in IT by altering IT policies that were not family-friendly. A little more security on long-term funding of such schemes would be of assistance, so the Government could help.

Image matters, so it would be useful for a few light television comedies or soaps to involve women who work in IT, because the television image of IT is male dominated. I drop that in because of "That's Life", which was on a few years ago and pops up in repeats occasionally. It portrayed several 20-something professional lawyers, women and men. *[Interruption.]* It was called "This Life". It may have had many non-legal scenes, but it reinforced the fact that the legal profession is as open to women as it is to men.

Occupations shown by the media have much to do with how young people see their future careers. If we do not see women who work in IT in the media, that will make it more difficult for 16 or 17-year-old women to view the IT profession as one that they should go into, and we will continue to lose the chunk of women who take computer studies at 16 but do not pursue it through the age of 18 and on to graduation at 21 and 22.

4.14 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): What a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow). I thoroughly enjoyed his interesting and well-informed speech. I take a slightly different tack, although I agree with much of what he said.

The Minister referred to the report "Women in ITEC Courses and Careers", which was published in November 2001. Several hon. Members have drawn

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

attention to the fact that, in 1998–99, only 21 per cent. of computer science graduates were women, but I think that we might attach rather too much significance to that statistic.

For 10 years before becoming a Member, I worked in the IT sector, particularly in the financial services sector. To a large extent, that was the cutting edge, mainly because that was where the investment and the large profits were made developing treasury and risk management systems for financial products. I cannot think of any contemporary of mine, either in my own bank or in the many other City banks, who had a degree in computer sciences. By and large, they were arts graduates, although I accept that a significant proportion of them were mathematics graduates. In that respect, the comments of the hon. Member for South Ribble had great force, but the industry was largely populated by those who acquired their computer skills subsequent to their degrees—as people do in many other disciplines.

I have some sympathy for what the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) said—indeed, the point was alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman)—which is that computer science has a terrifying jargon. However, it is precisely that—a jargon, whose only function is to act as a deterrent to new entrants so that those already working in the industry can maintain their price. It happens in all professions; barriers are erected to exclude new entrants in order to protect the interests of those already in them. Once people crack the jargon, and realise that that is all that it is, IT is like most other professions: most people can do it.

I accept that in some professions we want someone who has had prolonged training. For instance, I would not want people operating on me unless I knew that they were competent and had a great expertise and experience in their discipline. However, for the greater part of modern professional experience, my view is that most people can do it. That was certainly my experience of the computing industry. As someone who had a degree in late mediaeval church history, I quickly discovered that there was a limited demand for specialists on the heresies of the middle ages, and I managed, with some success, to pass myself off for 10 years as an IT professional.

The report includes figures—they were alluded to by the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood—showing that the number of women in employment in the IT industry and the other industries covered by the report declined from 16 to 13 per cent. between 1999 and 2000. That strikes me as rather more worrying, and I am inclined to ask what has gone wrong. My experience of the industry was that it lent itself to women. In the financial sector of the IT industry, there was a disproportionate number of female employees—including those in the most senior positions. Perhaps I was in a quite untypical environment, but I have no reason to believe that that was the case. Women did disproportionately well in that industry, and I am therefore surprised and disappointed at that statistic.

My experience differs from that of the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty), who saw movement into the industry from the user community. The traffic was largely going in the other direction, especially among female systems analysts, who quickly impressed the users with their understanding and skill in interpreting their requirements. Women's ability to sit down and understand requirements and get on well with the people who explain their requirements is much better than that of men. As a consequence, they tended to be poached by the user community. One often found that the IT industry, at least in financial services, was a springboard from which women moved from IT into the industry itself.

The Scottish bank for which I worked was a traditional employer and in many ways a Dickensian institution, but in 10 years we developed what might now be called flexible terms of employment. Those will improve further with the development of broadband, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) drew attention, and of other things that enable home working. The IT industry provides a helpful environment for women to thrive in, especially those with family responsibilities and the need for career breaks. There are many IT activities, such as programming and technical writing, that do not require people to be in the workplace. That trend developed when I was in the industry, to women's advantage, so I am worried about the statistic that suggests a decline in women in employment. I suspect that it may be a blip or that the statistic is questionable, because I find it very surprising.

I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden that the industry has to remain competitive because there is a great deal of competition overseas, especially in the Asian markets. Our bank outsourced the maintenance of what were called "legacy systems", the large batch programmes that were developed in the 1970s and early 1980s. All the maintenance and development of those systems have been outsourced to companies in India, which is a growing force in the IT market. We must take account of that and ensure that our business environment is helpful to IT companies, otherwise fewer men and women will be employed in an industry that is vital for the future.

4.23 pm

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate, especially as it is my first opportunity to speak in Westminster Hall, although that is entirely my own fault as I have been a Member for almost a year.

I begin by welcoming the comments made by the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), who said how surprised she was about the title of the debate. I assure her that her surprise is as nothing compared to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane), who last night, after more than one pint of beer, looked at me aghast and said, "Are you really having a debate on women and ET?" Clearly, he has been detained on the Floor of the House, or he would have been here.

We should demystify some of the language that surrounds IT, as the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) said. Computers are not scary, but simple instruments to use. I was astonished to find how many pensioners in my constituency regularly use computers to access the internet and who do so, after a small

amount of training, with a great deal of confidence—far more, I dare say, than many of my colleagues. We can always learn from the older generation.

My wife is one of those who have been scared off new technology by people saying that they are afraid to switch on the computer in case it blows up and other such dramatic suggestions. She has therefore decided that I am the only person in the household who can switch on the computer or set the timer for the video. It might be that she is either confused by technology or too lazy to do it herself. Given that she is not here, and that she never reads *Hansard*, I feel free to speculate.

I have had the privilege of serving on the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology for the past few months. It has discussed asking the royal societies why, as state-funded bodies, they have so few women members. The mere mention of such an inquiry precipitated a huge amount of panicked correspondence in the daily broadsheets. One of the defenders of the royal societies told me that to increase the number of women in those societies would be "to compromise excellence". It is profoundly depressing, at the beginning of the 21st century, that such attitudes hold sway, not only in academia but in industry.

There is no denying that the Government face a challenge in achieving a situation in which women have the same career opportunities as men. That is not to belittle other career opportunities and directions or the choice of the many women who want to remain in their homes. It is simply to say that women should be given exactly the same choice as everybody else.

We have mentioned statistics. Given that more than half of the university graduates in this country are women, we have to ask why only a fifth of computer graduates are women. That is a worrying disparity. The hon. Member for New Forest, West suggested that it might be a blip but I do not see much evidence for that. In 1995, seven years ago, only 25 per cent. of workers in the information and communications technology industries were women. Last year, that figure had fallen to 22 per cent. There is a medium-term decline in the number of women employed in those industries, and I am delighted that the Minister introduced the debate by telling us how the Government are trying to reverse that trend.

It did not have to be this way. The information technology industry—a brand new industry—provided an opportunity to reinvent the workplace. More than any other, it represented the future, yet we seem to have fallen into the bad old ways epitomised by some of our more traditional industries. When I think about my own city, Glasgow, I think of shipbuilding, but there are many other examples of male-dominated industries. I hesitate to name politics as one of them.

What went wrong? We have to go back to the classroom to find out. The Science and Technology Committee has been speaking to teenagers who are about to decide what subjects to take for their GCSEs or who are in the middle of their GCSE courses. In science, there is already a definite disparity between what boys and girls want to study. Even among those who go into science, girls are more likely to want to study biology and boys are more likely to want to study physics. I could be simplistic and conclude that that is because women are more interested in nurturing life and understanding how it is created, and men just like to blow things up. However, there is a more sophisticated analysis—

Mrs. Humble: No.

Mr. Harris: That is bit worrying.

There is no point trying to encourage school leavers to study computing science if they are not already familiar with the subject, having had an interest in it at school. It is up to teachers and the Government to find ways to encourage that interest.

The media must take some responsibility for taking a negative view of computer geeks, an expression that was used in the debate. The term "anoraks" was also used; I am not sure whether there are computer anoraks, as anoraks are usually worn outdoors and most computer geeks stay at home in their bedrooms. It is sometimes forgotten that in the early to mid-1990s, before the internet was recognised and used as almost infinite source of information, a communications tool and a source of entertainment, it was largely used by teenage boys to discuss the merits of "Star Trek" and "Dungeons and Dragons", and that image has persisted. Bill Gates, despite his intelligence, his achievements and his wealth, is invariably described in the media as a computer geek. That is the most obvious example of the media's patronising attitude to anyone who works with computers.

Another example is that of the movie industry. I have lost count of the number of times Hollywood movies portray male scientists as dysfunctional freaks, and female scientists are invariably played by implausibly pneumatic former models. The part of the nuclear physicist Dr. Christmas Jones in the latest James Bond movie, which I recommend, is played by the actress Denise Richards. It is not difficult to understand why many young women, seeing that media stereotype, are not persuaded to pursue a career in science, although it is not for me to speculate on what effect Miss Richards's portrayal may have on the male audience.

Schools must make science in general, and computing in particular, attractive, dynamic and relevant and, most importantly, inclusive. The hon. Member for New Forest, West hit the nail on the head when he said that computer professionals like to make their job look more difficult than it is. That is a trick used in many careers. Computing should not be an esoteric, arcane skill that allows people into a new, rarefied world of computer wizards. It is a basic skill that most people can achieve with very little training.

The Government have done a great deal to ensure that those who live in socially deprived areas have access to new technology. Castlemilk library in my constituency has a room with brand new, internet-ready computers that enable people living in the area to go on the internet in a few minutes. I extend a warm welcome to the Minister to visit the library to see for himself what an excellent asset it is to the local community.

The Government have addressed the issue of social exclusion in that community, but we are discussing sexual, rather than social, exclusion. We must learn from the mistakes of the past. British boardrooms have suffered massively over the years because they have refused to utilise the skills and experience of half the

[Mr. Harris]

population. The same has been true for many years of almost every industry, as it has been of this place, although I hope that the position is improving. Because IT technology is so fundamental to the health of our economy and to the future prosperity of the country, it is incumbent on all of us to ensure that everyone is included in the future of that industry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We are grateful to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris), whom I thank for his co-operation and for his informed advice on what films I should see.

4.35 pm

Mrs. Spelman: This has been an interesting debate, and I take from it some fundamental points on which all hon. Members are in agreement. Although the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) is not here at present, I take the opportunity to congratulate her on her new role as spokesperson on women's issues for the Liberal Democrat party.

There is no intrinsic reason why women and information technology should be incompatible. None of the barriers that we have evoked today is insurmountable, but it will take much initiative on all sides to dismantle real and perceived barriers. For the sake of those who take an interest in information technology, I wish to put on the record the view that it would be of enormous assistance to do something about the exclusivity of the language that tends to be used in the industry. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) described it as jargon. It is a jargon-littered subject, and that does nothing to encourage women to embrace the technology. I appeal to the industry to deal with the image that is associated with IT. I enjoin the media to be helpful and to contribute to a positive image that is associated with women and the use of information technology.

Hon. Members have tried to contribute constructively to the debate and to get a handle on the reality of the situation. The underlying, serious point concerns the skills set of our nation. We, as legislators, must help the Government of the day to see ahead and make sure that the future generation—male or female—will be well equipped to seek good employment opportunities. We must ensure that those who are currently faced with a difficult choice take whatever remedial action is necessary. Much of our debate has been about remedial action, both for generations that have not had the opportunity to acquire the skills as part of their formal school education and who have needed to acquire them latterly, and those for whom the school system has failed and who now perceive the need to acquire such skills. Much of our attention needs to be drawn to remedial action.

4.38 pm

Mr. Alexander: The debate has been wide ranging. I have certainly enjoyed and valued the contribution of all hon. Members. I wish to start my remarks with what may be a career-threatening confession about the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). When I listen to her during Trade and Industry Questions, I am regularly struck by her common sense, and by the fact that there are certain points of agreement between us. I sometimes wonder why she is a member of the Conservative party. However, given her opening remarks today, I have a better handle on why she is a Conservative.

The hon. Lady has a somewhat complacent view of this important challenge. She made the curious observation that women have a predilection towards working with the caring professions rather than machinery. That would be a revelation to the generations of mill girls, whose expertise working huge machines with their hands gave my town of Paisley world leadership in cotton production in the 19th and 20th centuries. It might also be news to Baroness Thatcher, who, as we know, was a research chemist before joining the ranks of the Conservative party. It may also be news to my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Margaret Beckett), who was a distinguished metallurgist before assuming her place in politics.

Although the speech made by the hon. Member for Meriden was well observed, it was premised on a fundamental error—that there is somehow a fundamental dichotomy between working with machines and working with people. The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) made her point powerfully. The dynamic sectors of the economy reflect an ability to master and use technical knowledge in the service of commercial goals that involve working with people. Our traditional view of geeks on the one hand, and people who understand markets on the other, defies the reality of places such as Silicon valley, where the powerful interchange between people with an intuitive understanding of the capacity of technology, and those with an intuitive understanding of markets, has led to such spectacular growth in the IT sector over the past few years.

I take great issue with the analysis that there is a fundamental cleavage between those who work with technology and those who work with people—it reflects a broader problem in the approach to economic policy making. I sympathise with some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Meriden about the call centre industry—a matter of considerable concern to me. My ministerial responsibilities in the Department of Trade and Industry have afforded me the opportunity to visit Bangalore in recent months, to see for myself some of the competitive challenges that we will face from the Indian sub-continent. I have also met representatives of the Call Centre Association and individual managers within the industry.

To suggest that there is a great risk in adopting a low-skill, low-wage view of the British economy is a curious critique from a Conservative spokesperson. I am happy to welcome a repentant sinner to the view held for many decades by Labour Members: the best competitive environment for the United Kingdom is to establish itself as a high-skill, high-wage, high-productivity, high-value-added economy. Again, I must judge the hon. Lady's words against the reality of policy. In pursuit of that vision, Labour Members voted for the national minimum wage that was opposed by the Conservatives. That was why we wanted extra funding for education and additional support for a national child care strategy, which was also opposed by the Conservatives in terms of resources. One must take with a pinch of salt

the suggestion that there is now unanimity that our future lies in a high-skill, high-wage economy—although that is certainly the view of the Labour Government.

A welcome degree of balance was brought to the debate by the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble). She was absolutely right to acknowledge the risk of complacency creeping into the debate, given the seriousness of the subject. By quoting worrying statistics and urging the Government to work collaboratively, she certainly found favour with me. She made her points powerfully.

My hon. Friend began her remarks by informing the Chamber, with humour, about the importance of the quill pen in history. She used humour effectively to draw out an important point: although individuals exercise private choices about whether to learn to read and write, as a society we face a fundamental choice about whether the public interest is served by equipping people with basic skills. That is not a partisan point. One need only speak to the director-general of the Confederation of British Industry, Mr. Digby Jones, to hear powerful arguments about the productivity of the British economy and the risk that we run if, after decades of under-investment in education, we do not deal with the basic skills challenge that faces us.

My hon. Friend's point about the importance of literacy in a previous generation holds true today: as a society, we face fundamental public policy choices. In the service of that, taking action to deal with fundamental challenges in literacy as well as the problems of ICT, is entirely consistent with our view—it is the effective interaction of Government and the market that can best offer us a future as a productive and dynamic economy. For many years, Labour Members have argued for equity and the need for people to realise their potential by getting basic skills. We are moving towards a knowledge-based economy, and there is great merit in advancing such skills for the productive interests of the United Kingdom. Given the range of jobs that now involve ICT—that was a common view of hon. Members—just as in previous generations we recognised an obligation to equip people with skills of reading, writing and basic numeracy, although we did not always fulfil that, we should now recognise that the challenge that we face is to equip people with opportunities to exploit those skills.

My hon. Friend suggested that I could give her grounds for encouragement in starting her journey toward more familiarity with ICT. Given the Rolls Royce machine that is the British civil service, I can offer her help and assistance, although I cannot vouch that each of the centres that I shall mention are in her constituency. In the environs of Blackpool, opportunities exist at a boys and girls club at Laycock Gate, Blackpool central library, Blackpool Foyer centre and Grassmere Road centre.

Mrs. Humble: I visit those establishments regularly, and every time I do, a lecturer or an assistant tries to detain me and sit me down. I shall have to do something about it, because not only the younger generation, but the older generation who increasingly use the facilities, have left me behind.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not know how the Minister is going to respond to that.

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend uses characteristic humour to make a serious point. In my constituency, training in basic adult literacy used to take place at the local further education college. I can think of few things that would be more intimidating to a person who did not have basic reading and writing skills than a request that they cross the threshold of a local FE college. The latest initiative that we have taken in my constituency is to ensure that we distribute information on courses in basic reading and writing to community centres. We can all learn from insights—not least my hon. Friend's experience—to ensure that courses are as accessible as possible.

I pay tribute to the contribution of the hon. Member for Guildford. I respect her expertise from her many years in the ICT field, and I agreed with much of her speech. I was sympathetic to her insights on the challenge that we face to transform attitudes in the ICT sector, and on our challenge to transform attitudes in this place. Much progress has yet to be made on politics and ICT.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) was able to speak before he had to depart. He brought much to the debate by drawing from his experience as Minister for Science and Technology in a previous Administration. Although at times he came close to contradicting the position of the principal Conservative spokesman, he gave us a welcome insight into several challenges that we face on public policy. His understanding of public policy and broadband issues made an important contribution to the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) paid due tribute to his constituents' strength and expertise in engineering. He drew powerfully on his and his family's personal experience to show the lessons that we should learn and challenges that we face. I was intrigued by his description of the professions of journalism and law. I declare an interest because I served as a Scottish lawyer before I entered this place, but I take his point on board. When I studied law, the number of women who entered law school was significantly higher than the number of men. There are grounds for optimism, although the Conservative spokesman observed that there are not yet equal numbers of women in the higher ranks of the law. That is a fair observation, and I hope that it will be addressed by the ever-increasing numbers of women entering the profession.

Mr. Tom Harris: My hon. Friend referred to the accuracy of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble about solicitors. Speaking as a former journalist, I tell the Minister that my hon. Friend's portrayal of journalists was just as accurate.

Mr. Alexander: I am on my mettle as regards my response to that observation. I will neither contest nor endorse my hon. Friend's assertion, as some journalists might read the record.

[Mr. Alexander]

I take on board the points that have been made about work-life balance funding, and it might be appropriate if I were to offer to write to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble who raised a point on the sustainability of that funding. With regard to his contribution, I feel that there are grounds for optimism about being able to leave behind the old-fashioned view of the economy and of the contribution that men and women respectively can make to it. I suggest that we are leaving that behind and moving forward—that we are progressing from a view of society as seen on "That's Life" to one that will be seen on "This Life".

The next contribution came from the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), who came close to suggesting that the statistic that underpinned some of the contributions to the debate was merely a blip. That point was addressed well by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris), who pointed out that it was not an isolated statistic, because there are worrying trends that deserve the attention of the House. That is why the debate has been important.

I felt that the hon. Member for New Forest, West was on surer ground in his assertion of the critical competitive importance of the ICT sector to the British economy. To draw on remarks I made earlier, it is precisely for that reason that we do not approach the debate merely in terms of equity and an interest in equality—strong though those are. We also approach it in terms of addressing how we can best harness the true talents of the UK work force, in an environment and an emerging economy where human capital—the skills and talents of our individual workers—will be a significant competitive driver, determining the relative success of the UK economy. It would be a dereliction of our duty, if we were not alive to the possibility that we might be denying the British economy the full range of talents available to it, so a clear economic rationale has underpinned the debate.

I turn to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart, whose constituency is close to my own home. If that was his maiden speech in this Chamber, he has set himself a very high standard; it was worthy of people of far more experience, and of many more years in this place.

From my own experience in my constituency of Paisley, South, I am aware of the kind of work that my hon. Friend described in his constituency. In Paisley central library, I recently visited a computer learning facility that is undertaking many of the same kinds of work that I imagine are under way in the Castlemilk library, about which he spoke. I would welcome the opportunity—if it were to arise—to visit Castlemilk, and to hear of the work that is being taken forward in Cathcart.

My hon. Friend's description of the media brought a novel and interesting flash of light and insight to the debate. Perhaps some of us should have touched on that subject earlier. I was also intrigued by his recommendations as to which films you should watch, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will bear them in mind. I end my remarks on his contribution by saying that his description of the problem left me stirred but not altogether shaken.

I will now conclude. This has been an important debate. I hope that the contributions—not only from Labour Members, but from across the Chamber—have convinced even those hon. Members who were sceptical at the start of the importance of the debate, on the grounds of both equity and economic productivity.

In my opening remarks, I acknowledged that there was still a great deal of work to do on the matter under discussion, and that the ambitions of the Government in that regard have by no means been fulfilled. We should regard the debate as the starting point of a continuing discussion about how, together with industry, we take forward some of the challenges that some of the more worrying statistics have revealed. Therefore, it is not a challenge exclusively for Government: there are many other players, not least the media and the sector itself, and there are a wide range of bodies that must take it forward.

I am heartened by the support I have received from Ministerial colleagues across Whitehall in rising to an important endeavour, and I will bear in mind many of the reflections that I have heard in the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I congratulate all the hon. Members who spoke in the debate on the quality and informed nature of their contributions.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Five o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 22 April 2002

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the functions of her Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [42987]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* In relation to the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, the answer is as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The CPS has not conducted any formal market testing activity in the last five years.

The CPS has, however, let a major contract for the provision of IT services under private finance initiative (PFI) principles in December 2001. The service provision is due to commence in April 2002.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

In March 1999 a new cleaning contract was awarded by the Treasury Solicitor's Department following a competitive tendering exercise. Another contract was let, after a further tendering exercise, for the Department's security guarding function in December 1999, as a consequence of the withdrawal of the previous (public sector) supplier. There were no cost savings in either case.

Serious Fraud Office

In the last five years the Serious Fraud Office has market tested and outsourced IT, telecoms and off-site storage services. The remaining information requested could be provided only by the individual consideration of all relevant finance files for the last five years. This would involve disproportionate cost.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to reduce unit costs per case in real terms by 1.3 per cent. by March will be met. [47815]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Law Officers' 2002 departmental report.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what new measures her Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47322]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* It is not the practice of the Law Officers to make public details of security arrangements for the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Solicitor-General how many times Ministers in her Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47111]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 30 April 1999. Details for travel undertaken in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Solicitor-General how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47150]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* Neither the Attorney-General nor I employ special advisers.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Solicitor-General how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46832]

The Solicitor-General: Nothing has been spent as neither the Attorney-General nor I employ special advisers.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and if the target was met. [49647]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General is not responsible for any non-departmental bodies.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [49612]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General is not responsible for any non-departmental bodies.

Porton Down

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Solicitor-General on what time scale she expects to reach conclusions in relation to the inquiry by Wiltshire Police into experiments at Porton Down, with special reference to *(a)* the file submitted to the Attorney-General in January 2001 concerning L.A.C. Ronald Maddison and *(b)* the police reports referring to experiments on the common cold. [47732]

The Solicitor-General: Wiltshire police commenced this inquiry in 1999.

As regards a possible prosecution, files of evidence for consideration by the CPS have been sent in stages since September 2001. A large quantity of material has been submitted and is in the process of being reviewed.

Further papers are expected from the police within the next few weeks. When all the evidence has been received, the CPS will conclude the review process promptly. There are no specific police reports referring to experiments on the common cold. These assertions are contained in numerous statements throughout the many evidential files and are being fully considered in conjunction with the other evidence.

Separately, an application has been made by HM Coroner for Wiltshire and Swindon for authority to apply to the Hight Court for a fresh inquest into the death of Ronald Maddison at Porton Down. The application has been granted by the Attorney-General.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Stadium

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps will be taken to recover the £120 million of Lottery funding invested in the project should the decision be taken not to proceed with the development of a new national football stadium at Wembley after 30 April. [50928]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* This would be a matter for discussion between Sport England and the Football Association, and Wembley National Stadium Ltd.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what plans she has to withdraw her Department's support for the National Stadium project; what assessment she has made of the effect withdrawal would have on the future of the project; and if she will make a statement; [51761]

(2) what assessment she has made of the impact of the FA's failure to satisfy the conditions she set out in her statement of 19 December 2001 on the future of the National Stadium project; and if she will make a statement. [51762]

Tessa Jowell: I set out to the House on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 291–93, the requirements that would need to be addressed by the Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Limited, for the Government to be able to give support to the National Stadium project. That remains the Government's position and I understand the Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Limited are working towards meeting those requirements.

Football

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last attended a Nationwide Football League match. [R] [50848]

Mr. Caborn: I attended the match between Norwich City and Stockport County on Sunday 20 April at Carrow Road.

Voluntary Sector

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1185–86W, on Government funding of the voluntary sector, if she will list the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which *(a)* her Department, *(b)* the Arts Council of England, *(c)* English Heritage and *(d)* Sport England distributes funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51404]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The Department has no grant scheme by which it distributes Government funding to the voluntary sector. However, during the financial year 2000–01 we provided the Community Service Volunteers £67,000 towards the cost of their Lending Time project. We have contacted the Arts Council of England, English Heritage and Sport England to request the information required, and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

National Lottery

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the running costs were of each of the Lottery distributors in the last 12 months. [51210]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* This information is not readily available. I will, however, write to the hon. Member as soon as it has been collated, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money has been distributed *(a)* in total and *(b)* to voluntary organisations by each of the Lottery distributors in each year of their existence. [51209]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* We do not hold this information centrally. We have, however, contacted each of the Lottery distributors to ascertain whether they hold this information, and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the *(a)* grant schemes and *(b)* other mechanisms by which each of the Lottery distributors distribute funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51207]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* We do not hold this information centrally. We have, however, contacted each of the Lottery distributors to ascertain

whether they hold this information, and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

DEFENCE

Iraq

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times RAF aircraft *(a)* were fired upon and *(b)* responded with fire in Iraqi airspace in the last 12 months. [45135]

Mr. Ingram: RAF aircraft undertake patrols in Iraqi airspace as part of the international coalition's No Fly Zone (NFZ) enforcement operations. A single coalition NFZ patrol involves multiple aircraft types in an integrated package. Surface-to-air fire by Iraqi air defence weapons is recorded as an attack on the whole, rather than against individual aircraft types.

Between 1 March 2001 and 20 March 2002 attacks on coalition aircraft by Iraqi Air Defence weapons, including anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles, were recorded on 488 occasions.

On four occasions RAF aircraft released ordnance in self-defence responses to these attacks.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [49597]

Dr. Moonie: None of the non-departmental bodies sponsored by the Ministry of Defence have to date employed people on the new deal for young people scheme.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his Department. [49125]

Dr. Moonie: Within the Ministry of Defence the policy for additional compensation to civil servants for hours worked in excess of normal conditioned hours differs depending on the grade of the employee and the duties that they routinely perform. The authorisation of overtime working has been delegated to responsible line managers and their associated finance staff.

Senior civil servants are not eligible for overtime payments. A few senior non-industrial staff are classed as non-overtime grades, but are entitled to payments for long hours once a monthly threshold of 10 hours has been passed. Other non-industrial and industrial staff are entitled to overtime payments normally on the basis of time and a half for Monday to Saturday overtime working, and double time for attendance on Sundays and public and bank holidays. Although not obliged to do so, staff are encouraged to take time off in lieu.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the cost was to his Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated; [49095]

(2) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49137]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W, by the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook).

Mountain Warfare

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which units of the Army are trained for mountain warfare; and if he will make a statement. [49327]

Mr. Ingram: There are two Army units that are trained for mountain warfare; 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery and 59 Commando Regiment Royal Engineers. In addition, Army personnel attached to the Commando Logistic Regiment and the Commando Medical Squadron are similarly trained. All these units are affiliated to 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, which is part of the Naval Service.

Deep Cut Army Camp

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) where the incident that led to the death of Private Cheryl James in 1995 within the Deep Cut Army Camp took place; where the death took place; and if he will make a statement; [51030]

(2) if he will make a statement on *(a)* the cause of death, *(b)* the circumstances and *(c)* the coroner's verdict on the death of Private Cheryl James in 1995 at the Deep Cut Army Camp; [51028]

(3) whether there was an MoD inquiry into the death of Private Cheryl James in 1995 at Deep Cut Army Camp; and if he will make a statement. [51029]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) where the incident that led to the death of the soldier Shaun Benton in 1995 within the Deep Cut Army Camp took place; where the death took place; and if he will make a statement; [51025]

(2) if he will make a statement on *(a)* the cause, *(b)* the circumstances and *(c)* the coroner's verdict on the death of Shaun Benton in 1995 at Deep Cut Army Camp. [51026]

(3) whether there was an MoD inquiry into the death of the soldier Shaun Benton in 1995 at Deep Cut Army Camp; and if he will make a statement. [51027]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) where the incident that led to the death of Private James Collinson in 1995 within the Deep Cut Army Camp took place; where the death took place; and if he will make a statement; [51032]

(2) if he will make a statement on *(a)* the cause of death, *(b)* the circumstances and *(c)* the coroner's verdict on the death of Private James Collinson in 1995 at the Deep Cut Army Camp; [51031]

(3) whether there was an MOD inquiry into the death of Private James Collinson in 1995 at Deep Cut Army Camp; and if he will make a statement. [51033]

Dr. Moonie: Private James Collinson, Royal Logistic Corps, died from a gunshot wound to the head while on guard duty at the Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut, on 23 March 2002. The circumstances surrounding Private Collinson's death are still the subject of a police investigation and it would, therefore, be inappropriate to comment further at this stage. A date for the coroner's inquest has yet to be set. Only after the inquest has concluded can an Army Board of Inquiry into Private Collinson's death be convened.

Gibraltar

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK military personnel are stationed in Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [51016]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 669W, to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch).

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the RAF station in Gibraltar. [51013]

Mr. Ingram: There are no current plans to change the role of the RAF station in Gibraltar.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his Spanish counterpart regarding the future of the Headquarters British Forces Gibraltar under the Brussels Process; and if he will make a statement. [51015]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has had no such discussions.

Blue Danube Atomic Bomb

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when drawings and specifications of the Blue Danube atomic bomb were placed in the Public Records Office; and if he will make a statement. [51024]

Mr. Hoon: The file containing this information about Blue Danube was transferred to the Public Record Office in August 1994.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the US Government regarding publication of details of the Blue Danube atomic bomb. [51022]

Mr. Hoon: None.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the maximum number of warheads loaded on to the individual Trident D5 missiles currently deployed; and what is the maximum number of warheads that could be deployed on each of the United Kingdom's Trident D5 missiles. [51137]

Mr. Ingram: A maximum of 12 nuclear warheads could be deployed on each of the United Kingdom's Trident D5 missiles. The number of warheads loaded on to each missile currently deployed is withheld under Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

QinetiQ

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps were taken to ensure that the bidding process for contractors in respect of QinetiQ was conducted in accordance with his Department's rules; and if he will make a statement. [50680]

Dr. Moonie: An advert was placed in the *Financial Times* (European edition) on 8 March 2002 seeking expressions of interest in becoming a strategic partner to QinetiQ in writing to UBS Warburg by 15 March 2002. Almost 40 parties expressed an interest and were forwarded a pre-qualification questionnaire for response by 28 March. 16 completed responses have been received and these are at present being assessed with the intention of selecting those parties to receive the information memorandum.

Senior Armed Forces

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 552W, on senior members of the armed forces, how many officers of the rank of general and above in each service attended *(a)* independent and *(b)* state schools. [51228]

Mr. Ingram: I have nothing to add to my earlier reply. This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* service family accommodation and *(b)* single living accommodation units were of (i) grade one, (ii) grade two, (iii) grade three and (iv) grade four standard in each year between 1997 and 2001; and if he will make a statement. [51168]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* married quarters and *(b)* single living accommodation quarters have been inspected for health and safety in the last 12 months; how many have failed health and safety inspections; and if he will make a statement. [51166]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many repairs have been made to *(a)* service family accommodation and *(b)* single living accommodation in each year between 1997 and 2001; how many of these have repeated repairs conducted in the previous year; and if he will make a statement. [51167]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

ABRO (Staff Rights)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the steps taken by his Department to protect staff rights in connection with service with ABRO, with special reference to the case of Mr. Alan Ely of Linlithgow. [46924]

Mr. Ingram: ABRO staff are Ministry of Defence civil servants and enjoy the same employment rights as all other staff employed in the Department. With particular regard to the dismissal case of Mr. Alan Ely, the appropriate departmental procedures were followed by ABRO.

Legal proceedings in this matter are currently on-going. On legal advice the MOD has appealed against the level of the Employment Tribunal's compensation award, made to Mr. Ely for unfair dismissal.

Donna Nook Range

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the annual cost of inspections of the Donna Nook range conducted by Explosives Ordnance Disposal personnel from RAF Coningsby has been in the last five years; and what his estimate is of the one-off cost of permanently disposing of munitions contained in this dump. [48661]

Dr. Moonie: Information on costs over the last five years is not available but, in the last financial year, the cost of RAF Coningsby-based personnel clearing RAF Donna Nook air weapons range was estimated to be £97,000. This figure does not include the cost of training, incidental expenses or the cost of replacing specialist bomb disposal equipment. Those personnel who undertake the clearance of the air weapons range also inspect the munitions dump weekly. No estimate has been made of the one-off cost of disposal of the munitions contained in this dump.

Military Aviation Accidents

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military aviation accidents involving RAF and other countries' air forces occurred in the UK *(a)* from 1990 to 1997 and *(b)* from 1997 to the present, broken down by region and by air force; and if he will make a statement. [51726]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Service Personnel (Transport)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what official guidelines there are concerning travel time for service personnel returning to their home base from overseas; and if he will make a statement. [51732]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how she proposes to modify the voluntary status of the UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme 2002 to comply with the mandatory status of the EU Trading Scheme when the latter comes into force in 2005. [48981]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Government welcome the principles of EU trading to encourage European industry to gain early experience of trading in advance of international trading under the Kyoto protocol. The Commission's proposal for a EU emissions trading scheme does differ in some respects from the UK scheme; one significant difference is that the Commission's proposal is for a mandatory scheme whereas the UK scheme is voluntary. The Government are working with the Commission and other member states during the negotiation process to develop a less rigid emissions trading scheme for the EU that takes account of existing national trading arrangements and provides for them to run their course. It has always been the Government's intention that the transition between the UK scheme and any EU or international trading scheme will be as seamless as possible.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she intends that the use of sinks and forest sequestration will be allowed as part of the UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme 2002. [48983]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Although the Government recognise that carbon sinks can provide environmental and other benefits, they believe that the UK's current priority should be actual emissions reductions, rather than carbon sequestration (either as sinks or storage) because of the complexities and uncertainties involved in forestry projects and other carbon sinks. For the time being, therefore, sinks and forest sequestration projects are not eligible for entry into the UK Emissions Trading Scheme. This approach to sinks and sequestration will be kept under review.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the rules her Department has drawn up to ensure that the UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme 2002 delivers emission reductions additional to those required by regulation will be published. [48976]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Government have already made further details on the treatment of regulatory requirements in the UK

Greenhouse Gas Trading Scheme available on request. The Government intend to formally publish these details later this week.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress with the UK Emissions Trading Scheme. [51943]

Margaret Beckett: The UK Emissions Trading Scheme went live on 2 April with the opening of the innovative, web-based Emissions Trading Registry, which records the transfer of allowances from buyer to seller. A number of trades have already taken place.

A total of 34 organisations successfully joined the Scheme through a competitive auction held in March. In return for taking on legally binding emissions reduction targets, these organisations will each receive a share of the financial incentive that the Government are making available over the five years of the Scheme. They can choose to meet their annual targets by reducing emissions themselves or by buying surplus allowances from other participating organisations. To date, over 50 other organisations have opened trading accounts so that they can buy and sell allowances.

We expect the volume of trades and number of participants to increase in the autumn and beyond when participation in the Scheme widens as some of the 6,000 companies in Climate Change Agreements begin buying allowances to enable them to meet their targets or selling any over-achievement to other participants. Projects that produce quantified reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will also be able, in time and subject to prior approval from the Government, to earn credits that can then be traded through the Scheme.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will state the baselines for the average emissions in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000 for each of the direct participants of the UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme 2002. [48977]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Direct participants in the UK Emissions Trading Scheme are currently in the process of having their baseline emissions independently verified by organisations accredited for this specific purpose by the UK Accreditation Service. These independent verification organisations will provide the Government with a verified baseline (an average of emissions in 1998–2000 unless there are regulatory requirements to take into account) for each direct participant. Once they have done so, the Government will make the baseline emissions for each direct participant publicly available. The Government expect to publish the first independently verified baselines at the end of this month. They will be available on *www.defra.gov.uk/etr.*

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which of the direct participants of the UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme 2002 fall under *(a)* integrated pollution control and *(b)* the flare consents regime for offshore installations; and what reduction in emissions for these companies is stipulated by the conditions set in their IPC authorisations and flare consents. [48980]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Three direct participants (DuPont UK Ltd, Ineos Fluor Ltd and Rhodia Organique Fine Ltd) in the UK Emissions Trading Scheme are subject to regulation under Integrated Pollution Control, and two (British Petroleum plc and Shell UK Ltd) that are subject to the Department of Trade and Industry's flare consent regime. The terms of these regulatory requirements under IPC are already available on the public register at the following local Environment Agency offices: Coverdale House, York for DuPont, Richard Fairclough House, Warrington for Ineos Fluor and Rivers House, Bridgewater for Rhodia. The 2002 flare consents for British Petroleum installations and fields in the Emissions Trading Scheme allow 1,132.55 thousand standard cubic metres of natural gas flared per day. For Shell, the comparable number is 698.17 thousand standard cubic metres of natural gas flared per day.

GM Crops

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to develop mechanisms *(a)* to prevent an increase in GM presence in conventional seeds and produce and *(b)* to prevent GM contamination of organic seeds and produce; and with whom this responsibility lies. [46622]

Mr. Meacher: The European Union has agreed interim measures to limit adventitious presence of approved GMOs in non-GM seeds to 0.5 per cent. More specific proposals are under discussion within the European Union. These would set cross-pollination thresholds ranging from 0.3 per cent. to 0.7 per cent. (depending on the species) in seed, in order broadly to keep GM presence in the resulting produce below the 1 per cent. threshold set for food. The Government are also considering what measures might be required to facilitate the co-existence of ordinary (non-seed) GM and non-GM crops and who should be responsible for such measures. For seed production, the grower of the seed crop is normally responsible for observing rules to achieve the desired level of seed purity. With organic seeds and produce, as with conventional seeds and produce, it is not possible to guarantee that GM cross-pollination will not occur, but we would like to aim for the lowest practical level, bearing in mind relevant factors, including the need to protect non-GM produce, the views of stakeholders, the practicalities of detection at low levels, and the costs involved.

Climate Change

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the external organisations set up by her as part of the Government's strategy to combat climate changes indicating *(a)* their remits and *(b)* their sources at funding. [50448]

Mr. Meacher: The Department, together with the Devolved Administrations, set up the Carbon Trust in April 2001. It is a private, not for profit organisation whose remit is to recycle around £100 million of climate change levy receipts over three years to accelerate the take

up of cost effective, low carbon technologies by business and levy payers. It receives funding from my Department and the Devolved Administrations.

In 1997, the Department also established the UK Climate Impacts Programme to help the public and private sector assess the impacts of climate change and plan how to adapt to it. We currently provide around £0.5 million a year to fund the (UKCIP).

Many other organisations from both the private and public sectors also assist the Government with it's climate change strategy. These include the Emissions Trading Group, the Climate Change Projects Office, the Energy Saving Trust, the Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research, the Tyndall Centre, and more besides.

European Environmental Directives

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she has collated in respect of the time taken to implement European environmental directives since May 1997. [49266]

Mr. Meacher: The table lists environment directives published since May 1997 alongside their transposition or expected transposition date.

Directive number	*Title*	*Published in official journal*	*Expected transposition date*	*Transposed*
97/49	The conservation of birds	29 July 1997	—	29 July 1997
97/62	The conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora	27 October 1997	—	30 January 1998
98/11	Energy labelling of household lamps	27 January 1998	—	1 July 1999
98/15	Amending Council Directive 91/271/EEC with respect to certain requirements established in Annex 1 thereof (Urban waste water treatment)	27 February 1998	—	27 August 1998
98/83	Water Intended for Human Consumption	3 November 1998	September 2002	—
99/9	Energy labelling household dishwashers	26 February 1999	—	8 July 1999
99/13	Solvents	11 March 1999	December 2002	—
99/22	Keeping Wild Animals in Zoos	29 March 1999	May 2003	—
99/30	Limit Values of Sulphur Dioxide and Nitrogen	22 April 1999	1 May 2002	—
99/31	Disposal of Waste by Landfill	26 April 1999	June 2002	—
99–32	Sulphur Content of Liquid Fuels	26 April 1999	—	11 March 2002
99/51	The marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations	26 May 1999	November 2002	—
2000/55	Energy efficiency requirements for ballasts for fluorescent lighting	18 September 2000	21 May 2002	—
2000/60	Establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy.	23 October 2000	December 2003	—
2000/76	Incineration of Waste	4 December 2000	December 2002	—
2001/18	Directive 2001/18/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 March 2001 on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms and repealing Council Directive 90/220/EEC	12 March 2001	17 October 2002	—
2001/80/EC	Limitation of emissions of certain pollutants into the air from large combustion plants	23 October 2001	27 November 2002	—
2001/81/EC	National emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants	23 October 2001	27 November 2002	—
2002/3/EC	Ozone in ambient air	12 February 2002	9 September 2003	—
2002/31/EC	Energy Labelling of household air conditioners	22 March 2002	1 January 2003	—

Marine Conservation

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost is of her Department's two-year pilot project for regional marine conservation in the North sea. [46990]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has a service level agreement with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to carry out the regional seas pilot in the Irish sea. The project should be completed by March 2004 and is planned to cost £397,200.

Noise Pollution

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of noise pollution in the London borough of Havering. [49694]

Mr. Meacher: No specific assessment has been made of environmental noise across the whole of the London borough of Havering. The Government announced in their Rural White Paper (November 2000) the decision to consult on a national ambient noise strategy. The consultation on the development of this strategy—Towards a National Ambient Noise Strategy—closed on 15 March this year, the results of which will be published in due course. A significant contribution to the development of the strategy will be the determination of exposure to environmental noise through noise mapping. The London borough of Havering will be considered in this exercise.

Endangered Species

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the World Wildlife Fund about the protection of endangered species; and if she will make a statement. [50469]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have contacted me about the trade in endangered species twice in recent months.

The first was to ask me to jointly fund with them an officer at TRAFFIC International to help support wildlife law enforcement in the UK. I was pleased to agree to this and we are making £50,000 available over the next two years.

The second enclosed a copy of the report 'Traded to Extinction?' launching WWF's illegal wildlife trade campaign. I will be meeting WWF to discuss their concerns about this shortly.

Waste Disposal

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what radioactive and toxic waste was dumped in the Irish sea from 1 May 2001 to 28 February 2002; what the origin of this radioactive and toxic waste was; and if she will make a statement. [47049]

Mr. Meacher: The UK ceased all sea dumping of radioactive waste in 1982, and all sea dumping of industrial waste in 1992. The only material now licensed for disposal at sea is dredged sediment from ports, harbours etc., and small amounts of fish waste. All such disposal is rigorously controlled under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 to ensure that the marine environment and ecosystems are protected.

Farm Waste

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will publish the DEFRA consultation paper on farm waste. [48304]

Mr. Meacher: We are preparing the regulations necessary to apply the provisions of the Waste Framework Directive to those types of agricultural waste which are not excluded from control under Article 2. A regulatory impact assessment (RIA) is also being prepared. On completion, the draft regulations and RIA will be issued for consultation with the farming industry and other interested groups. A firm date for publication of the consultation paper has not yet been set but our aim is to publish it later in the spring. I will ensure that a copy of the consultation paper is sent to the hon. Member when it is issued.

Sellafield

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to reduce radioactive waste from the British Nuclear Fuels, Sellafield plant. [49326]

Margaret Beckett: All radioactive discharges from the UK are within national and international dose constraints. The UK has made substantial progress in reducing these discharges over the last 25 years. Discharges now are less than 1 per cent. of what they were then. In making these reductions we have concentrated on the most harmful radionuclides. However, we accept that more needs to be done to deliver further reductions.

At a ministerial meeting of the OSPAR Commission at Sintra, Portugal in 1998, OSPAR members including the UK undertook to reduce radioactive discharges. Contracting parties must produce national plans by 1 July 2002 showing how they are going to achieve these reductions. The UK Radioactive Discharges Strategy will demonstrate how we are going to meet the targets for reducing radioactive discharges agreed at Sintra. The UK consulted about its draft strategy in June 2000 and we intend to publish the final version in time to meet the July 2002 deadline. Copies of the strategy will be placed in the House of Commons Library. We have also consulted on draft guidance to the Environment Agency which will help ensure that decisions on discharge authorisations for nuclear licensed sites in England are consistent with the UK strategy.

The Environment Agency has also carried out a public consultation on its review of Sellafield authorisations. The agency will put its recommendations to Ministers later this year. The agency carried out a fast-track review of Technetium-99 discharges ahead of the main Sellafield review. Their recommendations are currently with DEFRA and DoH Ministers for consideration.

Rhinoceros

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the threat to the rhinoceros population in Zimbabwe from illegal poaching. [48846]

Mr. Meacher: Most rhinoceros species are listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). This means that international trade in wild-taken rhinos and their products is prohibited. The UK goes further, however, in that it has banned trade in all raw rhino horn from whatever source.

My officials have contacted the CITES Secretariat who confirm that although there are reports of an increase in poaching in general in Zimbabwe, they do not have any detailed information to support this. While there may be an increased risk of poaching, there is as yet no evidence to indicate that this is leading to a decline in rhino populations. We will keep the situation under review.

Local Agenda 21

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the implementation of Local Agenda 21; what steps her Department is taking to promote its introduction by local authorities; and to what extent agreements on Local Agenda 21 signed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 have been enacted. [46565]

Mr. Meacher: In June 1997 the Prime Minister set a target for all local authorities in the UK to adopt Local Agenda 21 strategies by the year 2000. A Government Office survey showed that 93 per cent. of local authorities met this target.

The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to prepare a community strategy for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom. The Government want to see sustainable development become a mainstream issue for local authorities, their partners, and local communities. It believes that the most effective way to achieve this is to subsume Local Agenda 21 strategies within community strategies.

The Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions have introduced a Best Value Performance Indicator to report on local authorities' progress with community strategies. A survey of English and Welsh Authorities by the Local Government Association in autumn 2001 found that, of the 67 per cent. which responded, 27 per cent. of authorities had developed a strategy. Of those yet to develop a strategy, nearly 80 per cent. said they would have one by March 2002, and the remainder would be published by March 2003.

Packaging Waste

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 3 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1027W, on packaging waste, when the percentage levels of *(a)* business packaging waste recovery and *(b)* business packaging recycling in the United Kingdom in 2001 will be published. [49904]

Mr. Meacher: We aim to publish the figures within the next week.

Lead Shot

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the consultation on the recommendations of the Lead Shot Legislation (England) Review Group; and whether it is her policy that its proposals for changes to legislation should be implemented. [51939]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has conducted a consultation exercise on the proposals put forward by the Lead Shot Legislation (England) Review Group. Over 1,800 consultation papers were issued. The response rate was low. The report contained proposals for some changes to the site list in Schedule 1 of the Lead Shot Legislation 1999, removing some sites not considered important for waterfowl and adding others which were considered important. It also contained proposals for the removal of Common Snipe and Golden Plover from Schedule 2. No respondents disagreed with the recommendations. The amendments recommended will therefore be implemented by Statutory Instrument under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in due course.

Moduletron

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost to public funds of implementing in full the proposals for moduletron contained in the report of the Policy Commission on Farming and Food. [48562]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* In discussion with stakeholders, others in Government and the devolved administrations, DEFRA is considering the implications of the Policy Commission's proposals on modulation very carefully. The table below provides preliminary estimates, for the three years starting 2003–04, of the costs in England if the rate of modulation were increased as the Policy Commission propose. Any decision on whether to adjust the rate of modulation is subject to the Spending Review.

	2003–04	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Modulation rate currently proposed (%)	3.5	3.5	4.5
Government match-funding[1] (£ million)[2]	45	47	59
Modulation rate proposed by Policy Commission (%)	3.5	10	10
Government match-funding[1] (£ million)[2]	45	124	133
Additional match-funding required if Policy Commission proposals adopted in full (£ million)	0	77	74

[1] Assuming 100 per cent. match-funding.
[2] Note that these estimates are based on forecasts of subsidy receipts and are therefore subject to some uncertainty—for example future euro-sterling exchange rates (the rate used here is Euro 1 = £0.62)

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultation she undertook, and with whom, prior to determining the methodology for designating nitrate vulnerable zones. [48200]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Since adopting the Nitrates Directive in 1991, the Government have consulted extensively on all aspects of Nitrate Vulnerable Zone designation:

1992: First consultation on methodology for identifying NVZ areas in England and Wales;

1993: Second consultation on methodology for identifying NVZ areas in England and Wales;

1994: Consultation on proposed NVZ areas in England and Wales;

1995: Consultation on proposed Action Programme measures to apply in NVZ areas in England and Wales

1997: Consultation on draft regulations establishing Action Programme measures to apply in NVZ areas in England and Wales;

2002: Consultation on completing implementation of the Nitrates Directive in England.

All farmers potentially affected by each round of proposed designations have been invited to participate, as well as a broad range of stakeholder organisations.

Air Pollutants

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures the Government have put in place to reduce the levels of the air pollutants *(a)* sulpher dioxide, *(b)* NO, and *(c)* PM_{10}. [48545]

Mr. Meacher: Levels of all three pollutants have reduced significantly in recent years as emissions from industry and road transport have fallen. The National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory shows that emissions of each pollutant fell by the following amounts between 1990 and 1999 (the latest year for which figures are available).

Kilotonnes

Pollutant	*Emissions in 1990*	*Emissions in 1999*	*Percentage reduction*
Sulphur dioxide	3,754	1,187	68
Oxides of Nitrogen	2,760	1,605	42
Particles (PM_{10})	305	186	39

In respect of sulphur dioxide, the most significant emissions reductions in recent years have come about as a result of changes in industrial practices as well as the regulatory controls we have imposed. We estimate, for example, that fuel switching from coal to gas in power stations (which began in 1992–93) has reduced sulphur dioxide emissions by one million tonnes from what it might otherwise have been. We also estimate that the fitting of flue gas desulphurisation to two large coal power stations in 1993–94 has reduced emissions by 0.2 million tonnes; and that the use of lower-sulphur coal has reduced emissions by about 0.15 million tonnes.In respect of particles and oxides of nitrogen, the most significant contribution has come from the reductions in road transport emissions which are largely the result of the progressively tighter European Union standards for new motor vehicles and fuels. The introduction of three way catalysts on petrol vehicles in the early 1990s, for example, is estimated to have reduced emissions of oxides of nitrogen in 1999 by about 30 per cent. compared to what emissions might otherwise have been. Improvements in diesel vehicle technology have also made a significant contribution to reducing emissions of oxides of nitrogen and particles. The UK Government have helped to incentivise the early uptake of clean fuels (such as ultra-low-sulphur diesel and petrol) by setting preferential duty rates for them.

Organic Pollutants

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress with regard to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. [46559]

Mr. Meacher: The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants was adopted on 22 May 2001 and has 124 signatories. To come into force 50 countries need to ratify, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has set a target of 2004 at the latest. The Convention has been ratified by five countries, with work on ratification in progress in others including the UK. However, the use of all ten intentionally produced chemicals currently listed in the Convention has already been banned here.

In June UNEP will convene a sixth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, which developed the Convention, to oversee implementation of international action during the interim period and to prepare for the first Conference of the Parties after entry into force.

Sustainable Development

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library copies of the *(a)* United Kingdom submissions and *(b)* submissions by other nations relevant to United Kingdom policies on sustainable development, made to the preparatory meeting in New York for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. [49269]

Mr. Meacher: At the Third Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the UK Government worked with European Union partners in order to submit a joint EU position to the Chair. The submission addressed the Chair's document which was tabled at the end of the Second Preparatory Committee on 12 February. A copy of the document will be placed in the Library.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government plan to take *(a)* nationally, *(b)* Europe-wide and *(c)* internationally towards launching a mechanism to promote and develop international objectives for sustainable development in Johannesburg. [44414]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are working with their partners nationally, in Europe and internationally towards the development of proposals for the Johannesburg Summit that focus on the practical implementation of international sustainable development objectives. In particular we want to see a specific action programme agreed on resource efficiency, freshwater and sanitation, oceans, energy supply, sustainable development in Africa and to improve international governance. The UK has five initiatives in hand on energy, freshwater, forestry, finance, and tourism. We are urgently discussing with partners, especially within the EU, whether any of these could form an input into large scale global projects.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41077]

Mr. Bradshaw: None.

Equal Opportunities

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has established a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment; and what progress has been achieved. [44390]

Mr. Bradshaw: No policy appraisal baseline has yet been established, other than the existing personnel-related targets for diversity. The FCO diversity strategy agreed in January 2002, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House, sets out the strategic requirement to consult widely on the UK domestic implications of foreign policy. Action plans are under development as a result, including the future development of an appropriate cross-cutting structure for mainstreaming equality in foreign policy development.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the subject of each gender impact assessment drawn up by

his Department since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [44388]

Mr. Bradshaw: No gender impact assessments have yet been drawn up by the FCO. The FCO diversity strategy agreed in January 2002, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House, sets out the strategic requirement to consult widely on the UK domestic implications of foreign policy. Action plans are under development as a result, including developing wider ideas for extending the FCO's consultative network.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new data series separated by gender, race, disability and age have been commissioned by his Department since August 1997. [44389]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO routinely monitors data on gender, race, disability and age as part of its diversity monitoring process. No new data series have been commissioned since August 1997.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of staff at his Department are justices of the peace; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace. [44551]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has no strategy to encourage members of its staff to become justices of the peace. However, in accordance with section 50 of the Employee Rights Act 1996 (ERA), Heads of Department may grant special paid leave to officers required to attend court as justices of the peace. No central records are kept of which staff have been appointed to such positions, nor of leave granted to enable them to fulfil their duties.

Israel

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration the United Kingdom has given, in consort with European Union partners, to establishing sanctions against Israel, until Israel implements United Nations resolutions in full. [49483]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are not aware of any formal proposal for the EU to consider sanctions. The idea of sanctions has been discussed before but there has not been a consensus in favour. The Government's view is that we should at this stage focus on achieving a ceasefire and Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian areas.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to Israel in respect of the use of British-supplied military vehicles by the Israeli army in its invasion of the Palestinian territories in March and April. [49482]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 722–23W.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in his Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50410]

Mr. Bradshaw: In 2001–02 the figure for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was £4.5 million. For the British Council the figure was £0.93 million. The increase for our agency, Wilton Park, was £153,000. Information on our four other, much smaller, NDPBs is currently not available. I will write to the hon. Member shortly about them.

The pay increase for 2002–03 has not yet been agreed.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to clear the backlog of cases being sent by entry clearance officers. [50697]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not clear from the question to which backlog, if any, that my hon. Friend refers. I should be grateful for clarification of this and will ensure that my hon. Friend receives an early response.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when the appeal proposed in the case of Baljides Singh (post ref 819403/0115-New Delhi) arrived in London; [50696]

(2) on what date the explanatory statement in the case of Mr. Fuzal-Ur-Rahman post ref: ISB-/E4525 arrived from Islamabad in London. [50701]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not our practice to disclose details of individual entry clearance cases in a public forum. I will write to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East about this case in the next few days.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many contracts his Department has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether he can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50833]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Information on the number of contracts with consultants could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Decisions regarding the appropriate level of professional indemnity insurance are taken on a case-by-case basis. A common indemnity insurance limit for small consultancy work is £500,000. As with previous Administrations under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of discussions which form part of the process of policy development and analysis.

Gibraltar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has obtained an undertaking from the Government of Spain to abide by the results of referendums held in Gibraltar on its future status. [51450]

Peter Hain: The Government of Spain are fully aware of the public statements made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers that in the event of the people of Gibraltar rejecting any joint proposals put forward by Britain and Spain, Her Majesty's Government will continue to stand by the people of Gibraltar politically, legally and morally. This is not a matter for negotiation with Spain.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals are being discussed with his Spanish counterpart in relation to the future status of Gibraltar. [51451]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the Foreign Secretary's statement in answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 735.

Civil Service (Recruitment)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what percentage of policy entrants were educated at *(a)* public school, *(b)* Oxford university and *(c)* Cambridge university in each year since 1997; [50566]

(2) what percentage of the diplomatic service both operational and policy were educated at *(a)* public school, *(b)* Oxford university and *(c)* Cambridge university in each year since 1997; [50569]

(3) what percentage of operational entrants were educated at *(a)* public school, *(b)* Oxford university and *(c)* Cambridge university in each year since 1997. [50568]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information is as follows:

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Policy entrants				
Percentage from Oxbridge	48	65	44	57
Percentage from independent schools	64	61	60	64
Operational entrants				
Percentage from Oxbridge	6	7	4	4
Percentage from independent schools	24	37	33	37

The recruitment section records Oxford and Cambridge jointly and records school information as independent (which includes public schools) or comprehensive. These figures are published in the departmental report.

General Affairs Council

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason no devolved administration Minister attended the 4121 European Union Council of Ministers (General) meeting on 15 April; which suggestions and matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation; and what information and evidence was provided by his Department to enable effective post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [51729]

Peter Hain: Decisions on Ministerial attendance at Council meetings are taken on a case-by-case basis by the lead UK Minister. The Foreign Secretary attended this meeting, representing all parts of the UK.

It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for and follow-up to EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. This Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff left the service of his Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many his Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37551]

Mr. Bradshaw: 314 staff left the department between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001. 56 people left before their formal retirement age. This Department is still making annual compensation payments to 49 of those until they reach formal retirement age.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which Bills introduced by her Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans she has for the future use of such clauses. [49626]

Clare Short: In the last five years the Department for International Development has introduced the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill (in 1998) and the International Development Bill (in 2001). Neither contained sunset clauses. The Department has no current plans for future legislation.

Overseas Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Resource Centre for the Social Dimensions of Business Practice core contract. [49166]

Clare Short: Our contract with the International Business Leaders Forum to support the Resource Centre was awarded in 1999 following a competitive tendering process. The contract will end shortly. It has contributed

to understanding of the role of business in poverty elimination and has also established a valuable business and poverty database.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Mine Action Programme 2000 in the former Yugoslavia; [49188]

(2) what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Mine Action Programme in Yugoslavia. [49196]

Clare Short: All DFID's programmes in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia are subject to regular in-country monitoring by DFID's humanitarian mines adviser. We are satisfied that these programmes represent good value for money.

The Mine Action Programme for FRY Kosovo has been the subject of an independent evaluation for the UN by the PRAXIS Group Ltd., an international management consulting firm. The summary of the report concluded the mine action programme in Kosovo was a resounding success. The UK Government were also praised for responding quickly and effectively to the mines threat in Kosovo. The UK-funded part of the Kosovo programme was completed using a combination of NGO and commercial demining organisations which were selected on the basis of competency and value for money considerations. In the case of commercial organisations these were selected on a system of competitive tendering.

In Bosnia the UK contribution to demining is made through an international trust fund. The UN oversees the fund and the UK's ambassador sits on the fund's advisory board. Contracts for demining are let on the basis of competitive bidding open to both commercial organisations and NGOs.

In Croatia and Macedonia DFID made contributions to the UN system for mine clearance, awareness and support for capacity building. Contracts awarded by the UN are subject to their internal systems for competitive bidding and value for money considerations.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 341W, on catering services, for what reason there were increases from 1999 to 2000 of £44,767.18 and £6,935.57 in the costs of in-house canteen services and catering services, respectively. [50512]

Clare Short: The increase of £44,767.18 was largely due to the refurbishment and redecoration of the staff restaurant in our London offices at the start of 2000, involving the purchase of new catering equipment (freezers, cold counter and dishwasher), carpets and furniture. In addition, subsidies paid to catering contractors increased by £6,800 per annum in our East Kilbride office and by £7,300 per annum in London. The increase of £6,935.57 in catering services was a result of greater usage of hospitality services (i.e. teas, coffees, buffets etc.) on offer at both locations, principally as a result of the contractors advertising the facility more widely, coupled with a sharp increase in the number of meetings being held in both locations.

Arms Proliferation

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her written answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 885W, if she will list the projects which constitute her Department's programme that seeks to reduce the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons; and in which countries each of these projects operates. [50595]

Clare Short: The United Kingdom is committed to combating small arms availability and misuse. In partnership with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, my Department has established a comprehensive UK Small Arms and Light Weapons Reduction Programme. Over the next three years we will allocate a minimum of £19.5 million to UN agencies, regional organisations, Governments and non-governmental organisations seeking to develop and implement local, national, regional and international measures to combat small arms problems. The table lists the programmes which the Small Arms and Light Weapons Reduction Programme has supported.

Programmes	*Countries*
Global	
UNDP: Small Arms Project: Weapons Collection, Management and Destruction	Global
Small Arms Survey: Research and Analysis	Global
International Action Network on Small Arms Regional and Global Network Development Programme	Global
Geneva Forum meeting in preparation for the UN Conference	Global
Funding the participation of experts from developing countries in the UN Conference on Small Arms	Global
Saferworld: Programme to Stem the Proliferation of Small Arms	Europe, east Africa, southern Africa, central, south and south-east Asia
International Alert: Monitoring and Implementing the Small Arms Light Weapons Controls	Europe, Latin America, west Africa
Regional	
The African Conference on the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms: Needs and Partnerships	Africa wide
SaferAfrica: Arms Management and Disarmament	Africa wide
Latin America and Caribbean Initiatives on Illicit Trafficking in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects	Latin America
United Nations Regional Centre for Peace Disarmament and Development in Latin America and Caribbean: Implementing the OAS Convention	Latin America

Programmes	*Countries*
Sub-regional	
Viva Rio—Reducing Small Arms and Light Weapons Impact: Civil Society Participation in Security Sector Reform within Mercado Commun Del Sur	Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Paraguay, Uruguay
The Nairobi Secretariat: Implementing the Nairobi Declaration	East Africa, the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa
Security Research and Information Centre (SRIC) Controlling Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Regions and the Horn of Africa	East Africa, the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa
HMG support for combating small arms problems in Central and Eastern Europe	Central and eastern Europe
National	
Tanzania National Action Plan for Arms Management and Disarmament	Tanzania

Government Funding

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous) of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1185–6W, on Government funding of the voluntary sector, if she will list the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which her Department distributes funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51411]

Clare Short: The principal funding mechanisms we use to support voluntary sector organisations and civil society more generally are as follows:

Partnership Programme Agreements (PPAs): strategic level agreements, which set an overall framework for DFID's work with the organisation linked to strategic funding.

Civil Society Challenge Fund: open to UK based organisations working in partnership with organisations in developing countries.

Development Awareness Fund: open to any UK based organisations for work to raise awareness and understanding of development issues.

In addition, DFID supports specific programmes or activities of voluntary organisations through its regional programmes, as well as, for example, our conflict and humanitarian aid budget. Voluntary organisations can also benefit from some of DFID's research funds, for example the Engineering Knowledge and Research programme. DFID funding for UK-based non-governmental organisations is typically close to £200 million per year.

Complaints

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many complaints were registered against her Department and its predecessor Departments in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the parliamentary ombudsman in those periods. [51585]

Clare Short: Detailed records of all complaints made against the Department are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Details of cases taken up by the parliamentary ombudsman are contained in the ombudsman's annual reports, which are available in the Library of the House.

Departmental Public Spending

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on how the public spending plans of her Department have been affected by the Budget. [51734]

Clare Short: DFID's budget for 2002–03 remains as announced in the 2000 Spending Review. Allocations for 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be determined through the 2002 Spending Review over the next few months.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour

10. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to tackle disorder and antisocial behaviour in the north-west. [47069]

Angela Eagle: The Government are taking urgent action to tackle antisocial behaviour and disorder across the country and in the north-west. This includes the new measures contained in the Police Reform Bill as well as action by Crime and Disorder Partnerships with young people to divert them away from crime and nuisance crime.

32. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour. [47094]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), earlier to the similar question from my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle).

37. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been approved in Lancashire; and what recent representations he has received on their implementation. [47099]

Mr. Denham: From the introduction of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) in April 1999 to the end of September 2001 (the last point to which data are available), 16 orders had been granted in Lancashire.

A number of individuals and groups have made representations on the implementation of antisocial behaviour orders. They have been taken into account in formulating improved guidance for practitioners, which is being prepared, and the legislative changes proposed in the Police Reform Bill which include the introduction of interim ASBOs to stop antisocial behaviour more quickly; enabling county courts to make ASBOs in particular circumstances and empowering registered social landlords and the British Transport Police to apply directly for ASBOs to deal with the particular problems of antisocial behaviour they face.

Police Patrols

14. **Mr. Lilley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he collates on the proportion of police officers involved in patrolling public places on *(a)* foot and *(b)* in vehicles. [47074]

Angela Eagle: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary collects data on the proportion of police officers who are predominately assigned to operational patrol in uniform, either on foot or in a vehicle (including bicycles and motor cycles). Traffic and motorway patrols and dog sections are excluded from these figures. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's data do not differentiate between time spent patrolling on foot or in vehicles.

In 2000–01, 48.3 per cent. of police officers in England and Wales were assigned to operational patrol. For Hertfordshire, 54.3 per cent. of officers were assigned to this function.

However, we know from the PA Consulting report, "Diary of a Police Officer", that too much time is spent in the police station on paperwork. We are determined to find a solution to this so that officers can spend more time out of the station.

Police Stations

16. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of police stations in fighting crime. [47077]

Angela Eagle: It is important that the police service responds to the needs of the public by being accessible and visible. Strategic location of police stations as part of a whole range of methods of police presence, is key to this approach .

This year we have allocated to police authorities £179 million grant and credit approval for capital expenditure with a further £20 million to be allocated specifically for premises renewal, compared with £157 million in total last year.

Police Housing

17. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on the sale of dedicated police housing by police authorities. [47078]

Angela Eagle: The management of police property is entirely a matter for police authorities. Decisions relating to the sale of housing and other properties are not ones in which Ministers have any power to intervene. I would expect police authorities to take likely future needs into account when considering what approach offers best value.

The Audit Commission in its report entitled "Action Stations Improving the Management of the Police Estate" recommended that police forces identify and dispose of buildings that were unsuitable or had maintenance liabilities which were beyond the forces' means and rationalise their remaining estate.

Trial Delays

18. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to reduce delays in bringing criminal cases to trial. [47079]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government have introduced a number of procedural reforms to ensure that criminal cases are brought before the courts with the minimum of delay. These include bringing charged cases before magistrates courts at the first available hearing; sending indictable only cases straight to the Crown court following first appearance in the magistrates court; and reducing by more than half the time taken to deal with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence (from 142 days to 67 by December 2001).

Looking ahead, the Government are also formulating a set of exacting targets to further reduce delay; running pilot schemes involving extended court sitting hours and closer Crown Prosecution Service/police liaison prior to charge.

Her Majesty's chief inspectors of the Court Service and the Crown Prosecution Service are also conducting a national inspection of listing, to seek to identify how courts can manage their case loads most efficiently, and we look forward to making use of their findings and recommendations in order to make continued progress in reducing delay.

Police Initiatives

20. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the number of initiatives and targets in relation to the police since 1997. [47081]

Mr. Denham: Since 1997, the police in England and Wales have been involved in a number of initiatives. Some relate only to the police, while others, such as the introduction of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, bring together a number of partners to concentrate on those issues of greatest concern to the communities they serve.

Police authorities are required to set targets for reductions in domestic burglary, vehicle crime and, in five major cities, robbery. This month the Street Crime Action Team was set up to help deliver these robbery targets. The police service also has a key role to play in delivering Government targets relating to, for example, drug misuse and persistent young offenders.

The House is also aware of the radical programme of work being taken forward following the White Paper "Policing a new Century", much of which is contained in the Police Reform Bill.

Entry Screening

21. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the procedures for screening applications to enter the United Kingdom. [47082]

Angela Eagle: In 2001, 71,700 people applied for asylum on arrival in the United Kingdom. This represents an 11 per cent. fall in applications compared with a 2 per cent. fall for the European Union generally.

Overall there were a record 118,000 decisions made with 74 per cent. refused, 9 per cent. granted asylum and 17 per cent. granted exceptional leave to remain. The backlog of undecided applications was more than halved and continues to fall.

79 per cent. of appeals were dismissed by the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) in 2001. This is an indication that despite the increase in decision-making, the quality remains high.

Provisionally, 9,285 principal applicants were removed in 2001, an increase of 3 per cent. on 2000 and the highest annual total on record.

Street Crime (Wandsworth)

22. **Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on *(a)* Operating Safer Streets and *(b)* the Robbery Reduction Initiative as they affect London, with particular reference to the London borough of Wandsworth. [47083]

Mr. Denham: The first phase of Operation Safer Streets, the Metropolitan police's anti-street crime initiative in London's nine worst affected boroughs, ran for eight weeks from 4 February until the end of March. The force statistics show that the operation has had a marked impact on street crime offences. In week eight of the operation, street crime allegations in the nine boroughs were 21 per cent. down on the corresponding week last year. The second phase began on 15 April and will run until March 2003. It will be extended to include a further six London boroughs, including Wandsworth.

The Metropolitan police force area is one of the 10 areas included in the Government's wider street crime initiative, which involves a concerted response to street crime across all the criminal justice and social agencies.

Police Morale

24. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police morale. [47085]

Mr. Denham: There is no established direct method of measuring the level of morale in the police service.

We are determined to tackle those elements of police officers' working lives that can create frustration and detract from their ability to do their jobs in the way that they would wish. We are committed to investment in scientific and technological support and to reducing the burden of unnecessary bureaucracy .

We are seeking agreement on a package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service which would leave the vast majority of officers better off. The package is now subject to conciliation in the PNB.

We have turned around the decline in police numbers that started under the last Government. By 31 January the police service was at record strength and we are on course for our target of 130,000 officers by spring 2003.

Violent Crime

25. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of changes in the levels of violent crime in the last 12 months. [47086]

Mr. Denham: The latest survey of violent crime is contained in the 2001 British Crime Survey, which indicated that violent crime fell by 19 per cent. between 1999 and 2000. Recent recorded crime statistics produced by the Metropolitan Police show a rise in recorded street robbery. That is why we have launched an initiative aimed at reducing the level of street crime in the 10 areas of England and Wales with the highest levels of street robbery. The programmes will focus on curbing the rise in street robberies and the number of illegally held weapons, as well as the adoption of fast track prosecutions to ensure that offenders are brought to justice speedily. The budget contained £180 million in new money and a further £100 million to be drawn from the Criminal Justice Reserve. These funds will be used for extra police, extra support staff, an increase in police operations and an additional 2,300 additional prison and remand places.

Juvenile Crime

26. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport about plans to reduce crime committed by juveniles. [47087]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary for State for Culture, Media and Sport, and I are both members of the cross-Government action group to tackle street crime. We both fully recognise the potential of sport and the arts to divert young people from offending and we are working together to develop this.

"Secure Borders, Safe Haven" White Paper

27. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responses he has received to his paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven—Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain"; and if he will make a statement. [47089]

Angela Eagle: We have received 330 responses to the White Paper from organisations and individuals. We will arrange for copies of the responses from organisations to be placed in the Library unless they have indicated they do not wish their responses to be published.

Street Crime

28. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the 10 force street crime initiative. [47090]

Mr. Denham: The street crime initiative starts operation this month across the 10 force areas with the highest levels of robbery: Avon and Somerset, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Metropolitan Police, Merseyside, Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire, Thames Valley, West Midlands, West Yorkshire. It involves the police in targeting offenders who commit robbery, snatch theft, carjacking and offences involving the illegal possession and use of firearms. The criminal justice agencies will prioritise these cases to ensure that those taken off the streets by the police are dealt with quickly and effectively from arrest to disposal in specially designated street crime courts in each area. We have also strengthened the powers of the courts in the 10 areas by introducing electronic

tagging to ensure that young people comply with bail conditions, and by giving magistrates enhanced powers to remand juveniles in secure accommodation.

The initiative also brings together the resources and expertise of non criminal justice system agencies to help tackle the causes of street crime and take preventive action. The initiative will include, for example, more schemes in place involving police in schools, more truancy sweeps, better information exchange between schools, the police and social services, diversionary activities and advice and services for young people, and early access to drug treatment provision.

Community Support Officers

29. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will consider a further round of applications for funding for community support officers to assist the police. [47091]

Mr. Denham: The Police Reform Bill, which is still subject to parliamentary scrutiny, contains provisions which will allow chief officers of police to designate support staff as community support officers. It will be open to police forces to choose to use this available means to employ community support officers.

Criminal Justice

30. **Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reform the criminal justice system. [47092]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government recognise that the criminal justice system is not working well enough on its key goals of crime reduction and justice.

To this end the forthcoming White Paper on Criminal Justice will include a wide variety of measures to increase efficiency and effectiveness across the criminal justice system. For example, these measures will include improving the workings of the jury system; and changing the rules governing the issue of disclosure.

We will also seek to improve the rules of evidence; and bring more persistent offenders to justice.

The Government will be looking closely at the possibility of reforming court culture in order to support vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. This may include the establishment of a Victims' Ombudsman.

The issue of sentencing will also be addressed to provide greater protection for the public; and include programmes designed to reduce the chance of re-offending.

The Government intend to publish full details of these proposals in legislation later in the year.

Volunteering (Older People)

31. **Ross Cranston:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to promote volunteering by older people. [47093]

Angela Eagle: The Government believe it is important to utilise fully the skills and talents of older people. That is why the Home Office is investing £20 million in the Experience Corps, which aims to recruit 250,000 volunteers over three years. We also provide funding for REACH, RSVP and other organisations which promote and encourage volunteering by older people. We have provided £1.5 million in funding for local and national organisations, such as Help the Aged, as part of the Older Volunteers Initiative, which addresses issues of raising quality and quantity of voluntary opportunities for older people. We are evaluating the initiative with a view to publishing the good practice it has identified.

Re-offending

33. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the incidence of re-offending of those sentenced to *(a)* community sentences and *(b)* fines in the last five years. [47095]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Information on re-offending rates, as opposed to reconviction rates, for persons sentenced to community sentences and fines is not collected. Re-offending rates are not normally measured as they rely on the self-reporting of offending by offenders. Such an approach can lead to questions over the reliability of data based on individuals' recollection and willingness to tell an official source about their offending behaviour.

However, information on reconviction rates for persons convicted of a standard list offence and sentenced to a community penalty or fine is collected. The reconviction rate is normally measured over a period of two years from the commencement of the community penalty or the date a person receives a fine. The reconviction rates are shown in the table. These rates include convictions for offences committed prior to the offences for which a financial or community sentence was imposed.

Reconviction rates for persons commencing community sentences or fined for a standard list offence and reconvicted within two years.

Reconviction rates[1] for persons commencing community sentences or fined for a standard list offence and reconvicted within two years

	Percentage reconvicted within two years	
	All community penalties	*Persons fined*
1994	54	45
1995	56	43
1996	56	36
1997	55	38
1998	56	35

[1] Unadjusted for factors which are known to have an impact on reconviction, such as previous criminal history, age, gender, and offence.

Youth Crime

34. **Mrs. Helen Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to reduce youth crime. [47096]

Mr. Denham: The Government are supporting a wide ranging programme which is tackling the issue of youth offending. This includes working with families through the Sure Start initiative, neighbourhoods through Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, education services through reducing exclusions and improving attendance and implementation of the 10 year drugs strategy.

The improvements made to the youth justice system have also resulted in the tackling of delays in the system and the speeding up of justice, establishing new youth justice structures and making available expanded powers for the courts and police to use.

Combined with the Home Secretary's recent announcement on making remand facilities available for persistent young offenders aged 12–16, a greater impetus to the use of antisocial behaviour orders by local authorities and the establishment of the London youth crime task force we are taking forward a programme which deals head on with youth crime on all fronts.

Dungavel Detention Centre

35. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on conditions for asylum seekers at the Dungavel detention centre. [47097]

Angela Eagle: All removal centres must provide for the safety and care of detainees in compliance with the Detention Centre Rules 2001. The rules set out the rights and responsibilities of those held in removal centres and of those who operate such centres. The contract with the Premier Custodial Group Ltd., which operates Dungavel removal centre, reflects the requirements of the rules.

Prison Suicides

36. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have committed suicide in the last year for which figures are available; and how many of these occurred in safe cells. [47098]

Beverley Hughes: There were 72 self-inflicted deaths of prisoners in 2001, a reduction of 11 per cent. on the year 2000. Two of these occurred in safer cells.

Public Sector Workers (Attacks)

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to prevent attacks on public sector workers. [47075]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Violence, threats and abuse to workers from any sector are unacceptable.

The Health and Safety Commission has agreed a three-year programme of work (2000–03) to help employers tackle the increasing problem of work-related violence. We will be working with the Health and Safety Executive, who are responsible for implementing Commission policies, on elements of their programme to help to reduce the incidents of work-related violence.

In addition, the Home Office Police Scientific Development Branch have also been successful in securing funding under the Invest to Save Budget for Safer Hospitals and Safer Schools projects. Both projects will involve bringing together both existing and emerging technologies to deliver reductions in violent crime against staff, patients and pupils and a reduction in associated property crime.

Home Detention Curfew

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make an outline statement on his Department's policy on home detention curfew for prisoners released before the end of their sentence. [47080]

Beverley Hughes: Under the Home Detention Curfew (HDC) scheme prisoners serving over three months and under four years, who pass a risk assessment, may be released up to 60 days early to spend the final part of their sentence under an electronic curfew. 46,000 prisoners have been released on the scheme since it began in January 1999. Over 93 per cent. completed the scheme successfully.

From the beginning of May 2002, prisoners serving sentences of three months or over but under 12 months, with the exception of those convicted of violent or drugs offences within the previous three years and prisoners who have any history of sexual offending, will be released on HDC for the latter part of their sentence unless there are compelling reasons not to do so.

999 Calls

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 999 calls have been made to Suffolk Constabulary since July 1997; and how many of these calls needed an emergency police response. [50582]

Mr. Denham: The figures are as follows:

1997 to 2002	*Number of 999 calls made*	*Number of these calls which needed an emergency police response*
1997–98	61,961	38,524
1998–99	75,079	38,011
1999–2000	88,740	35,795
2000–01	100,203	[1]9,960
2001–02	117,452	[1]9,671
Total	443,435	131,961

[1] Suffolk Constabulary changed the grading policy to respond in a more scientific way.

Information on other aspects of Suffolk Constabulary's performance can be found in their Policing Plan 2002–03.

Tagged Offenders (Norfolk)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many tagged offenders have re-offended in Norfolk following release from prison. [47070]

Beverley Hughes: The data requested are not readily available. To provide a geographical breakdown of re-offending would incur a disproportionate cost. However, less than 2 per cent. of offenders placed on the home detention curfew scheme across the country have been reported as committing a further offence. This low figure would suggest that the scheme is operating effectively.

Prisoners (Education)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what work his Department is undertaking to raise the educational achievements of serving prisoners. [47076]

Beverley Hughes: We have increased prison education funding by 15 per cent. in real terms over the next two years. We have set challenging basic skills targets for every prison. We will raise standards and learner achievement by bringing developments in mainstream

provision into prisons. From April 2002, we will be ensuring that provision meets national standards by introducing the Common Inspection Framework into prisons along with a national strategy to support continuous improvement in prisons.

Football Hooligans

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives on policing Football League games in England. [49932]

Mr. Denham: Home Office advice is provided on the legislative framework for policing football matches. Responsibility for policing matches rests with the local police ground and match commanders. Operational guidance is co-ordinated by the Association of Chief Police Officers.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals, by club, who purport to support English Nationwide and Premier League football teams are classified as football hooligans within Home Office categories. [49931]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not held centrally. Local police forces are responsible for monitoring and maintaining a record of the behaviour of football hooligans who associate themselves with domestic football clubs. Government, Association of Chief Police Officers and the National Criminal Intelligence Service no longer apply hooligan categories to individuals involved in football disorder. This has been replaced by a more targeted, intelligence-led approach.

Prisons (Education)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to improve reading and writing skills of those in prison. [48912]

Beverley Hughes: One of the immediate objectives of the Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit is to increase the proportion of prisoners leaving custody with acceptable literacy and numeracy skills to help them resettle into the community and gain employment on release. The most recent basic skills Level 2 data shows that the Prison Service has achieved 14,400 qualifications in 2001–02, which is 80 per cent. of the final target. We are taking action to improve reading and writing by running basic skills pathfinder projects in seven prisons as part of a wider national project to pilot new national tests and standards, and we are developing innovative approaches to the delivery of basic skills which include using popular subjects, such as drama, art and physical education.

Passports

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why full 10-year passports are the only form of passport available. [48015]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The 10-year passport is the international standard agreed with the International Civil Aviation Organisation. The United Kingdom Passport Service also issues passports valid for five years to children aged under 16. The one-year British Visitors Passport was discontinued in 1995 because it was a less secure document and was not widely accepted for travel outside Western Europe.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the running costs were of *(a)* her Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* her Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [41037]

Ms Hewitt: The Appropriation accounts published by my Department for 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 show total running costs for my Department and its agencies of £398 million, £419 million, £450 million and £484 million respectively.

Of these running costs the amounts spent on Ministers' private offices were:

£3.8 million (1997–98) of which staff costs totalled £2.27 million.

£4.2 million (1998–99) of which staff costs totalled £2.26 million.

£3.4 million (1999–2000) of which staff costs totalled £1.94 million.

£3.6 million (2000–01) of which staff costs totalled £2.08 million.

Complete data are not yet available for 2001–02.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how much was spent by Ministers in her Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years; [47053]

(2) how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46846]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The total cost of entertainment—including food, alcohol and non-alcoholic drink for each of the last five years is as follows. These figures combine total costs for Ministers' offices and special advisers.

Financial year	*Total (£)*
1997–98	13,339
1998–99	23,088
1999–2000	18,202
2000–01	16,319

Complete data are not yet available for 2001–02.

Telecommunications Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on 25 to 26 March; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [50859]

Mr. Alexander: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 379W.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason no devolved Administration Minister attended the 2417 European Union Council of Ministers (Research) meeting on 11 March; which suggestions and matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation; and what information and evidence was provided by her Department to enable effective post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [51730]

Ms Hewitt: There was no requirement for a devolved Administration Minister to attend the Council of Ministers research meeting on 11 March. No suggestions or matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation. In developing the UK Government's position on European research issues, the Office of Science and Technology regularly consults the devolved Administrations. It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. My Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Post Office Network

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* warrants and *(b)* cheques for each benefit were cashed in the post office network in each year since 1997. [51008]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* This is a matter which falls within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the sub-post offices which have closed since May 1997, indicating for each *(a)* whether it is rural or urban, *(b)* whether it is in an area of deprivation and *(c)* the distance to and name of the nearest sub-post office to that which closed. [51007]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* This is a matter that falls within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Bank Holidays (Payment)

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of employees who do not receive payment for bank holidays. [51379]

Alan Johnson: The Autumn 2001 Labour Force Survey indicates that 17 per cent. of workers are not paid for bank holidays.

SEEDA

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether SEEDA has undertaken an audit of the infrastructure needs of the communities of the North Kent Coast, with particular reference to the constituency of Sittingbourne and Sheppey. [50626]

Alan Johnson: SEEDA has funded the preparation of an Area Investment Framework for the Thames Gateway in north Kent. This covers includes Sittingbourne and Sheppey at the eastern end of the area. The work includes an audit of infrastructure needs. The Area Investment Framework will be launched at a conference held in Gravesend on 23 April, and thereafter will be carried forward by the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership.

Radioactive Waste Research

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the priorities in respect of radioactive waste research set out in the European Commission's Multi-Annual Framework Programme for Research, COM (2001) 94 Final. [49493]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are playing an active role in the negotiations on the content and priorities of the Multi-Annual Framework Programme 2002–06 of the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) for research and training, in order to ensure that it reflects UK priorities as far as possible. Radioactive waste research at an EU level will complement research in the UK into the wider range of waste management options described in the consultation document "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely" issued in September last year.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

HSE

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what technical support contracts were awarded by the Health and Safety Executive between 1 January and 31 December 1999. [51439]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 983W, on HSE, what technical support services were provided by each of the suppliers referred to in annexe 1 under the framework agreement. [51447]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Public Service Agreement

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what public service agreement targets were due to be met by his Department by 31 March; how many of these have been met; and if he will make a statement. [50909]

Dr. Whitehead: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [49601]

Dr. Whitehead: Information on the New Deal programmes is not collected centrally for non-departmental public bodies and therefore this is a matter for individual NDPBs.

Foreign Seafarers

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure the enforcement and application of international conventions covering pay, conditions, welfare, social security and other rights of foreign seafarers on UK ships. [50575]

Mr. Jamieson: International conventions are applied to UK and foreign seafarers alike on UK ships, in line with our understanding of the requirements of those conventions and they are enforced accordingly. Social security issues are, however, a matter for the Department for Work and Pensions.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to make 1 million more buildings cheaper to keep warm through the installation of energy efficient measures by 31 March will be met. [47219]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to increase the number of passenger miles travelled on national railways by 15 per cent. by 2001–02 will be met. [47264]

Dr. Whitehead *[pursuant to his reply, 10 April 2002, c. 90–91W]:* Information about progress on this PSA will not be published in the Department's annual report. We expect the final outturn figures to show growth of about 12 per cent. Following the accident at Hatfield there was a 5 per cent. decline in passenger kilometres, which has only recently been recovered. The passenger kilometre figures for 2001–02 will be published by the Strategic Rail Authority in "National Rail Trends" on 6 June.

Use Classes/Temporary Use Provisions

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what steps he plans to take to take account of the views of local authorities, other organisations and individuals who have requested copies of his Department's consultation paper on possible changes to the Use Classes Order and Temporary Uses Provisions but to whom his Department has been unable to supply copies; [51597]

(2) how many copies of his Department's consultation document on possible changes to the Use Classes Order and Temporary Uses Provisions were *(a)* printed, *(b)* distributed by his Department to its list of consultees and *(c)* kept by his Department for distribution on request to interested organisations and members of the public; [51598]

(3) when his Department ran out of copies for distribution of its consultation document on possible changes to the Use Classes Order and Temporary Uses Provisions; [51599]

(4) many requests have been made to his Department for copies of the consultation paper on possible changes to the Use Classes Order and Temporary Uses Provisions; how many of those requests were refused because the Department had no copies in stock; and if he will make a statement. [51600]

Ms Keeble: Our consultation paper on possible changes to the Use Classes Order and Temporary Use Provisions was published on 24 January 2002. Initially, a total of 3,519 copies of the consultation paper were printed. Of these, 2,125 were distributed by my Department to listed consultees. 1,300 were allocated for distribution on request to interested organisations and members of the public.

Approximately 540 orders have been taken. Since the initial stock of documents ran out on 15 March, an additional 66 orders have been taken. Another 500 copies of the paper have been printed to fulfil these orders and to accommodate further orders.

In addition to the paper copies of the consultation paper, it has been available on our website at www.dtlr.gov.uk since 24 January.

Following the end of the consultation period on 24 April 2002, we shall consider the views of all those who have responded before making any decisions on the future composition of the Use Classes Order and temporary use provisions.

Rough Sleeping

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 734W, on rough sleeping, if he will list those local strategies for which his Department has committed funding for 2002–03, and the relevant criteria for those strategies. [51740]

Ms Keeble: All local housing authorities in England have been given the opportunity to bid for revenue funding from 1 July 2002 until 31 March 2003 to support their homelessness strategies. The Government is interested in supporting strategies that are forward

thinking, reflect the themes in the DTLR report "More than a roof", bring innovation to preventing homelessness and seek to achieve best practice.

Current funding arrangements prevail until June 2002 to give the Homelessness Directorate an opportunity to fully assess local authority strategies and bids.

A copy of the guidance on bidding for homelessness strategies has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Garden Hedges

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce proposals to give local authorities the power to intervene in neighbour disputes about overgrown garden hedges. [51538]

Ms Keeble: The Government will introduce legislation giving local authorities the power to deal with complaints about high hedges as soon as there is space in the parliamentary timetable.

Windows

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research the Government have commissioned into alternative glass suppliers that will meet the criteria set under S.I. 440. [51434]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The Department has not commissioned research into alternative glass suppliers. However through contacts with glass manufacturers the Department has been informed that there are at least three companies supplying types of glass in the UK that enable window manufacturers to achieve the technical performance standards of Part L of Schedule 1 to the Building Regulations 2000 (S.I. 2000/2531) as amended by the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2001 (S.I. 2001/3335).

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if there will be exemptions for listed buildings where the design of windows could make it difficult to comply with the regulations under S.I. 440. [51437]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* S.I. 2002/440 does not set any technical standards. It enables self-certification by prescribed persons for certain types of building work. With regard to windows, S.I. 2002/440 introduces a new Building Regulation that enables members of the Fenestration Self-Assessment (FENSA) Scheme to self-certify their installation work complies with the applicable technical requirements. FENSA members may certify that work consisting only of the installation, as a replacement, of a window, rooflight, roof window or door in an existing building complies with regulation 4 of the Building Regulations. This regulation requires that the work complies with the applicable requirements of Schedule 1 of those regulations (S.I. 2000/2531, as amended by S.I. 2001/3335).

For building work comprising replacing windows guidance on compliance with the Building Regulations is given in Approved Documents L1 and L2. This includes guidance on what is reasonable provision for listed buildings. In addition to this, my Department has been working closely with English Heritage on a new publication advising on making reasonable energy efficiency provisions in conservation work. The publication is aimed at building control inspectors as well as builders, and I understand it will be published soon.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total estimated compliance costs are to *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* builders of new homes and *(c)* all installations of new windows in existing houses of Statutory Instrument No. 440 Regulation 16A; and what the average individual cost will be of applying for building regulation permission to comply with S.I. 440. [51431]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* In the regulatory impact analysis we undertook prior to laying the regulations, we considered that there would be no cost to local authorities from the introduction of S.I. 2002–440, as the provisions effectively relieve them of the burden of enforcement through building control. The builders of new homes will similarly not face a cost as the provisions deal solely with the installation of windows, and gas, solid fuel and oil-fired appliances, and plumbing in existing buildings. The cost for all installations of new windows in existing buildings through the need for installers to obtain membership of the fenestration self-assessment scheme was estimated at £1,715,000 against savings of £91,885,000 in the first year There will be no cost for applying for building regulation permission, as none of those registered with these schemes is required to give a building notice and pay a fee, in relation to carrying out work for which they are registered, and which is permitted not to be notified in the circumstances prescribed in the S.I.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what enforcement measures will be taken against those who do not comply with S.I. 440. [51432]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The only offence created by S.I. 440 would be the failure of a person registered with the fenestration self-assessment scheme, not more than 10 days after the building work has been completed, to give a local authority a notice to that effect, or a certificate as evidence that the requirements of regulations 4 and 7 of the Building Regulations 2000 (S.I. 2000 No. 2531) have been satisfied. Local authorities can prosecute any person that contravenes any provision contained in the building regulations under Section 35 of the Building Act 1984.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Government will withdraw S.I. 440 and introduce a kitemark system in new windows for the glass and frames that would comply with specified 'U' values for insulation. [51435]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* No. S.I. 440 introduces a new building regulation that enables members of the fenestration self-assessment scheme to self-certify their installation work complies with the building regulations.

There are British Standards Institution Kitemark quality assurance schemes for window products, but none currently covers overall window U-values. More importantly however, as manufactured product schemes,

they cannot address the compliance of installation work with the technical and workmanship requirements of the building regulations.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures will be put in place to prevent sole suppliers of hard-coat thermal efficient glass abusing their position to impose unreasonable price increases under S.I. 440. [51433]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The Department is aware of at least three companies supplying hard-coat thermally efficient glass in the UK. There are also several other international flat glass manufacturers that might seek to trade in the UK depending upon how the market develops. There is therefore no need to put in place anti-monopoly measures.

Disabled Facilities Grant

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will raise the income thresholds for eligibility under the disabled facilities grant scheme. [51265]

Ms Keeble: The means test for disabled facilities grant makes a careful assessment of an applicant's resources and expenditure needs in order to calculate whether he is in a position to contribute towards any required adaptation to the property. The Government think that this test is fair and reasonable and because demand for DFG is very high it ensures that help goes to those most in need. Many of the detailed allowances used in the assessment are updated annually and SI 2002 No.530, which came into force on 1 April, makes the necessary changes which will be applicable for the year 2002–03.

Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 977W, on housing, which local authorities were running a cash incentive scheme in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [48709]

Ms Keeble: Details of the local authorities in England reporting expenditure on cash incentive scheme grants in these years have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment the Government have made of the number of new dwellings needed in London and the South-east to satisfy the need for affordable housing over the next 10 years. [50049]

Ms Keeble: The Government do not make national estimates of housing need, nor the dwellings required, as such approaches are unable to reflect local needs. Instead, local authorities, in conjunction with regional planning bodies, are expected to produce estimates of need and the dwellings required.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 977W, what figures his Department has collated on the sum each local authority in London running a cash incentive scheme in 2000–01 originally identified as being available to potential applicants. [48716]

Ms Keeble: The information provided by London authorities on their planned spend on Cash Incentive Schemes grants in 2000–01 is shown in the table.

Planned programmes for cash incentive scheme in London, 2000–01

	£000
Barking and Dagenham	0
Barnet	619
Bexley	0
Brent	0
Bromley	0
Camden	1,992
City of London	0
Croydon	1,410
Ealing	0
Enfield	1,283
Greenwich	0
Hackney	537
Hammersmith and Fulham	0
Haringey	500
Harrow	290
Havering	185
Hillingdon	450
Hounslow	0
Islington	0
Kensington and Chelsea	0
Kingston upon Thames	400
Lambeth	0
Lewisham	300
Merton	150
Newham	0
Redbridge	0
Richmond upon Thames	58
Southwark	0
Sutton	200
Tower Hamlets	500
Waltham Forest	1,222
Wandsworth	750
Westminster	400

Source:
Housing Investment Programme returns submitted by authorities in July 2000

Right to Buy

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* published on the right to buy scheme since 1 May 1997. [49914]

Ms Keeble: Three research projects have been commissioned:

(i) The impact of the February 1999 changes to limits on Right to Buy discounts.

(ii) Exploitation of the Right to Buy scheme by companies.

(iii) A review of the system for valuing properties for Right to Buy purposes.

Results from these projects will be made publicly available when the work is completed.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on the activities of

commercial property companies offering local authority tenants a cash incentive to exercise the right to buy their home. [50917]

Ms Keeble: We are aware of anecdotal evidence of a number of abuses of the RTB by companies, particularly in London. We have commissioned research into what is happening, including the extent and type of such 'abuses' and the effect on the housing market. The results will be made publicly available when the work is completed.

Housing Stock Transfer

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many units of housing stock have been transferred from local authority control to *(a)* housing associations and *(b)* similar bodies in each of the last five years; and how many ballots have taken place over that period of local authority tenants in which they have failed to agree a transfer. [51658]

Ms Keeble: The table shows the number of dwellings transferred from local authority ownership to housing associations in each of the most recent five financial years. Also shown for each of these years is the number of ballots in which tenants have not supported the transfer proposal.

Financial year	*Dwellings transferred*	*Negative ballots*
1997–98	32,982	2
1998–99	73,900	5
1999–2000	97,385	4
2000–01	134,219	4
2001–02	35,390	5

The Secretary of State will not normally give his consent to the transfer of tenanted local authority dwellings to organisations other than registered social landlords.

Fire College, Gloucestershire

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in relation to the fire college at Morton-In-Marsh, Gloucestershire, when he received the report of the internal auditors investigation into financial irregularities; what the results of that report were; if he will publish it; and what action he is taking. [51226]

Dr. Whitehead: There are a number of matters outstanding and it would be inappropriate to comment further at this stage. The final report will fall within various exemptions of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information including that relating to law enforcement and legal proceedings. It would therefore be inappropriate to disclose the contents.

Arson

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, (1) pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 675W, on the Fire Service, if he will place in the Library the criteria used by the Arson Control Forum to assess bids from local fire authorities for arson reduction initiatives; [50988]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 675W, on awards made by the Arson Control Forum, if he will place in the Library the guidance provided to local fire authorities when bidding for funding from the Arson Control Forum. [50902]

Dr. Whitehead: The guidance to local fire authorities and the criteria used by the Arson Control Forum to assess their bids were set out in a letter to potential bidders from the chairman of the Arson Control Forum, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of the Fire Service, Graham Meldrum, dated 6 November 2001. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Libraries of the House today.

Telecommunication Masts

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers he has to intervene in decisions on the installation of a telecommunication mast in a residential area once the local council authority has given permission for the installation of the equipment; and if he will make a statement. [50861]

Ms Keeble: Local planning authorities have powers under section 97 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to make orders to revoke or modify a planning permission, prior to it being implemented, where they consider it expedient to do so. If an order is opposed, it has to be confirmed by the Secretary of State before it can take effect.

The Secretary of State also has powers, under section 100 of the Act, to revoke a planning permission granted by a local planning authority. However, the Secretary of State will generally use this power only if the original decision is judged to be grossly wrong, so that damage is likely to be done to the wider public interest.

Under section 102 of the Act, local planning authorities also have power to make an order, requiring that any use of land be discontinued or continued subject to conditions or that any buildings or works shall be altered or removed. Such an order will not take effect unless it is confirmed by the Secretary of State.

Section 104 of the Act gives the Secretary of State powers to make discontinuance orders himself.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his Department's policy is on the siting of mobile phone masts; what recent discussions he has had on the siting of mobile phone masts; and if he will make a statement. [51460]

Ms Keeble: Current planning guidance on telecommunications is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 8 (revised) (PPG8).

Our general policy is to facilitate the growth of telecommunications systems while protecting the environment.

We attach considerable importance to keeping the numbers of telecommunication masts to the minimum consistent with the efficient operation of the network. We

strongly encourage the sharing of masts and sites, where that represents the optimum environmental solution in a particular case, and the use of existing buildings and other structures to site new antennas. We also encourage the use of sympathetic design and camouflage.

On 22 August 2001, following consultation, we significantly strengthened the planning arrangements for telecommunications development. We:

strengthened public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below and for masts on buildings and structures so that they are exactly the same as applications for planning permission

increased the time for authorities to deal with prior approval applications from 28 and 42 days to a uniform 56 days

underlined that school governors must be consulted on all proposals for new masts on or near a school or college

increased fees to enable authorities to carry out full public consultation.

Local Government Pension Scheme

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish the conclusions of the review of the local government pension scheme announced in Local Government Pensions Committee Circular No. 106. [50883]

Dr. Whitehead: The conclusions of the stock-take exercise on the local government pension scheme are being considered. An announcement about the next steps will be made shortly. I can confirm that no regulatory changes are envisaged to the scheme benefit package.

Council Tax Bills

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requirements there are on councils with regard to the wording of council tax bills in respect of precepts by town and parish councils. [51243]

Dr. Whitehead: Council tax bills must show the billing authority's council tax and percentage change from last year for the dwelling in question, inclusive of any local precept for the area in which the dwelling is situated. The demand notice must also show separately either the total of any local precept or the per dwelling amount of any local precept, and the name of the local precepting authority. These requirements are set out in Schedule 1 to the Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rating (Demand Notices) (England) Regulations 1993 (S.I. 1993–191).

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the total savings of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the *(a)* M1/A1 Link Road, *(b)* A1(M), *(c)* A30/35, (d)M40, (e) A417/419, (f) A19, (g) A50, (h) A69 and (i) second Severn Crossing by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49271]

Mr. Jamieson: The following figures show the savings estimated at the time of contract award.

£ million

Project	*Public sector comparator*	*Winning DBFO bid*	*Estimated saving*
M1-A1	344	232	112
A1(M)	204	154	50
A419/A417	123	112	11
A69	57	62	(5)
M40	276	182	94
A19	177	136	41
A50	77	67	10
A30/A35	149	148	1
Total	1,407	1,093	314

Note:

Figures are net present values calculated at an 8 per cent. real discount rate. This was the rate used for assessing road projects at the time of contract award.

I understand that the publicly and privately financed options for the second Severn Crossing were evenly matched.

Road Designation

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his Department's definition is of *(a)* a trunk road and *(b)* a strategic route. [50763]

Mr. Spellar: The trunk road network is the national system of routes for through traffic. The Highways Agency manages this network in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. There is no definition of a strategic route but we identified a core network of nationally important trunk routes in "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England" published in July 1998.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the reasons why the A683 link to the M6 is designated a strategic routeway; and if he will list the factors which determined the designation of the M6 Link Road Scheme to Heysham a proposal of regional significance. [50677]

Mr. Spellar: The designation of the A683 as a strategic routeway and the M6 to Heysham Link as a route of regional significance was made by the North West Regional Assembly in its role as the Regional Planning Body.

The designation process of roads as routes of Regional significance by the NWRA considered a number of factors, most specifically, the function of a particular route in terms of its strategic importance, status and type of traffic carried.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the reasons for and provide an analysis of the factors which led to the proposal to detrunk the A585. [50678]

Mr. Spellar: My noble Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (Lord Whitty)

confirmed the routes in the core trunk road network in April 1999. The routes were identified following public consultation and taking the following factors into account:

linking main centres of population and economic activity;

accessing major ports, airports and rail intermodal terminals;

joining the peripheral regions to the centre;

providing key cross-border links to Scotland and Wales;

classification as part of the UK Trans-European Road Network.

A14

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the timetable is for improving the road safety of the A14 crossroads at Rookery. [50581]

Mr. Jamieson: Draft Orders for the A14 Rookery Crossroads improvement scheme were published on 21 March 2002. Depending on the number and nature of any objections received in response to the publication of the draft Orders, a public inquiry may be necessary. Subject to the completion of the necessary statutory procedures work on the scheme is expected to start in 2004–05 and be completed in 2005–06.

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions the Government have had with the transport industry on concessionary travel for those under 18 who are *(a)* in full time education and *(b)* unemployed. [51297]

Ms Keeble: In recent months officials from both the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Social Exclusion Unit have participated in discussions held by the Commission for Integrated Transport involving the transport industry. These discussions have covered a number of issues including concessionary fares for those under 18. Both the SEU and CfIT will report later this year.

Free travel is provided under the education acts for school children living more than the statutory walking distances from school. Separately, school age children are often allowed half-fare travel, either funded by local authorities or by transport operators on a commercial basis—usually on all journeys they make, not just to and from school or college. Many transport operators offer discounted fares to "Jobseekers". In addition, the Department for Education and Skills is developing the Connexions Card which will offer a range of commercial discounts for all 16–19 year olds. The card will be capable of carrying existing travel concessions and is expected to be available nationally from autumn 2002.

Scotrail (Industrial Dispute)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last had discussions with the Scottish Executive regarding the industrial dispute by employees of Scotrail; and what the outcome of these discussions was. [46481]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers have regular discussions with the Scottish Executive on rail related issues.

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress towards upgrading the South Central network; and in what timeframe work will be completed. [49839]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Theresa May) on Thursday 18 April 2002, *Official Report,* columns 1103W-1104W. I expect the Strategic Rail Authority to be able to sign a new franchise agreement with GoVia later this year.

Rail Performance

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), of 26 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 959W, on rail performance measures, when he intends to publish the benchmarks to which he refers; if he will list the benchmarks published to date; and by whom and how these benchmarks will be measured. [51019]

Mr. Jamieson: The benchmarks are the figures published on 18 February 2002 (reliability & punctuality, and safety) and 18 March (quality), the sources for which were specified at the time.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his reply of 25 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 664W, on the Strategic Rail Authority, if he will list the *(a)* processes and *(b)* outcomes to which he refers. [51020]

Mr. Jamieson: Each Multi Modal Study will have a separate set of outcomes, and processes, which may involve the Strategic Rail Authority, some of which they will be required to implement.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice his Department received from *(a)* SwiftRail and *(b)* Network Rail about the amount of time needed to conclude a bid and end the Railtrack administration. [49867]

Mr. Jamieson: SwiftRail has said publicly that the process envisaged by the administrator for transferring Railtrack out of administration could be prolonged. Network Rail said at the time of making a bid for Railtrack plc that, if accepted, Railtrack could be released from administration by the end of July. This is a very challenging timetable.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on how many occasions in the last six months there has been a significant computer failure at National Air Traffic

Services leading to the disruption of aircraft movement in UK airspace; what action he is taking to prevent such failures; and if he will make a statement. [49000]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* This is an operational matter for NATS. I understand the position to be as follows.

There have been two occasions in the last six months, on 27 March and 10 April, when aircraft movements in UK airspace have been disrupted by unplanned computer stoppages. Both events occurred at West Drayton as a result of a software problem associated with an unusual set of circumstances connected with flight data.

NATS is conducting a full inquiry into the incidents, to establish whether further adjustments are required to ensure the long term robustness of the system.

Apart from these two incidents, NATS has experienced no significant computer failures in the last six months. Notwithstanding the incident on 27 March, the Flight Data Processing System at West Drayton achieved 99.6 per cent. availability in the year ended 31 March.

Pilotage

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 671W, on pilotage, when he will place a copy of the report in the Library; and what monitoring of the new arrangements has been conducted by his Department. [51449]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 803–04W.

Port Marine Safety Code

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the statutory harbour authorities in the UK broken down by *(a)* companies, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* trusts; which authorities had completed implementation of the port marine safety code by 31 December 2001; and what steps he is taking to ensure full compliance. [51440]

Mr. Jamieson: To date, the following harbour authorities have told my Department that they have completed implementation of the Port Marine Safety Code:

(a) Company Ports

Associated British Ports:
- Ayr
- Barrow
- Barry
- Cardiff
- Fleetwood
- Garston
- Goole
- Grimsby
- Hull
- Immingham
- Ipswich
- King's Lynn
- Lowestoft
- Newport (Gwent)
- Plymouth
- Port Talbot
- Silloth
- Southampton
- Swansea
- Teignmouth
- Troon
- Whitby

Boston

Bristol

Clydeport

Forth Ports Ltd:
- Dundee
- Forth
- Tilbury

Hutchison Ports:
- Felixstowe
- Harwich International
- Larne

Mersey Docks & Harbour Company:
- Heysham
- Liverpool
- Medway

Portland Port

Stena Line Ports:
- Fishguard
- Folkestone
- Holyhead

Tees and Hartlepool

Warrenpoint

(b) Local Authority Ports

Aberdeenshire Council:
- Macduff

Anglesey County Council:
- Amlwch

Bristol City Docks

Carrick District Council:
- Truro

Cumbria County Council:
- Workington

Fenland District Council:
- Wisbech

Fife Council

Hampshire County Council:
- River Hamble Harbour Authority

Moray Council:
- Buckie
- Burghead
- Cullen
- Findochty
- Hopeman
- Portknockie

Penwith District Council:
- Penzance

Portsmouth

Scarborough Borough Council:
Scarborough
Whitby
Shetland Islands Council:
Lerwick
Scalloway
Sullom Voe
South Hams District Council:
Salcombe
Sunderland
Thanet District Council:
Broadstairs
Margate
Ramsgate
Torbay Council:
Brixham
Paignton
Torquay
Torridge District Council:
Bideford
West Somerset District Council:
Minehead
Watchet
Weymouth and Portland Borough Council

(c) Trust Ports

Aberdeen Harbour Board
Belfast Harbour Commission
Berwick Harbour Commission
Bridlington Pier and Harbour Commission
Brightlingsea Harbour Commission
Caernarfon Harbour Trust
Carlingford Lough Commission
Chichester Harbour Conservancy
Cromarty Firth Port Authority
Dover Harbour Board
Falmouth Harbour Commission
Fowey Harbour Commissioners
Fraserburgh Harbour Commission
Gloucester Harbour Trustees
Great Yarmouth Port Authority
Harwich Haven Authority
Inverness Harbour Trust
King's Lynn Conservancy Board
Lancaster Port Commission
Langstone Harbour Board
Lerwick Port Authority
Londonderry Port
Lymington Harbour Commission
Milford Haven Port Authority
Montrose Port Authority
Neath Harbour Commission
Newlyn Pier and Harbour Commission
Newport (Gwent) Harbour Commission
Padstow Harbour Commission
Peterhead Bay Authority
Peterhead Harbour Trust
Poole Harbour Commission
Port of London Authority
Port of Plymouth
Cattewater Harbour Commission
Shoreham Port Authority
Stornoway Pier and Harbour Commission
Teignmouth Harbour Commission
Tyne Port Authority
Warkworth Harbour Commission
Wells Harbour Commission
Whitehaven Harbour Commission
Wick Harbour Trust
Yarmouth (Isle of Wight) Harbour Commission

(d) Other public sector ports

British Waterways Board:
Caledonian and Crinan canals
London Docklands
River Ouse
Sharpness Docks
Environment Agency:
Rye Harbour.

My officials are corresponding with, and visiting, a number of harbour authorities that have significant responsibilities for marine safety if they have not reported compliance with the code.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 671W, on marine and port safety, what subjects were discussed at the two exchanges of correspondence with the acting chairman; and if he will place copies of these exchanges in the Library. [51448]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has now written on three occasions to the acting Chairman of Humber Pilots Ltd. (HPL), on four subjects—(1) the circumstances in which HPL's contract with Associated British Ports was terminated and the former pilots' authorisations revoked; (2) the requirement in the Port Marine Safety Code for pilotage services to be covered by a contract; (3) the numbers of Humber pilots now and formerly authorised by the competent harbour authority, and their qualifications; (4) the records of incidents kept by the authority and HPL. Letters between the Department and its correspondents are treated in confidence unless the originator chooses to make them public.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent changes there have been in the *(a)* measurement of and *(b)* legal duties for the safety of navigation by harbour authorities; and what progress has been made towards implementation of the port marine safety code. [51441]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no recent changes in the legal duties for the safety of navigation of harbour authorities. The port marine safety code makes clear that the duties and powers that harbour authorities already have are generally sufficient to enable them to maintain

proper standards of port marine safety. The Department is undertaking a review during 2002 to assess how far the code has been implemented and what has so far been achieved.

Port Developments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance his Department issues on how alternatives to port developments should be assessed where adverse environmental impacts are likely; what decisions have been taken on who is to carry out these assessments; and if he will make a statement. [51376]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 517W, in which I announced that the Department had issued a consultation paper concerned with the development of an appraisal framework for ports in the UK. The period for consultation ran until 5 April and we are now analysing the results. These will assist the Department in drawing up a guidance note for all those involved with port developments requiring some form of official approval, which we aim to issue later this year. It will address how alternatives are to be assessed.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what means his Department intends to measure port productivity and efficiency to establish what scope there is for improved use of existing facilities; and if he will make a statement. [51375]

Mr. Jamieson: Our ports policy paper, "Modern Ports—A UK Policy", published in November 2000, recognised that it is important to have a clear overall picture of trends affecting the ports industry, and especially of the potential need for new port development. We said that the Government will consider with the industry and other interests how to benchmark port performance and best practice methods. We are discussing with the ports industry how this can be taken forward.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 296W-97W, in which I announced that the Department had issued a discussion paper, "Recent developments and prospects in UK container ports", which was aimed at promoting a better understanding of the ports and shipping business, and of the demands which are now causing pressure on capacity.

National Flag Shipping

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that the UK takes advantage of EU state aid guidelines to encourage national flag shipping. [50574]

Mr. Jamieson: We have introduced the tonnage tax, which has in the last two years contributed to a 61 per cent. increase in tonnage of the UK registered fleet. We have also extended and increased funding to the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme, which subsidises the costs of seafarer training, and we are committed to extending the Crew Relief Costs Scheme to cover European as well as more distant ports, when parliamentary time is available. We have already cleared the first two measures with the Commission to ensure that they comply with state aid guidelines, and will seek clearance for the third when appropriate.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pension Credit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the changes to *(a)* cost and *(b)* coverage of the proposed pension credit if the withdrawal rate of the savings credit were (i) 10 per cent., (ii) 22 per cent. and (iii) 25 per cent. [20296]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The Savings Credit is designed specifically to reward pensioners with low or modest second pensions or savings. Setting the Savings Credit rate at 60 per cent. strikes the right balance between affordability and the objective of helping pensioners at the lower end of the income scale. As illustrated in the table, below increasing the rate of the Savings Credit to 90 per cent. would require an additional £2 billion for a full year. It would also mean the Pension Credit would be payable to single pensioners with incomes over £300 per week (nearly £16,000 per year) and over £430 for pensioner couples (around £22,500).

Additional expenditure required for Pension Credit for a full financial year

Savings credit rate (percentage)	*Change in costs (£ billion)*	*Changes in number of benefit units entitled (000s)*
60	0	0
75	+0.6	+800
78	+0.8	+1,000
90	+2.0	+2,200

Notes:
1. Costs are the additional expenditure required for Housing and Council Tax Benefits and Pension Credit.
2. Numbers of benefit units relates to those entitled to Pension Credit.
3. The estimates are for 2004–05 (the first full year in which Pension Credit will be payable) and are based on estimates published in the pre-Budget report.
4. The estimates are for GB only and exclude persons residing in residential care and nursing homes.
5. The estimates are based on the Department's Policy Simulation Model, using data from the Family Resources Survey (FRS) for 1999–2000.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what proportion of single pensioners entitled to the pension credit are expected to be in receipt of less than the full rate of the state basic pension on the inception of the pension credit scheme in October 2003; [47658]

(2) what proportion of pensioner couples entitled to the pension credit are expected to be in receipt of less than the full rate of the state basic pension for a couple based on the husband's contribution record on the inception of the pension credit scheme in October 2003. [47659]

Mr. McCartney: Information is not available in the format requested.

In total around 4.1 million pensioner households will be entitled to Pension Credit in 2003–04, of which around 1.2 million households contain a couple.

Appeal Tribunals

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many appeal tribunals in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK have been adjourned as a result of the Tribunal of Commissioners decision in CSDLA/1019/99; [49006]

(2) how many full sessions in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK have been adjourned as a result of the Tribunal of Commissioners decision in CSDLA/1019/99; [49007]

(3) if medical members who would be disqualified by conflict of interest as judged by the Tribunal of Commissioners decision in CSDLA/1019/99 are still being allocated to sit on Appeal Tribunal hearings; and if he will make a statement; [49008]

(4) what costs have been incurred owing to the cancellation of appeal tribunal hearings as a result of the Tribunal of Commissioners decision in CSDLA/1019/99; [49009]

(5) how many medical members in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK of appeal tribunal hearings he estimates could be disqualified from hearings when the findings of CSDLA/1019/99 are applied. [49011]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Neil Ward, Chief Executive of the Appeals Service. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from N. D. Ward to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 18 April 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your recent parliamentary questions on the subject of the Tribunal of Commissioners decision (CSDLA/1019/99). You asked:

> how many appeal tribunals in (a) Scotland and (b) the UK have been adjourned as a result (49006);
>
> how many full sessions in (a) Scotland and (b) the UK have been adjourned as a result (49007);
>
> what costs have been incurred owing to the cancellation of appeal tribunal hearings as a result (49009);
>
> if medical members who would be disqualified by conflict of interest as judged by the decision are still being allocated to sit on Appeal Tribunal hearings (49008); and
>
> how many medical members in (a) Scotland and (b) the UK of appeal tribunal hearings he estimates could be disqualified from hearings when the findings of CSDLA/1019/99 are applied (49011).

The jurisdiction of appeal tribunal administration by the Appeals Service extends to Great Britain only.

Information on the number of appeal tribunals, and full sessions, adjourned as a result of the Tribunal of Commissioners decision, and the costs, is unavailable.

The President of Appeal Tribunals has considered carefully the impact of the above decision. The decision is currently the subject of an appeal to the Court of Session. In the meantime, all medically qualified panel members are being offered hearings.

There are currently 133 fee paid medically qualified panel members in Scotland, of whom 28 also carry out work for Schlumbergersema/Nestor Disability Analysis. For Great Britain, the figures are 856 and 136 respectively.

I hope this is helpful.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when an Appeal Tribunal is adjourned, what costs have to be met for personnel and services; and what these have amounted to on average in the last year. [49012]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Neil Ward, chief executive of the Appeals Service. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from N. D. Ward to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 18 April 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your question regarding what costs have to be met for personnel and services, as a result of adjourned appeal tribunals; and what these have amounted to on average in the last year.

The costs may include administrative costs for staff and venues as well as those of panel members and travelling expenses for the appellant. Information regarding the specific costs of adjourned tribunals is unavailable. However, the average cost of an appeal cleared by an appeal tribunal is £155 (excluding first tier agency costs). An appeal may be cleared at the first hearing, or after one or more adjournments.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Mark Preedy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if she will ensure that officials in her Department examine the case of Mr. Mark Preedy. [46298]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Bill Wiggin, dated April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask if the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will ensure that officials in his Department will examine the case of Mr. Mark Preedy.

As individual cases are a confidential matter I have written to you separately concerning Mr. Preedy.

State Pension

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people above state pension age have *(a)* reduced entitlement to the basic state pension and *(b)* no entitlement at all to a basic state pension. [45911]

Mr. McCartney: There are around 1.46 million people in Great Britain with a reduced entitlement to the Basic State Pension and around 360,000 with no entitlement at all.

The Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) was introduced in April 1999 to provide a new higher income below which pensioners with little or no savings should not fall. From April 2002 no pensioner has to get by on less than £98.15 a week under MIG (£149.80 for couples). Over two million pensioners nationally benefit from this measure.

Source:

Administrative Data September 2001 and ONS mid 2000 Population Estimates.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people failed to claim their state pension within three months of reaching state pension age; what the total amount of state pension left unclaimed was in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [47585]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* There is no requirement to claim retirement pension at state pension age.

Contributory Pension Schemes

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are *(a)* active members, *(b)* deferred members and *(c)* retired members of employers' contributory pension schemes. [46922]

Mr. McCartney: Information is not available on the number of deferred or retired members of employer contributory schemes (that is, a scheme where there is an employee contribution—"contributory scheme"). Information from the Government Actuary's survey of Occupational Pension Schemes (1995) shows 8.9 million active members in contributory schemes. In addition, it is estimated that there are 1.6 million active members of Group Personal Pension schemes (where the employee makes a contribution) and 1.5 million where the employer makes a contribution in addition to the employee.

Information is available on the membership profile of occupational pension schemes (both contributory and non-contributory):

Occupational pension membership 1999–2000

Members	*Million*
Active	10.5
Retired	6.2
Deferred	7.3

Notes:

1. The information on active members and retired members (ie those in receipt of an occupational pension) is drawn from the Family Resources Survey 1999–2000.
2. The number of deferred members is estimated from the difference between active/retired members and total scheme membership. This estimate is subject to a degree of error due to the differing data sources used.

Recruitment

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the policy of his Department is regarding recruitment and employment of people over 55; [48703]

(2) what the policy of the Benefits Office is regarding the employment and recruitment of people over 55. [48704]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions is committed to achieving equality of opportunity and diversity. All applicants and employees are treated fairly to enable them to develop and fulfil their potential, valuing the contribution each person can make to the organisation. Vacancies other than those for positions in the Senior Civil Service are open to everyone up to the age of 65 and a person's age is not taken into account at any stage of the selection process.

At present the normal retirement age for staff in the Senior Civil Service is set by the Cabinet Office at 60, although there is the option to retain members beyond the age of 60 if it is judged to be in the public interest and the Department is satisfied about the fitness and efficiency of the individual to carry out his or her duties.

We are committed to ending age discriminatory practices and Government Ministers, through the Cabinet Office, are actively working towards removing the current barriers for members of the Senior Civil Service.

Pensioners

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost in 2002–03 of increasing the weekly basic state retirement pension for couples by *(a)* £8 for those where the head is aged up to 74 years, *(b)* £18 for those where the head is aged between 75 and 79 years and *(c)* £28 for those where the head is aged 80 years and over. [50882]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available.

Complaints

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints were registered against his Department and its predecessor Departments in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in those periods. [51219]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The information requested is not available.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many members of staff at his Department are justices of the peace; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace. [44554]

Mr. McCartney: Information on the members of staff who are justices of the peace is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA) requires employers to allow their staff reasonable time off for public duties. The civil service code (para 9.2.5) requires Departments and agencies to allow time off for attending these duties. Responsibility for the decision-making, in relation to attendance for such activities has been delegated to local managers within the Department.

Departmental Groups

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* reviews, *(b)* task forces and *(c)* advisory groups have been established by his Department since May 1997; what their membership is; and what reports they (i) have published and (ii) are preparing to publish. [28580]

Mr. McCartney: Departmental Ministers and officials consider many policy questions and issues on a routine and on-going basis and frequently seek the views of people external to the Department on a more or less formal basis. The following table shows the task forces, ad hoc advisory and policy review groups with external members, which have been established since May 1997:

				Total number of members					
Task forces, ad hoc advisory and policy review groups	*Date Established*	*Date reported/due to report*	*Date wound up*	*Ministers*	*Civil Servants*	*Wider public servants*	*Voluntary/ Charity*	*Other in Private Sector*	*Total*
Pension provision group	September 1997	'We all need pensions—The Prospectus for Pension Provision' June 1998. 'Responses to the Pensions Green Paper' March 1999 'A Commentary on the Pension Credit' March 2001.	Proposed March 2002	0	0	1	0	6	7
Pension sharing consultation panel	November 1997	No reports.	Proposed March 2002	0	0	1	2	14	17
Ad hoc group of external stakeholders: Decision Making and Appeals	February 1998	No formal reports produced.	April 2001	0	4	0	8	0	12
Activities of managing life working group	July 1998	No reports have been published. Minutes of meetings are produced.		0	6	0	7	0	13
Housing benefit simplification and improvement project	September 1998	No reports published.	Mid 1999	0	18	2	0	0	20
Modern service working group	December 1998	No plans to produce a report.	—	0	5	0	7	0	12
Statutory money purchase illustrations working party	April 1999	'Illustrations of Money Purchase Pensions' September 2000. Consultation paper summer 2001	Proposed March 2002	0	2	1	0	3	6
Member-nominated trustee working group	June 1999	Proposals in 'Member-Nominated Trustees and Directors: Consultation document' published October 1999.	Proposed March 2002	0	2	0	0	7	9
Stakeholder pensions core group	July 1999	No formal reports.	December 2000	0	4	1	0	19	24
Pension forecasting advisory group	July 1999	'Planning Your Future' published July 2000.	March 2001	0	10	0	0	8	18
Best practice guidelines working practice	July 1999	No formal report.	November 2000	0	4	1	0	7	12
Dual sensory impairment group	September 1999	No formal report.	November 2000	0	4	0	4	0	8
Benefits agency standards committee	November 1999	First annual report published September 2000.	Proposed March 2002	0	2	3	1	3	9
Older people—media images working group	August 2000	No report planned.	March 2001	0	7	0	6	1	14
Partnership against poverty	March 2001	No report as such, provides feedback to department after each meeting.	—	0	6	5	10	0	21
Jobcentre plus employers forum	May 2001	No formal report planned.	—	0	2	2	0	8	12
Jobcentre plus stakeholders forum	May 2001	No formal report planned.	—	0	4	2	18	0	24
The private pensions simplification (pickering) review	September 2001	Report due July 2002.	—	2	5	0	0	5	12

Task forces, ad hoc advisory and policy review groups	Date Established	Date reported/due to report	Date wound up	Total number of members: Ministers	Civil Servants	Wider public servants	Voluntary/ Charity	Other in Private Sector	Total
The minimum funding requirement consultant panel	September 2001	No formal report planned.	—	0	8	0	1	12	21
Scottish partnership against poverty	November 2001	No formal report planned.	—	0	11	0	7	6	24

Ministerial approval

Date

Secretary of State approval

PSL approval

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the longest period of time elapsed is between receiving *(a)* the administration fee and providing the information requested and *(b)* a request for information and providing the information requested, under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33455]

(2) what administration fees are charged by the Department for information requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33462]

(3) what percentage of responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of the £10 fee, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the administration fee. [33469]

Mr. McCartney: Such information is available as follows.

The longest period of time elapsed is between a request for information and providing the information requested is over 120 days.

The Department currently only records elapsed time for clearing requests in periods of 20 days i.e. 40–60 days, 60–80 days. This information is only available for requests recorded from 24 October 2001.

We do not charge an administration fee for information requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998.

From 1 March 2000 to 23 October 2001 the Department has responded to 91.40 per cent. of requests within 40 days and 8.60 per cent. over 40 days.

From 24 October 2001 to 31 December 2001 the Department has responded to 92.33 per cent. of requests within 40 days; 7.40 per cent. over 40 days and 27 per cent. over 60 days.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 have been completed *(a)* within 40 days, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the original letter; and how many are outstanding; [33571]

(2) how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of receiving and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the £10 administration fee. [33564]

Mr. McCartney: From 1 March 2000 to 23 October 2001 the Department has responded to 5,604 within 40 days; 529 over 40 days and none over 60 days.

From 24 October 2001 to 31 December 2001 the Department has responded to 989 within 40 days; 81 over 40 days and nine over 60 days.

At 31 December 2001 there were 530 SARs outstanding throughout the Department.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many requests the Department has received under the Data Protection Act 1988 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation; [33583]

(2) how many responses the Department has completed to requests for information made under the Data Protection Act 1998 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation. [33576]

Mr. McCartney: Between 1 March 2000, when the Data Protection Act came into force with respect to electronically held data, and 23 October 2001 the Department received and completed 6,825 subject access requests.

The Act extended rights to clerical data on 24 October 2001 and since then (up to 31 December 2001) the Department has received 320 requests for clerical data only; 107 requests for electronic data only; and 652 requests for both clerical and electronic data.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the period of time elapsed is for the oldest outstanding request for information under the Data Protection Act 1998, since receipt of the *(a)* original request and *(b)* administration fee. [33449]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the average cost of processing each information request under the Data Protection Act 1998 in the last 12 months. [33439]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available.

SCOTLAND

Appointments

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the public bodies are to which she has a right to make appointments since 1 July 1999; and when she will next make appointments to each of them. [47133]

Mrs. Liddell: One of my functions under the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 is to appoint the Commissioners to the Boundary Commission for Scotland. I will be required to make two new appointments from 1 January 2003.

Ferry Transport

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made on devolving powers to the Scottish Executive on ferry transport. [47392]

Mrs. Liddell: An order under section 63 of the Scotland Act will shortly be laid before Parliament. Subject to approval, this order will devolve to Scottish Ministers a power to provide financial support for shipping services between the Highlands and Islands and Northern Ireland.

Scottish Enterprise

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise; and what was discussed. [47651]

Mrs. Liddell: I meet representatives of a wide range of public and private sector bodies in a variety of circumstances, both formal and informal, and I shall continue to do so. Those discussions include the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise on matters relating to the Scottish economy.

Friends of Scotland

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have registered as Friends of Scotland. [46973]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 169W.

MSPs

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will publish the result of her consultation on MSP members. [47649]

Mrs. Liddell: The consultation period ended on 29 March. I will now give careful consideration to all of the views expressed and will publish in due course a summary of the responses. I hope to be in a position to announce the Government's decision on this important matter soon.

Shipping Services

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response she has received from the Scottish Executive to her consultation about transferring functions to the Scottish Ministers regarding financial assistance for shipping services which start or finish outside Scotland. [51397]

Mr. Foulkes *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The Scotland Office has held detailed discussions with the Scottish Executive on the proposed transfer of functions to Scottish Ministers regarding financial assistance to shipping services. An order under section 63 of the Scotland Act will shortly be laid before Parliament. Subject to approval, this order will devolve to Scottish Ministers a power to provide financial support for shipping services between the Highlands and Islands and Northern Ireland.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the total real terms expenditure of her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if she will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36161]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999. Since that date the Department has spent the following on publicity:

	£
July 1999 to March 2000	21,289
April 2000 to March 2001	130,903
April 2001 to date	180,341
2001–02 estimate	180,341

All of the expenditure was on advertising, with most of this related to election or electoral registration matters. No assessment has been made of the expenditure in real terms.

Complaints

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints were registered against her Department and its predecessor Departments in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in those periods. [51582]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date, no complaints have been registered against the Department.

Details of complaints between 1990 and 1999 are contained in the annual reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. These reports were laid before Parliament and are available in the Library.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many members of her staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if she will make a statement. [39740]

Mrs. Liddell: No staff in my Department have requested paid leave to work as a volunteer during the last two years.

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37699]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Rail Journeys

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make it her policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in her Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40435]

Mrs. Liddell: The Civil Service Management Code requires all Government Departments and agencies to ensure that employees use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances, taking into account any management benefit and the needs of staff with disabilities.

Job Sharing

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are employed in her Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35367]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in her Department. [41050]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department currently has four members of staff employed in a total of two job-share positions.

Apart from a very small number of posts, where there are particular business requirements, all vacant positions are advertised as being available on a part-time, job share/split as well as on a full-time basis.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff in her Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41088]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Since that date, no staff in the Department's press office have received termination or redundancy payments.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what legal costs have been incurred by her Department in each of the last four years. [34350]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999. Since that time it has incurred the following legal costs in relation to my areas of responsibility:

£

	Legal costs
July 1999 to March 2000	1,769
April 2000 to March 2001	5,487
April 2001 to March 2002	18,892

These do not include the cost of in-house legal services but include payments made to other Departments for legal services. The figures are gross, do not include costs recovered or recoverable and do not include costs paid to third parties by way of damages or compensation.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if she will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in her Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in her Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits; [38146]

(2) if she will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in her Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in her Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38182]

Mrs. Liddell: Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published in a similar form to previous years as soon as possible. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The additional information requested in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to visit the Baltic states. [45842]

Mrs. Liddell: It is my intention to visit the Baltic states in due course.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how many staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36214]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36213]

Mrs. Liddell: No official in my Department receives paid facility time on a full time basis to undertake trade union activities.

WALES

Complaints

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many complaints were registered against his Department and its predecessor Departments in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in those periods. [51583]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There is no central register of complaints.

Since its establishment on 1 July 1999, the Parliamentary Ombudsman has investigated no complaints against the Wales Office. The Ombudsman's annual reports contain the following details of complaints against the former Welsh Office.

Year	*New cases received*	*Rejected or discontinued*[1]	*Cases concluded*	*Upheld in whole or in part*
1990–91	9	7	0	0
1991–92	9	6	2	2
1992–93	12	8	4	4
1993–94	12	11	0	0
1994–95	25	14	2	0
1995–96	15	12	9	8
1996–97	16	12	0	0
1997–98	12	13	3	2
1998–99	17	10	5	4
1999–2000	8	19	0	0
2000–01	1	1	0	0

[1] From 1999–2000, includes "Concluded without investigation"

Note:

Annual workload includes cases carried forward from previous years

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff have been employed by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42454]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 295W.

User Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what new steps her Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if she will publish the findings. [47310]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department continuously commissions tightly focused market research to help develop and evaluate advertising and publicity campaigns. This research will often focus on views of customers about its services.

For example in 2001–02, campaigns where strategic communications research or creative development research have been commissioned include the drive to widen participation in Higher Education; the promotion of the relevance of science to teenagers, as part of Science Year, the child care recruitment campaign; the campaign to help those adults with basic skills gaps; and the promotion of foundation degrees and modern apprenticeships.

It is seldom possible to publish the findings of this type of research as these projects test creative work commissioned from advertising agencies as part of the development of the publicity campaigns and are regarded as commercial-in-confidence. This research is subject to the usual strict rules that spending must represent good value for the taxpayer and must not be used for party political purposes.

The Department also conducts research to help us understand the education, skills and communication needs of our customers. It has sampled and consulted on the views of teachers, parents and other groups affected by the Department's policies on specific issues. For example the project "Causes of truancy by pupils of compulsory school age" gathers the views of pupils, parents, school and LEA staff on the causes of truancy and what measures could be taken to address the issue. One of the aims is to examine the issue of absence that is condoned by parents. "A longitudinal study of factors contributing to variations in teacher effectiveness" will investigate the factors which contribute to the effectiveness of teachers at different stages of their career, working in a range of schools in different contexts, and how this changes over time. Part of this study is to track 300 teachers over three years measuring their effectiveness by pupil outcome measures and other qualitative techniques. Again it would not be possible to give details of every project without disproportionate costs.

The Department is committed in particular to consulting its youngest customers and enthusiastically supports the Government's core principles on involving children and young people. We arranged a consultation day with pupils on 5 November 2001 on the Education White Paper and our consultation on the 14–19 Green Paper which started in February includes a young persons' document and events with young people. Most Connexions Partnerships are successfully involving young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of the service. The views of young people are also gathered through the millennium volunteers national and regional fora. We will build on these examples to promote consultation with children and young people across the Department's activities.

The Department's website has details of its research programme from 1997 on http://www/dfes.gov.uk/research. Information about opinion polls, focus groups and other forms of research commissioned by the Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally.

New Schools

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans her Department has to build new *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in Lancashire. [48601]

John Healey: It is not the role of the Department to decide when and where to build new schools. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) have a duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places available for children in their area. To help identify where additional places are needed, LEAs are required to produce annually a locally agreed School Organisation Plan which sets the context for the provision of school places over a five year period. Where Authorities can demonstrate a need for additional places, they can apply for capital funding support from the Department in the form of a basic need allocation. Since 2000–01, Lancashire LEA has received basic need allocations in respect of 587 secondary school places. It is, however, for the LEA to decide how best to use these allocations in line with the locally agreed priorities identified in its Asset Management Plan. Any proposal to establish a new school would be made and decided locally.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new schools have been built in each of the local authorities of England in each of the last five years. [48608]

John Healey: We do not hold information in the form requested. Much capital funding support is allocated to local education authorities and schools on a formulaic basis. Records of how it is utilised for specific projects are held locally.

Education Finance

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average amount spent per pupil was in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* sixth form colleges in (i) St. Helens, (ii) Liverpool, (iii) Manchester, (iv) London, (v) England and (vi) Scotland in (1) 1998, (2) 1999, (3) 2000, (4) 2001 and (5) the quarter to 31 March 2002. [48667]

Mr. Timms: The following table sets out the average amount spent per pupil in primary schools and per pupil in secondary schools. 1999–2000 is the latest year for which

information is available. I shall write to my hon. Friend when the information for 2000–01 is to hand. The Department does not hold information on spending by sixth form colleges. My right hon. Friend is not responsible for expenditure in Scotland.

Education expenditure per school pupil

	1998–99	*1999–2000*
342 St. Helens		
Pre primary/primary	1,770	2,030
Secondary	2,480	2,650
341 Liverpool		
Pre primary/primary	1,970	2,020
Secondary	2,580	2,720
352 Manchester		
Pre primary/primary	1,860	1,960
Secondary	2,670	2,820
London		
Pre primary/primary	2,320	2,450
Secondary	3,030	3,050
England		
Pre primary/primary	1,960	2,070
Secondary	2,550	2,640

Notes:

1. All figures are in real terms (2000–01) prices, based on GDP deflators published by Treasury on 27 March 2002

2. All figures are in £s rounded to the nearest £10.

3. Expenditure data for 1999–2000 are taken from section 52 outturn statements completed by local education authorities and returned to DfES.

4. Data for previous years are taken from DTLR's Revenue Outturn Returns.

5. Pupil numbers used in calculating pupil figures are financial year averages, based on January Annual School Census returns.

Emmanuel College, Gateshead

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils who gained entry to Emmanuel college in Gateshead LCS achieved level *(a)* 4, *(b)* 5 and *(c)* 6 in Key Stage 2 (i) maths, (ii) English and (iii) science SATs at primary school as a percentage of their year 7 intake for each of the years (A) 1999, (B) 2000 and (C) 2001. [48924]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not readily available. Analyses of this kind will be possible once proposals for a national pupil database are implemented. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 109–11W.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which Bills introduced by her Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans she has for the future use of such clauses. [49628]

Mr. Timms: The current Education Bill is the only example of where such a provision has been included, through subsection (6) of clause 2 of the Bill. The need for future use of such clauses would be assessed during preparation for any future legislation.

Sector Skills Councils

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings her Department has had with the sector skills councils since their inception. [49847]

John Healey: There are currently five Trailblazer SSCs covering the following sectors:

Retail

Environmental and Land Based Industries

Apparel, Footwear and Textiles

Audio Visual Industries

Oil and Gas Extraction, Petroleum Refining and Marketing, and Chemicals Manufacturing and Processing.

My Department holds regular meetings with the Trailblazer SSCs. Meetings have also been facilitated by my Department's officials between the Trailblazer SSCs and the devolved Administrations, other Government Departments, and other partner organisations.

Meetings have also taken place between the Department and the potential sector skills councils.

This regular dialogue will continue in order for the sector skills councils to achieve their aim of leading the skills and productivity drive in industry and business sectors which is recognised by employers. They will bring together employers, trade unions and professional bodies in working with Government to develop the skills to meet the demand from businesses in order to close the skills gaps between the UK and our competitors.

Oil and Gas Industry

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for a sector skills council for the oil and gas industry. [50016]

John Healey: A sector skills council (SSC) for the oil and gas extraction, oil refining and processing and chemical manufacturing sector was licensed on 19 March. The SSC, known as Cogent, is one of five Trailblazer SSCs selected to demonstrate the importance of influential employer-led bodies in driving up skills and productivity in sectors. I look forward to Cogent making significant early progress in addressing the skills and productivity priorities for this sector.

IT Contracts

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 257W, on IT contracts, whether the competition being run by Becta to accredit ICT suppliers for schools will take into account the ease for schools of changing between those suppliers. [50033]

John Healey: The Accredited Service Suppliers initiative will not put in place a framework contract and hence schools will create their own formal contract arrangements with suppliers. However, all Becta accredited NGfL service suppliers will be governed by a code of conduct, which will ensure that suppliers do not impose unreasonable terms and conditions on schools and other educational customers. Part of this code of conduct will cover arrangements for termination of contracts. Rigorous monitoring of accredited supplier performance will be undertaken by Becta and accreditation will be publicly withdrawn from suppliers who do not work within the code of conduct.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in her Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions she has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within her Department. [50475]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The Connexions card is a smart card designed to encourage young people to continue in learning beyond 16. Young people can collect points every time they attend a learning session, which can then be redeemed for a wide range of rewards and "money can't buy" opportunities—for example, going behind the scenes at a pop concert or attending a top sporting event. Cardholders will also receive on-the-spot discounts in a wide range of high street shops.

The Department has developed the Connexions card through a public private partnership with Capita who are providing the technological and commercial infrastructure to support the initiative. The fact that the card and its infrastructure are smart means that it is capable of taking on more functions such as helping a school or local education authority validate the payment of education maintenance allowances or an e-purse for cashless catering.

The card is currently being rolled out region by region and will be available across England from autumn 2002.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in each of the Inner London boroughs have school playing fields; and if she will list them. [50542]

John Healey: As part of the data collected for local education authorities' asset management plans, the Department has information on numbers of school playing fields. The Department is currently appraising the data with a view to publishing analysis later this year.

City of Bradford Metropolitan Council

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the City of Bradford metropolitan council was invited to submit a bid for the latest round of PFI projects; when the bid was received; and on what date the Department's response was issued. [51040]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* A letter was sent by the Department for Education and Skills to all local education authorities (LEAs) in England on 31 July 2001, inviting PFI proposals expected to reach contract signature in 2003–04. The proposal from the City of Bradford metropolitan council was received on 17 December 2001. All LEAs which submitted proposals were notified of the outcome on 25 March 2002.

Educational Psychologists

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the average waiting time between a child being referred by his school to an educational psychologist and the first consultation taking place has been in the last 12 months; [51053]

(2) how many educational psychologists are employed *(a)* by each local education authority in England and Wales and *(b)* in total; what the equivalent figures were for the last five years; and if she will make a statement; [51055]

(3) if she will make a statement about the recruitment and retention of educational psychologists; [51056]

(4) what estimate she has made of the number of posts for educational psychologists in local education authorities in England and Wales that are unfilled. [51057]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Information on waiting times for consultations with educational psychologists is not collected centrally. Recruitment and retention of educational psychologists are matters for local education authorities, as employers.

The latest available information on the number of educational psychologists employed by local education authorities in England, and the number of unfilled posts, is given in the following table:

Educational psychologists (full-time equivalent)

	In service					*FT vacancies*
LEA	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2001*
City of London	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.0
Camden	8.4	7.5	7.5	10.9	12.0	0.0
Greenwich	16.0	16.9	15.9	12.9	14.5	1.0
Hackney	11.0	10.0	10.5	11.7	12.5	1.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	6.5	7.5	9.3	7.5	5.9	1.0
Islington	10.0	13.0	12.3	14.1	12.0	0.0

Educational psychologists (full-time equivalent)

LEA	In service 1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	FT vacancies 2001
Kensington and Chelsea	9.0	10.0	8.0	8.0	6.0	0.0
Lambeth	13.3	8.0	10.7	13.4	15.1	0.0
Lewisham	13.5	13.5	12.5	12.5	13.5	0.0
Southwark	13.6	11.1	12.3	12.3	11.7	2.0
Tower Hamlets	14.0	29.6	15.7	15.3	14.4	0.0
Wandsworth	11.2	11.6	10.7	11.3	11.0	0.0
City of Westminster	10.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	9.4	0.0
Barking and Dagenham	12.9	10.9	11.9	14.0	11.9	3.0
Barnet	16.1	15.5	15.5	14.4	15.5	1.0
Bexley	11.3	10.0	11.0	10.6	10.1	0.0
Brent	11.6	10.0	9.4	10.0	11.0	0.0
Bromley	11.5	12.0	12.0	11.0	11.5	1.0
Croydon	10.4	14.6	13.9	13.4	9.6	1.0
Ealing	12.8	13.8	23.8	14.7	13.7	1.0
Enfield	15.0	12.7	17.6	20.6	19.2	3.0
Haringey	14.8	13.3	15.0	14.1	11.6	2.0
Harrow	11.0	4.6	8.7	10.3	10.9	1.0
Havering	7.9	9.6	9.5	9.5	9.5	0.0
Hillingdon	12.4	13.8	15.3	14.2	15.5	0.0
Hounslow	9.5	19.5	10.0	10.5	10.5	0.0
Kingston upon Thames	4.9	6.9	5.7	6.8	5.4	1.0
Merton	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.8	9.6	0.0
Newham	12.1	12.8	15.5	19.0	17.7	4.0
Redbridge	8.1	8.2	10.0	10.4	7.4	2.0
Richmond upon Thames	6.6	7.6	7.6	7.1	6.1	1.0
Sutton	5.6	5.0	6.5	8.9	10.8	0.0
Waltham Forest	13.0	13.0	13.0	13.0	8.3	1.0
Birmingham	39.0	40.1	46.2	22.6	46.2	0.0
Coventry	13.3	12.8	13.9	14.5	16.0	0.0
Dudley	10.5	10.5	11.5	7.7	11.7	5.0
Sandwell	14.0	15.0	14.0	16.0	15.0	0.0
Solihull	9.4	10.0	9.5	11.0	9.5	1.0
Walsall	10.5	12.6	11.8	12.0	10.6	0.0
Wolverhampton	11.8	12.8	10.0	13.0	15.0	0.0
Knowsley	8.8	8.0	9.0	9.0	9.0	0.0
Liverpool	16.0	16.0	15.0	15.0	14.0	0.0
St. Helens	6.0	8.0	7.0	6.0	8.1	0.0
Sefton	10.0	11.0	10.6	9.5	13.6	0.0
Wirral	14.0	12.5	13.7	12.8	12.1	2.0
Bolton	8.4	8.4	8.4	9.4	9.4	0.0
Bury	7.6	7.2	6.1	8.0	8.6	0.0
Manchester	17.6	20.9	22.2	17.8	21.0	0.0
Oldham	6.5	7.5	7.5	8.5	8.9	0.0
Rochdale	8.3	9.3	9.3	8.0	9.3	0.0
Salford	9.5	8.3	7.6	11.2	8.8	3.0
Stockport	11.8	10.6	10.5	11.2	10.0	0.0
Tameside	7.6	9.6	9.6	9.6	9.6	0.0
Trafford	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.4	7.0	0.0
Wigan	12.0	11.8	12.4	12.4	10.0	2.0
Barnsley	4.0	6.5	6.9	7.4	7.9	0.0
Doncaster	10.9	11.9	10.9	10.9	9.9	2.0
Rotherham	11.5	10.5	8.3	7.3	9.1	0.0
Sheffield	19.4	20.9	22.4	23.4	26.0	0.0
Bradford	18.5	19.2	20.5	21.7	21.7	0.0
Calderdale	8.4	7.4	7.4	7.7	8.8	0.0
Kirklees	21.5	22.5	20.0	22.8	25.1	3.0
Leeds	14.5	17.0	19.0	21.5	19.5	2.0
Wakefield	10.0	10.0	11.0	9.0	9.3	0.0
Gateshead	9.0	9.5	9.5	9.5	6.5	0.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	14.4	10.4	14.8	10.5	8.6	0.0
North Tyneside	6.6	7.5	5.7	7.7	9.0	0.0
South Tyneside	6.0	7.5	5.0	7.1	6.5	1.0
Sunderland	11.5	11.5	13.5	15.9	11.1	0.0
Isles of Scilly	0.0	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bath and North East Somerset	5.0	5.0	5.0	8.5	7.0	0.0
City of Bristol	16.9	14.3	15.6	19.2	19.5	0.0
North Somerset	7.9	7.5	9.0	12.0	10.5	1.0
South Gloucestershire	7.3	7.0	8.8	9.8	11.4	0.0
Hartlepool	3.2	4.0	4.0	3.4	2.4	1.0
Middlesbrough	5.0	7.0	7.4	7.0	6.2	0.0
Redcar and Cleveland	5.1	4.9	6.0	6.0	5.8	2.0

Educational psychologists (full-time equivalent)

LEA	In service 1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	FT vacancies 2001
Stockton on Tees	8.5	5.1	7.0	6.0	8.3	0.0
City of Kingston Upon Hull	8.0	8.3	10.3	10.3	11.4	10.0
East Riding of Yorkshire	8.0	8.0	8.0	7.0	9.0	0.0
North East Lincolnshire	4.0	5.0	5.0	5.6	6.4	0.0
North Lincolnshire	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.5	5.0	0.0
North Yorkshire	13.1	14.3	15.8	14.7	14.5	0.0
York	6.9	6.9	6.9	7.8	8.1	0.0
Former Bedfordshire	16.3	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	—	6.0	10.3	10.3	11.7	.0
Luton	—	4.8	5.3	6.0	7.0	0.0
Total former Bedfordshire area	16.3	10.8	15.6	16.3	18.7	1.0
Former Buckinghamshire	24.9	—	—	—	—	—
Buckinghamshire	—	18.2	19.7	19.8	18.6	36.0
Milton Keynes	—	10.0	7.0	10.0	11.5	0.0
Total former Buckinghamshire area	24.9	28.2	26.7	29.8	30.1	36.0
Former Derbyshire	31.9	—	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	—	22.0	20.6	23.0	20.7	3.0
Derby	—	9.0	8.7	10.9	10.9	0.0
Total former Derbyshire area	31.9	31.0	29.3	33.9	31.6	3.0
Former Dorset	25.0	—	—	—	—	—
Dorset	—	14.0	13.0	12.6	12.7	0.0
Poole	—	5.5	6.0	4.5	5.1	1.0
Bournemouth	—	4.0	5.4	6.0	6.0	0.0
Total former Dorset area	25.0	23.5	24.4	23.1	23.8	1.0
Former Durham	23.4	—	—	—	—	—
Durham	—	16.0	20.9	20.6	23.2	0.0
Darlington	—	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	0.0
Total former Durham area	23.4	20.0	23.9	24.6	27.2	0.0
Former East Sussex	18.3	—	—	—	—	—
East Sussex	—	11.9	13.9	12.6	16.9	1.0
Brighton and Hove	—	7.1	6.7	7.7	7.7	0.0
Total former East Sussex area	18.3	19.0	20.6	20.3	24.6	1.0
Former Hampshire	61.4	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	—	48.9	48.3	50.1	42.9	4.0
Portsmouth	—	11.0	9.0	14.0	11.0	2.0
Southampton	—	10.0	11.6	12.7	12.7	0.0
Total former Hampshire area	61.4	69.9	68.9	76.8	66.6	6.0
Former Leicestershire	26.2	0.0	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire	—	21.1	22.6	24.6	21.1	2.0
Leicester	—	12.7	13.3	12.7	21.0	5.0
Rutland	—	0.4	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0
Total former Leicestershire area	26.2	34.2	35.9	37.8	42.1	7.0
Former Staffordshire	28.0	—	—	—	—	—
Staffordshire	—	21.0	20.0	22.4	18.5	6.0
Stoke on Trent	—	6.1	8.0	6.2	6.1	0.0
Total former Staffordshire area	28.0	27.1	28.0	28.6	24.6	6.0
Former Wiltshire	13.2	—	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire	—	14.3	20.9	15.6	14.1	0.0
Swindon	—	5.9	4.9	6.5	6.7	0.0
Total former Wiltshire area	13.2	20.2	25.8	22.1	20.8	0.0
Former Berkshire	20.6	20.2	—	—	—	—
Bracknell Forest	—	—	3.0	3.0	3.0	0.0
Windsor and Maidenhead	—	—	6.6	6.0	5.2	1.0
West Berkshire	—	—	5.4	5.8	8.3	1.0
Reading	—	—	4.0	5.0	4.5	1.0
Slough	—	—	4.9	7.7	9.7	0.0
Wokingham			4.9	5.0	5.0	1.0
Total former Berkshire area	20.6	20.2	28.8	32.5	35.7	4.0
Former Cambridgeshire	19.5	19.5	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	19.0	18.3	16.8	1.0
Peterborough	—	—	6.5	6.5	6.6	0.0
Total former Cambridgeshire area	19.5	19.5	25.5	24.8	23.4	1.0
Former Cheshire	30.1	27.8	—	—	—	—
Cheshire	—	—	18.8	23.8	18.4	15.0
Halton	—	—	4.0	5.0	5.0	0.0
Warrington	—	—	6.0	10.1	6.0	2.0
Total former Cheshire area	30.1	27.8	28.8	38.9	29.4	17.0
Former Devon	34.8	33.2	—	—	—	—
Devon	—	—	20.8	18.9	21.5	0.0
Plymouth	—	—	9.5	9.4	9.5	0.0
Torbay	—	—	3.6	3.5	3.5	0.0

Educational psychologists (full-time equivalent)

LEA	In service 1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	FT vacancies 2001
Total former Devon area	34.8	33.2	33.9	31.8	34.5	0.0
Former Essex	63.3	60.5	—	—	—	—
Essex	—	—	45.6	47.6	52.4	1.0
Southend on Sea	—	—	4.0	5.0	5.8	1.0
Thurrock	—	—	4.5	7.5	6.0	1.0
Total former Essex area	63.3	60.5	54.1	60.1	64.2	3.0
Former Hereford and Worcestershire	22.0	20.2	—	—	—	—
Herefordshire	—	—	4.7	5.7	5.6	0.0
Worcestershire	—	—	19.8	18.7	22.6	0.0
Total former Hereford and Worcester area	22.0	20.2	24.5	24.4	28.2	0.0
Former Kent	55.8	50.2	—	—	—	—
Kent	—	—	37.7	43.6	42.4	5.0
Medway	—	—	9.5	10.1	9.5	0.0
Total former Kent area	55.8	50.2	47.2	53.7	51.9	5.0
Former Lancashire	55.3	51.9	—	—	—	—
Lancashire	—	—	40.5	43.3	42.1	1.0
Blackburn with Darwen	—	—	8.0	9.0	8.0	0.0
Blackpool	—	—	5.0	5.5	6.5	0.0
Total former Lancashire area	55.3	51.9	53.5	57.8	56.6	1.0
Former Nottinghamshire	32.9	30.8	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	—	—	22.8	25.3	25.8	1.0
Nottingham	—	—	9.2	9.4	15.1	0.0
Total former Nottinghamshire area	32.9	30.8	32.0	34.7	40.9	1.0
Former Shropshire	13.0	13.1	—	—	—	—
Shropshire	—	—	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Telford and Wrekin	—	—	13.6	14.5	16.9	0.0
Total former Shropshire area	13.0	13.1	13.6	14.5	16.9	0.0
Cornwall	13.0	13.0	13.0	12.8	13.4	0.0
Cumbria	17.2	17.2	17.0	19.9	23.6	2.0
Gloucestershire	8.5	8.5	17.5	18.2	19.1	0.0
Hertfordshire	34.6	34.9	35.8	35.3	32.4	3.0
Isle of Wight	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	0.0
Lincolnshire	18.8	15.4	17.0	17.0	19.0	1.0
Norfolk	24.0	21.5	23.5	20.5	20.5	4.0
Northamptonshire	23.4	29.1	28.4	28.1	25.6	4.0
Northumberland	9.2	8.5	8.5	14.5	9.1	0.0
Oxfordshire	17.9	19.9	18.8	21.1	22.2	0.0
Somerset	16.3	16.8	20.5	23.5	23.8	0.0
Suffolk	15.8	19.8	19.8	19.3	18.7	2.0
Surrey	34.2	31.2	31.2	34.3	37.0	2.0
Warwickshire	14.8	14.6	18.0	19.9	16.1	0.0
West Sussex	21.8	22.7	21.5	23.6	26.2	3.0
Total England	1,767.6	1,788.1	1,866.5	1,928.7	1,954.4	176.0

Source:
Annual form 618G surveys of teachers in service and teacher vacancies.

Speech Therapy Services

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has given to schools and local education authorities about gaining access to speech therapy services for children with relevant special education needs. [51054]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Access to speech and language therapy services is covered in Chapter 8 of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice, published by the Department in November 2001. There is also a booklet on the role of health professionals in the SEN Toolkit which issued alongside the code.

Under the SEN category of the Standards Fund, grant support is available to all English local education authorities to enhance speech and language therapy services in conjunction with the NHS and voluntary sector. Such support was recommended in the report of the working group on the provision of speech and language therapy services to children with SEN, published in November 2000.

Education Act

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which children are not treated as part of the population of a local authority area for the purposes of section 13 of the Education Act 1996. [51175]

Mr. Timms: Section 13 of the Education Act 1996 (the 1996 Act) sets out the general responsibility of the local education authority to provide primary, secondary and further education to meet the needs of the population of the area concerned, exclusive of the duties of further and higher education funding councils. This section applies to all children in the area of the local authority concerned, except that none of the LEA's duties under the 1996 Act applies in respect of any person who is in custody because of a court order or an order of recall made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

School Standards and Framework Act

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which children are not included as being part of a local education authority's area, for the purposes of section 118 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, other than those described in subsections 118(1)(a) and (b). [51177]

Mr. Timms: Section 118 of the School Standards and Framework Act sets out the duty of the local education authority (LEA) in respect of nursery education. It imposes a duty on the LEA to secure that sufficient nursery education for children who have not attained compulsory school age is provided for their area, whether or not by the LEA. However, section 562 of the Education Act 1996 provides that none of the LEA's duties under that Act are to apply in respect of any person in custody because of a court order or because of an order of recall made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Performance Targets

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what performance indicators and targets local education authorities are expected to agree with her Department for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03, showing the period covered by the target or indicator and the date by which agreement should be achieved. [51295]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* LEAs agree targets with my Department through their Education Development Plans. LEAs were required to submit the second generation of EDPs in January. I approved the majority of plans at the end of March. There are a small number of authorities that have yet to receive approval for their plan from their councils, all council approval is expected by the beginning of June. The targets in the EDPs are for the academic years 2002–03 and 2003–04 and were set for:

Key Stage 2 literacy and numeracy at level 4 and above and level 5 and above

Key Stage 3 English, maths, science and ICT at level 5 and above

Key Stage 4 percentage to achieve five or more GCSE A*-C, percentage to achieve five or more GCSE at A*-G including English and maths, average point score per pupil

Key Stage 4 children leaving care at 16+ to achieve five or more GCSE at A*-C and children leaving care with one or more GCSE at A*-G

Attendance targets for primary, secondary and special schools

KS2, KS3 and GCSE/GNVQ actual and target performances for minority ethnic groups.

The only changes from the first EDPs are that there are attendance targets rather than unauthorised absences, and that exclusion targets are no longer required.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what are *(a)* the agreed performance targets for (i) unauthorised absence, (ii) exclusions, (iii) key stage 2 tests, (iv) GCSEs and (v) A-levels and *(b)* the performance against those targets, for each local education authority in London in the most recent year for which information is available. [51296]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Performance targets for unauthorised absence, exclusions, key stage 2 tests and GCSEs were agreed by London Education Authorities in their Education Development Plans covering school years 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02.

Performance targets for key stage 2 tests and GCSEs were agreed by London Education Authorities in their Education Development Plans covering the school years 2002 to 2007. LEAs were not required to agree exclusion targets for 2003 onwards, and absence targets have been altered to include authorised absence figures as well as unauthorised absence figures.

The latest information on these targets together with the performance results for the years 1999, 2000 and 2001 have been placed in the Library.

Local education authorities do not agree A-Level performance targets.

Student Transport

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who is responsible for providing funding for transport for post-16 students in Essex; and how much funding is being provided for transport for post-16 students in Essex in the current academic year. [51299]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Essex local education authority has a duty to provide and fund transport support for its post-16 students, where the Authority assesses that this is necessary under Section 509 of the 1966 Education Act.

Account is taken of transport costs in calculating the Revenue Support Grant, however, there is no specific grant. Local education authorities (LEAs) and colleges also receive Learner Support Funds to help with the costs of student support, including transport.

In 2001–02, Essex local education authority planned to spend £1.5 million on transport for students aged-16 and over. Additionally, a further £880,000 was planned to support students with special needs.

Sixth Form Funding

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress her Department has made on equalising funding for sixth form funding for schools and colleges. [51301]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are making a substantial investment in FE. We are putting an extra £237 million into the sector in 2002–03 alone, a 3 per cent. real terms increase. Total funding per student has gone up by 16 per cent. in real terms since 1997. For the academic year 2002–03 the Learning and Skills Council is raising its funding rates for courses delivered by FE sector colleges by 2.5 per cent. in cash terms, the highest increase for years. The Government remains committed to bringing up the level of funding for colleges towards that of schools. We are looking to the current spending review to secure the resources colleges need to deliver our ambitious agenda for FE, and thereby to bring up funding levels.

Community Champions Funds

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what awards have been made under the Community Champions Funds to projects in *(a)* the

Buckingham constituency, *(b)* Buckinghamshire and *(c)* England, indicating the (i) date of award, (ii) amount awarded and (iii) details of the project in each case. [51383]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: To date, in excess of 3,500 individuals and small community groups have been awarded grants by the Community Champions Fund. Grants of up to £2,000 have been awarded in all English regions. The total amount awarded by the Community Champions Fund since 1999 is £4.5 million.

During the lifetime of the Community Champions Fund, only one application for funding has been received from Buckinghamshire. This was supported with a grant of £1,710. The project, known as SKIDZ, is focused on the Black and Minority Ethnic young people and their parents in the region. It encourages support for community education and capitalises on young people's interest in motor vehicles in order to do this.

Teacher Trainees

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher trainees are enrolled on *(a)* part-time PGCE courses and *(b)* school centred initial teacher training [51590]

Mr. Timms: In 2001–02, 827 new entrant and continuing teacher trainees enrolled on part-time PGCE courses in England. 1,213 trainees entered courses based in School Centred Initial Teacher Training.

The figures include forecast recruitment to courses starting in the spring and summer 2002 terms.

Source:

2001 Teacher Training Agency ITT Trainee Numbers Census.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher trainees are enrolled in two-year full-time subject conversion PGCE courses; and how many of these trainees are in their second year. [51591]

Mr. Timms: In 2001–02, 844 trainees enrolled on two-year, full-time, PGCE courses in England. Of those, 351 are on the second year of their course.

The figures include forecast recruitment to courses starting in the spring and summer 2002 terms.

Source:

2001 Teacher Training Agency ITT Trainee Numbers Census.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher trainees are enrolled in flexible postgraduate teacher training provision. [51596]

Mr. Timms: In 2001–02, 1,764 new entrant and continuing teacher trainees enrolled on flexible Postgraduate Initial Teacher Training (PGCE) courses in England.

The numbers include forecast recruitment to courses starting in the spring and summer 2002 terms.

Source:

2001 Teacher Training Agency ITT Trainee Numbers Census.

Secondary Teachers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the number of secondary teachers that will be needed in schools in England in 2005. [51628]

Mr. Timms: Head teachers and governing bodies are best placed to decide on their schools' staffing requirements in the light of local circumstances and the available resources. For their part, the Government are working to improve the overall total number of teachers available for appointment and to increase the funding available to schools to pay for them.

Between January 1997 and January 2001, the number of full-time equivalent regular teachers working in the maintained schools sector in England rose by 10,990. Of those, 7,250 were employed in secondary schools. The Government have pledged to secure a further increase for the maintained sector of at least 10,000 regular teachers by 2006. The proposals to make more creative use of school support staff that my right hon. Friend described in her speech to the Social Market Foundation on 12 November will help to ensure that schools are able to use these teachers' professional skills to maximum effect.

Education Policy Costs

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the cost in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of the (i) National Literacy Strategy and (ii) National Numeracy Strategy. [51592]

Mr. Timms: The following funding has been allocated through the Standards Fund to support the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.

	£ million
National Literacy Strategy	
2001–02	88
2001–03	103
National Numeracy Strategy	
2001–02	98
2001–03	103

School Violence

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many physical assaults by pupils on other pupils occurred in *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary, *(c)* special and *(d)* all schools in England in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [51594]

Mr. Timms: This information is not available centrally.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in his Department. [41008]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This answer covers the Headquarters of the Lord Chancellor's Department, (including Associated Office), the Court Service and Public Guardianship Office.

The Department is currently undertaking an equality audit of pay and pay related systems in partnership with the trade unions. Once data have been analysed a formal action plan will be drawn up to address any unfair imbalances between groups created as a result of existing policy. Plans for on-going monitoring of the pay and appraisal systems will be formulated following the initial report and action plan. This Equal Pay audit will in addition cover the areas of ethnicity, disability and working hours.

The new pay and performance management arrangements for members of the Senior Civil Service will also be subject to equality monitoring.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many Private Finance Initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50280]

Mr. Wills: None of the Lord Chancellor's Department's PFI contracts have been subject to refinancing.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44883]

Mr. Wills: Contract signature was delayed on the following private finance initiative (PFI) projects:

CCS;

ARAMIS;

Libra;

Probate Records Centre;

Hereford and Worcester magistrates' courts;

Humberside magistrates' courts;

Manchester magistrates' court; and

Derbyshire magistrates' courts.

Contract signature has also been delayed on the following PFI projects which are still in procurement:

Sheffield Family Hearing Court;

East Anglia Scheme;

Exeter Combined Court;

Avon and Somerset magistrates' courts; and

Bedford magistrates' court.

Contract signature has also been delayed on the Bristol Civil Justice Centre, which is a non-PFI public private partnership.

A project has been treated as delayed where contract signature has not been achieved by the date that was expected when the project was advertised in the Official Journal of the European Community.

Immigration Tribunal

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she last visited the Immigration Tribunal. [50709]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I visited the Immigration Appellate Authority in Leeds on 26 September 2001; Taylor House in London on 25 October 2001 and intend to visit Hatton Cross in the near future.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the 2002 departmental report will be published. [49582]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 774W, by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith).

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil Service (Recruitment)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the percentage of successful applicants to the Civil Service Selection Board who were educated at *(a)* public school, *(b)* Oxford University and *(c)* Cambridge University in each year since 1997. [50571]

Mr. Leslie: The Civil Service Selection Board does not record the schools that Fast Stream applicants have attended. Annex D of the annually published Fast Stream Recruitment Report provides an analysis by university of first degree of candidates each year. This data shows that the percentages of successful applicants who were educated at Oxford and Cambridge universities were as follows:

Percentage

	Oxford	*Cambridge*
1997	18.4	15.9
1998	17.4	17.0
1999	14.1	16.0
2000	17.8	14.3

Government Services

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to co-locate Government services in locations accessible to *(a)* parents of young children, *(b)* old people and *(c)* those without access to a private motor car. [49798]

Mr. Leslie: Electronic delivery of Government services provides the opportunity to bring them together in a convenient way for users, particularly those who find travel difficult. Over half of Government services are already available online, and all will be by 2005.

The citizen portal at ukonline.gov.uk provides comprehensive information and online services tailored to specific groups of users, including parents and older people, from a single website address. In addition, to assist people who do not have Internet access at home,

the Government is rolling out a national network of over 6,000 UK online centres providing convenient access in the local community.

Furthermore, ukonline.gov.uk will be available through a number of different channels—the first being digital television. A pilot of this, which commenced on 10 April this year, aims to bring Government information and services to those who would prefer to interact with the Government via a television rather than a PC.

Civil Contingencies Secretarial

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Civil Contingencies Secretariat comprehensive review of the country's plans for dealing with emergencies will be published. [49828]

Mr. Leslie: The Civil Contingencies Secretariat's review of the country's plans for dealing with emergencies is a continuing exercise whose findings are regularly reported to the Cabinet's Civil Contingencies Committee and its three sub committees. Generally, and in accordance with long-standing convention, these plans are not made public.

However, the responses to the Emergency Planning Review and a summary of these responses by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, have been placed in the Library of the House and placed on the website "www.ukresilience.info".

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in his Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50406]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office, the Government Offices, the Central Office of Information, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Government Car and Dispatch Agency all have separate delegated authorities over pay. The estimate of the cost of the pay increase at the time of the settlement for 2001–02 is presented in the table. The estimate of the cost for 2002–03 for the Equal Opportunities Commission is also presented. Costs for the other organisations cannot be given for 2002–03 because the pay increases have yet to be agreed.

£ million

	2001–02	*2002–03*
Cabinet Office[1]	2.2	—
Government Offices[1]	2.6	—
Central Office of Information[1]	0.7	—
Government Car and Dispatch Agency[2]	0.3	—
Equal Opportunities Commission[3]	0.2	0.2

[1] Refers to settlement year 1 August to 31 July.
[2] Refers to settlement year 1 April to 31 March and excludes non-industrial staff.
[3] Refers to settlement year 1 April to 31 March.

Consultation Documents

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which consultation documents published by Government Departments and their agencies in 2001 did not carry the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [49954]

Mr. Leslie: Responsibility for compliance with the Code of Practice rests with individual Departments and their agencies.

Government Documents

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of the consultation documents published by Government departments or their agencies in 2001 were made available on the internet. [49949]

Mr. Leslie: Monitoring and compliance with the Code of Practice on Written Consultation, including the requirement to make consultation documents available on the internet, rests with individual Departments and their agencies. The Cabinet Office does not, therefore, keep a central statistical record of the percentage of documents put on websites.

TREASURY

Form DOM1

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many completed versions of Form DOM1 the Inland Revenue has received in each of the last five fiscal years; and if he will make a statement. [38260]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that the publication of such statistics in a form which would enable me to say how many completed versions of Form DOM1 the Inland Revenue has received in each of the last five fiscal years would involve disproportionate cost.

State Pension

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action the Treasury has taken to quantify unfunded state pension liabilities in Britain and the European Union since 1996; if he will publish figures for *(a)* unfunded state pension liabilities and *(b)* unfunded occupational scheme liabilities for (ii) the UK and (ii) those EU countries for which comparable figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [48700]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government Actuary's Department estimates that as at 31 March 2001 the liabilities for UK unfunded public service pension schemes were about £350 billion and figures for schemes administered by Departments are now published annually in pension scheme Resource Accounts. We do not have comparable information for unfunded private sector schemes or for equivalent unfunded public and private occupational arrangements in other EU countries. On a slightly different basis the Government Actuary has estimated that, as at 1 April 1999, discounted future expenditure on the state pension from past contributions is £1,108 billion (as shown in Table 13.4 of Inland Revenue Statistics 2001, on the Inland Revenue website).

Comparable figures for state pension expenditures across the EU are not published by Governments. However, the European Commission's Economic Policy Committee (EPC) has published projections of annual expenditure on state pension-related expenditure as a share of GDP in EU member states (in the EPC report "Budgetary Challenges posed by Ageing Populations" of 24 October 2001). Since this study the UK Government

has announced the introduction of the pension credit from October 2003, which will slightly increase UK public pension spending as a share of GDP, although this expected to stay broadly around its current level in the long-term ("The Pension Credit: long-term projections", DWP, January 2002).

Pension Rights

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to public sector pension schemes of the House of Lords' ruling in February 2001 on the pension rights of part-time workers. [50035]

Mr. Andrew Smith: It is difficult to estimate precisely the numbers of part-timers eligible for retrospective access to public service schemes. But on the basis of estimates that up to 60,000 part-timers may be granted access, the resulting increase in the present value of public service pension liabilities may lie in the range of £0.5 to £1 billion. These pension liabilities will be payable over a period in excess of 40 years.

Small Businesses (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the economic prospects for small businesses within the Greater London area. [50589]

Mr. Boateng: In terms of business creation, the Greater London area continues to out-perform other UK regions. Recent figures show that the number of VAT registrations in London per 10,000 residents is 65 compared with a UK average of 39. However, as in all regions, the level of small business activity varies markedly across Greater London.

Small firms in London have access to a range of national and local policies and programmes designed to support new and small businesses. These include financial support (through schemes such as the Small Firms' Loan Guarantee Scheme) and business advice and guidance. The London Regional Venture Capital Fund will be up-and-running shortly provided £50 million of investment for small firms with growth potential.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 576W, on heavily indebted poor countries, if he will estimate the proportion of the additional $50 billion per annum which would be devoted to debt relief, broken down by country. [51278]

Mr. Boateng: The cost of achieving the International Development Targets has been estimated at an additional US$50 billion per annum, equivalent to a doubling of current global aid. The commitment by the US and EU is a major step towards meeting the requirements for this additional US$50 billion; there has not yet been full commitment to deliver the entire amount, nor decisions made on how such an amount could be delivered if the total was achieved.

Debt reduction under the HIPC initiative can therefore be only one element of the additional finance required. Both the US and EU have yet to decide on how to distribute this increased level of resources, we expect that one of the ways could be through debt relief.

At the moment the HIPC initiative is helping to increase social expenditures in countries receiving HIPC debt relief by $1.7 billion in 2001–02, equivalent to 1.2 per cent. of GDP. On average, health and education spending account for 65 per cent. (40 per cent. on education and 25 per cent. on health) of the use of HIPC debt relief.

EU Energy Tax

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had at EU level on the proposed EU energy tax; and if he will make a statement. [50443]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government continues to take part in discussions about proposals for an Energy Products Directive.

Tax Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the *(a)* total cost and *(b)* cost per claimant to businesses for administering (i) working families tax credit, (ii) children's tax credit, (iii) child tax credit and (iv) the working tax credit in the last 12 months. [50992]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the costs to employers of operating the Working Families' Tax Credit and the Disabled Person's Tax Credit are given in paragraphs 40–46 of the regulatory impact assessments for the Tax Credits Bill 1999, a copy of which is in the Library. There are over 1.3 million recipients of these tax credits.

Employers are involved in administering the Children's Tax Credit only through implementing the PAYE codes routinely supplied by Inland Revenue, which include adjustments for the credit as appropriate. No estimate is available of the additional cost incurred by employers.

There have been no costs to employers in-administering the Child Tax Credit or the Working Tax Credit in the last 12 months.

Tax Liability

David Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on recent action which he has taken to ensure that the full tax liability is paid by very wealthy individuals. [51000]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Whilst recognising the right of businesses and individuals to manage their tax affairs efficiently, the Government is committed to ensuring a fairer tax system by countering abuses and contrived avoidance schemes. Each Budget since 1997 has included measures to secure the tax base and combat avoidance by blocking tax loopholes, including those used by wealthy individuals. We will continue to stop abuses of the tax system which benefit a small minority at the expense of taxpayers generally.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his 2002 Budget speech reiterated this commitment when he said that, "to ensure fairness for taxpayers and businesses, we must act swiftly to close tax loopholes and be vigilant against tax avoidance". He also announced that the Government is reviewing the complex rules of residence and domicile.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Utilities Contracts (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51880]

(2) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions) (Designated Date for the Securities and Futures Authority) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51888]

(3) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Climate Change Levy (Electricity and Gas) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51896]

(4) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Official Listing of Securities) (Transitional Provisions) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51904]

(5) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services Act 1986 (Extension of Scope of Act and Meaning of Collective Investment Scheme) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51848]

(6) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Exemption) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51852]

(7) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Open-Ended Investment Companies Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51856]

(8) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Capital Allowances (Energy-Saving Plant and Machinery) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51860]

(9) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Commencement No. 5) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51864]

(10) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions) (Authorised Persons etc.) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51868]

(11) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Variation of Threshold Conditions) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51872]

(12) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (EEA Passport Rights) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51876]

(13) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions) (Ombudsman Schemes and Complaints Scheme) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51884]

(14) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Climate Change Levy (Combined Heat and Power Stations) Prescribed Conditions and Efficiency Percentages Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51892]

(15) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 4) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51900]

(16) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Personal Portfolio Bonds (Tax) (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51908]

(17) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Disclosure of Confidential Information) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51832]

(18) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulations Relating to Money Laundering) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51834]

(19) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) (Miscellaneous) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51836]

(20) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Disclosure of Information by Prescribed Persons) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51838]

(21) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Social Security (Contributions) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51840]

(22) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Financial Promotion) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51842]

(23) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 5) (Northern Ireland) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51844]

(24) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services (EEA Passport Rights) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51846]

(25) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 7) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51878]

(26) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Commencement No. 4 and Transitional Provision) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51882]

(27) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 6) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51890]

(28) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Capital Gains Tax (Gilt-Edged Securities) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51898]

(29) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Public Offers of Securities (Exemptions) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51906]

(30) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Underlying Tax on Dividends and Dual Resident Company) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51850]

(31) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Designated Professional Bodies) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51854]

(32) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Dissolution of the Insurance Brokers Registration Council) (Consequential Provisions) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51858]

(33) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the National Savings Stock Register (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51862]

(34) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Insolvency) (Definition of "Insurer") Order; and if he will make a statement; [51866]

(35) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Controllers) (Exemption) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51870]

(36) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Consultation with Competent Authorities) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51874]

(37) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Stamp Duty Reserve Tax (TradePoint) (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51886]

(38) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Climate Change Levy (Use as Fuel) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51894]

(39) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Consequential Amendments) (Pre-Commencement Modifications) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51902]

(40) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions and Savings) (Civil Remedies, Discipline, Criminal Offences etc) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51910]

(41) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Service of Notices) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51847]

(42) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Collective Investment Schemes Constituted in Other EEA States) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51881]

(43) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 6) (Northern Ireland) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51889]

(44) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Income Tax (Car Benefits) (Reduction of Value of Appropriate Percentage) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51897]

(45) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Official Listing of Securities) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51905]

(46) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions and Savings) (Rules) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51849]

(47) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Appointed Representatives) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51853]

(48) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Commencement No. 2) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51857]

(49) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Communications by Auditors) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51861]

(50) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Financial Promotion) (Amendment) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51865]

(51) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions) (Controllers) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51869]

(52) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Appointed Representatives) (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51873]

(53) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions) (Reviews of Pensions Business) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51877]

(54) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Conversion of Buildings) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51885]

(55) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Climate Change Agreements (Energy-intensive Installations) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51893]

(56) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions, Repeals and Savings) (Financial Services Compensation Scheme) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51901]

(57) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) (Miscellaneous) (No. 2) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51909]

(58) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Compensation Scheme: Electing Participants) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51833]

(59) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Commencement No. 3) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51835]

(60) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Building Societies (Restricted Transactions) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51837]

(61) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 Competition Information) (Specification of Enactment etc) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51839]

(62) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (New Deal Consequential Amendments) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51841]

(63) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Markets and Insolvency (Settlement Finality) (Revocation) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51843]

(64) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 5) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51845]

(65) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Gaming Contracts) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51875]

(66) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 7) (Northern Ireland) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51879]

(67) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Meaning of "Policy" and "Policy holder") Order; and if he will make a statement; [51883]

(68) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits Up-rating Order; and if he will make a statement; [51891]

(69) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 4) (Northern Ireland) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51899]

(70) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax to Museums and Galleries) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51907]

(71) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Carrying on Regulated Activities by Way of Business) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51851]

(72) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Professions) (Non-Exempt Activities) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51855]

(73) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (New Deal Consequential Amendments) (Northern Ireland) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51859]

(74) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Mutual Societies) Order; and if he will make a statement; [51863]

(75) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Law Applicable to Contracts of Insurance) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51867]

(76) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Own-initiative Power) (Overseas Regulations) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51871]

(77) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Rights of Action) Regulations (Commencement); and if he will make a statement; [51887]

(78) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Climate Change Levy (Solid Fuel) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [51895]

(79) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Offers of Securities) Order; and if he will make a statement. [51903]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 976–82W.

HEALTH

GP Registrars

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of GP registrars intending not to work full-time on qualifying. [39205]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Information is not collected or held centrally on the future working intentions of GP registrars.

Ambulance Service

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of responses was achieved

to *(a)* Category A calls within eight minutes and *(b)* category B calls within 14 minutes in (i) Q4 2000–01, (ii) Q1 2001–02, (iii) Q2 2001–02 and (iv) Q3 2001–02 by urban ambulance services. [46288]

Ms Blears: Information about ambulance responses to emergency calls is not available on a quarterly basis. The most recent information available for urban and all other ambulance NHS trusts about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response times is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Latest provisional management information indicates that at February 2002, 28 out of the 32 ambulance trusts in England were achieving our key target of responding to 75 per cent. of immediately life threatening '999 calls' within eight minutes (category A). All ambulance trusts are expected to achieve the 75 per cent. target during 2002.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the average turnaround times for ambulance crew for *(a)* England, *(b)* NHS trusts and *(c)* each NHS region in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [42896]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Agency Nurses

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what transitional arrangements he intends to introduce to enable criminal records checks to be made in respect of agency nurses in the first year of operation of Criminal Records Bureau disclosures. [41713]

Jacqui Smith: Paragraph 6(c) of the Care Standards Act 2000 (Commencement No. 9 (England) and Transitional and Savings Provisions) order 2001 sets out the transitional arrangements for the provision to the National Care Standards Commission of documentation relating to criminal record certificates in respect of persons supplied by existing licensed nurses agencies.

Health Staff

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* cancer specialists and *(d)* consultants per 1,000 head of population there were in (i) St Helens and Knowsley Health Authority, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the North West, (iv) England and (v) Scotland in (1) 1998, (2) 1999, (3) 2000, (4) 2001 and (5) the quarter to 31 March 2002. [48662]

Mr. Hutton: The latest census figures collected are for September 2001, 2002 figures are not yet available. Liverpool health authority contains the data for Merseyside. The Department does not have figures for Scotland.

Available information is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS) Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including GMS practice nurses), medical and dental consultants, hospital medical staff within the cancer specialities and general practitioners by specified health authorities within the north west regional office area and per 1,000 population as at 30 September each year

	Headcount	*Per 1,000 population*
1998		
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including practice nurses)		
England	323,460	7
North west	46,990	7
QC2 Liverpool HA	4,370	9
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	1,720	5
All practitioners[1]		
England	29,700	1
North west	3,830	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	280	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	190	1
UPEs[2]		
England	27,390	1
North west	3,500	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	250	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	180	1
All HCHS Consultants		
England	22,220	0
North west	3,130	0
QC2 Liverpool HA	440	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	100	0
All cancer specialist staff		
England	5,350	0
North west	710	0
QC2 Liverpool HA	90	0
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	0
All cancer specialist consultants		
England	3,270	0
North west	450	0
QC2 Liverpool HA	50	0
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	0
1999		
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including practice nurses)		
England	329,640	7
North west	47,920	7
QC2 Liverpool HA	4,420	10
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	1,770	5
All practitioners[1]		
England	29,990	1
North west	3,900	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	280	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	190	1
UPEs[2]		
England	27,590	1
North west	3,600	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	250	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	180	1
All HCHS Consultants		
England	23,220	0
North west	3,310	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	440	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	100	0

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS)
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including GMS practice nurses), medical and dental consultants, hospital medical staff within the cancer specialities and general practitioners by specified health authorities within the north west regional office area and per 1,000 population as at 30 September each year

	Headcount	Per 1,000 population
All cancer specialist staff		
England	5,690	0
North west	760	0
QC2 Liverpool HA	80	0
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	0
All cancer specialist consultants		
England	3,360	0
North west	470	0
QC2 Liverpool HA	50	0
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	10	0
2000		
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including practice nurses)		
England	335,950	7
North west	48,540	7
QC2 Liverpool HA	4,620	10
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	1,790	5
All practitioners[1]		
England	30,250	1
North west	3,910	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	280	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	190	1
UPEs[2]		
England	27,700	1
North west	3,610	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	250	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	180	1
All HCHS Consultants		
England	24310	0
North west	3,430	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	450	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	100	0
All cancer specialist staff		
England	5,960	0
North west	820	0
QC2 Liverpool HA	90	0
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	0
All cancer specialist consultants		
England	3,530	0
North west	480	0
QC2 Liverpool HA	50	0
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	0
2001		
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including practice nurses)		
England	350,380	7
North west	49,720	8
QC2 Liverpool HA	4,800	11
0QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	1,910	6
All practitioners[1]		
England	30,680	1
North west	3,950	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	290	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	200	1

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS)
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including GMS practice nurses), medical and dental consultants, hospital medical staff within the cancer specialities and general practitioners by specified health authorities within the north west regional office area and per 1,000 population as at 30 September each year

	Headcount	Per 1,000 population
UPEs[2]		
England	27,840	1
North west	3,600	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	250	1
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	180	1
All HCHS Consultants		
England	25,690	1
North west	3,590	1
QC2 Liverpool HA	480	11
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	120	0
All cancer specialist staff		
England	6,380	0
North west	840	0
QC2 Liverpool HA	90	0
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	0
All cancer specialist consultants		
England	3,720	0
North west	490	0
QC2 Liverpool HA	60	0
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	10	0

Notes:
[1] All practitioners (excluding GP retainers) include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs, PMS salaried GPs, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS other.
[2] UPEs include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.
Headcount figures are rounded to the nearest ten, rates of population are rounded to the nearest whole number.
Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
Figures exclude agency staff.
Population data based on 1998 figures and projections for subsequent years.
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.
Office for National Statistics.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS)
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including GMS practice nurses), medicaland dental consultants, hospital medical staff within the cancer specialities and general practitioners by specified health authorities within the north west regional office area and per 1,000,000 population as at 30 September each year

	Headcount	per 100,000 population
1998		
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including practice nurses)		
England	323,460	654
North west	46,990	712
QC2 Liverpool HA	4,370	946
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	1,720	517
All practitioners[1]		
England	29,700	60
North west	3,830	58
QC2 Liverpool HA	280	60
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	190	58

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS) Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including GMS practice nurses), medicaland dental consultants, hospital medical staff within the cancer specialities and general practitioners by specified health authorities within the north west regional office area and per 1,000,000 population as at 30 September each year

	Headcount	per 100,000 population
UPEs[2]		
England	27,390	55
North west	3,500	54
QC2 Liverpool HA	250	55
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	180	55
All HCHS Consultants		
England	22,220	45
North west	3,130	47
QC2 Liverpool HA	440	94
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	100	31
All cancer specialist staff		
England	5,350	11
North west	710	11
QC2 Liverpool HA	90	19
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	6
All cancer specialist consultants		
England	3,270	7
North west	450	7
QC2 Liverpool HA	50	10
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	5
1999		
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including practice nurses)		
England	329,640	663
North west	47,920	727
QC2 Liverpool HA	4,420	965
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	1,770	532
All practitioners[1]		
England	29,990	60
North west	3,900	59
QC2 Liverpool HA	280	61
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	190	58
UPEs[2]		
England	27,590	55
North west	3,600	55
QC2 Liverpool HA	250	55
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	180	55
All HCHS Consultants		
England	23,220	47
North west	3,310	50
QC2 Liverpool HA	440	97
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	100	30
All cancer specialist staff		
England	5,690	11
North west	760	12
QC2 Liverpool HA	80	18
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	6
All cancer specialist consultants		
England	3,360	7
North west	470	7
QC2 Liverpool HA	50	11
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	10	4

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS) Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including GMS practice nurses), medicaland dental consultants, hospital medical staff within the cancer specialities and general practitioners by specified health authorities within the north west regional office area and per 1,000,000 population as at 30 September each year

	Headcount	per 100,000 population
2000		
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including practice nurses)		
England	335,950	672
North west	48,540	734
QC2 Liverpool HA	4,620	1,011
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	1,790	540
All practitioners[1]		
England	30,250	61
North west	3,910	59
QC2 Liverpool HA	280	61
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	190	56
UPEs[2]		
England	27,700	55
North west	3,610	55
QC2 Liverpool HA	250	55
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	180	54
All HCHS Consultants		
England	24,310	49
North west	3,430	52
QC2 Liverpool HA	450	99
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	100	32
All cancer specialist staff		
England	5,960	12
North west	820	12
QC2 Liverpool HA	90	19
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	7
All cancer specialist consultants		
England	3,530	7
North west	480	7
QC2 Liverpool HA	50	12
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	5
2001		
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including practice nurses)		
England	350,380	698
North west	49,720	753
QC2 Liverpool HA	4,800	1,058
0QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	1,910	581
All practitioners[1]		
England	30,680	61
North west	3,950	60
QC2 Liverpool HA	290	63
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	200	61
UPEs[2]		
England	27,840	55
North west	3,600	54
QC2 Liverpool HA	250	55
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	180	54
All HCHS Consultants		
England	25,690	51
North west	3,590	54
QC2 Liverpool HA	480	105
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	120	36

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS) Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including GMS practice nurses), medicaland dental consultants, hospital medical staff within the cancer specialities and general practitioners by specified health authorities within the north west regional office area and per 1,000,000 population as at 30 September each year

	Headcount	*per 100,000 population*
All cancer specialist staff		
England	6,380	13
North west	840	13
QC2 Liverpool HA	90	20
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	20	5
All cancer specialist consultants		
England	3,720	7
North west	490	7
QC2 Liverpool HA	60	13
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	10	4

[1] All practitioners (excluding GP retainers) include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (para 52 SFA), PMS Other

[2] UPEs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

Notes:

Headcount figures are rounded to the nearest 10, rates of population are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.

Figures exclude agency staff.

Population data based on 1998 figures and projections for subsequent years.

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census

Office for National Statistics

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the steps being taken to reduce the number of operations cancelled at short notice. [40827]

Mr. Hutton: From 1 April 2002 any patient whose operation is cancelled by the hospital on the day of surgery for non-clinical reasons will be offered another binding date within a maximum of the next 28 days or can choose to have their treatment funded at the time and hospital of the patient's choice.

On 5 March 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that the NHS Modernisation Agency would be developing good practice in operating theatres and ensure this is spread throughout the NHS. Initial guidance was issued in December 2001. Further guidance to improving operating theatre performance will be published later this year.

In addition, £8.5 million has been made available to assist NHS trusts in reducing cancelled operations. NHS trusts with the greatest challenges will receive £75,000 to fund a full-time manager and support from doctors to tackle the problem. They will have to meet specific targets set by the Modernisation Agency and their performance will be subject to monthly reviews. All other trusts will receive up to £35,000 incentive funding to help them reduce the number of cancelled operations.

The Government have also taken a number of other steps that will contribute to the reduction of cancelled operations.

A £100 million programme of investment was announced in November 2001. This will contribute to reducing hospital bed occupancy rates by purchasing additional operations in the private sector.

NHS Plan target to have 20,000 more nurses, midwives and health visitors, 7,500 more consultants, 2,000 more GPs and 6,500 more therapists and other health professionals by 2004.

Introduction of on-the-spot booking systems to ensure hospitals organise their clinic slots and theatre sessions more productively.

A programme of investment in NHS facilities, including Diagnostic and Treatment Centres, to create additional acute capacity and separate the bulk of routine elective care from competing emergency pressures.

Commissioner for Children

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to introduce a Commissioner for Children in England. [45958]

Jacqui Smith: The Government take the needs of children very seriously and are committed to improving safeguards for children. We are following with interest the developments both in Wales—where a Commissioner has already been appointed—and in Northern Ireland, where a similar course is being followed. We are committed to learning all the lessons from these initiatives that prove relevant to England. We have made major advances through the establishment of the Children and Young People's Unit, and the appointment of Dr. Roger Morgan as the Children's Rights Director and Professor Al Aynsley-Green as the National Clinical Director for Children.

National Care Standards

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people responded to the consultation on national care standards; how many welcomed the introduction of new standards; and how many did so subject to the provision of adequate resources. [41273]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The number of responses to the various consultations on national minimum standards was as follows:

Care homes for older people: 1,250

Care homes for younger adults: 500

Children's homes: 227

Fostering services: 68

Boarding schools and FE colleges: 141.

The overwhelming majority of respondents welcomed the introduction of new standards. This included the majority of providers even though they also highlighted the resource implications.

NHS Plan News

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many copies of NHS Plan News were returned for recycling by NHS premises. [42308]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* As part of the distribution management process for NHS Plan News, all NHS organisations and social service departments were asked to suggest the number of copies likely to be required by that organisation.

Only in the case of distribution errors or changes in requirements did the Department arrange for the return of copies. Amendments to the distribution database were immediate. It was not, therefore, necessary to retain information about copies collected or returned.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment has been made by the NICE on the effectiveness of TNF alpha blockers in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis; [42537]

(2) whether TNF alpha-blockers are available on NHS prescription. [42538]

Jacqui Smith: TNF alpha blockers are available on the national health service (NHS). All licensed medicines are available on the NHS unless they are listed on schedule 10 or 11 to the NHS (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992 which restricts prescribing by GPs.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on 22 March 2002, recommending the use in appropriate cases of etanercept for the treatment of juvenile idiopathic arthritis and etanercept and infliximab for rheumatoid arthritis.

NICE's guidance is available on the internet at www.nice.org.uk or by writing to NICE at 11 Strand, London, WC2N 5HR.

Patients Charter

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Patient's Charter provides commitments to detained patients. [42941]

Jacqui Smith: The Patient's Charter for Mental Health Services applies to services provided by the national health service for people with a mental illness. It includes a section on care under the Mental Health Act summarising the rights of detained patients and drawing attention to the provisions and safeguards laid down within the Mental Health Act 1983 and the Mental Health Code of Practice, which protect patient rights.

Mental Health

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of delays in cases waiting for a mental health review tribunal hearing; and how many patients are waiting for a mental health review tribunal hearing. [42938]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is responsible for providing administrative support to the tribunal including the handling of applications and organisation of hearings. Every effort is made to ensure that cases of patients detained under section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983 are heard within the statutory time limit of seven days that is set out in the Act. All other applications are scheduled for hearing as soon as possible following receipt. During the period January 2001 to December 2001 20,274 application were received in England and 11,765 hearings were held. The difference between the number of applications made and the number of cases heard is accounted for by applicants withdrawing of their own volition, adjournment of hearings on the authority of the regional chairmen, change in status of the patient's detention under the Act or discharge from detention by the responsible medical officer before the date of the hearing. Of 3,646 section 2 cases heard during the period 22 per cent. were disposed of outside the statutory time limit. The average waiting times for hearings are shown in the table.

Average waiting times (January to December 2001)

	Time
Section 2	7.5 days
Non-restricted	7.6 weeks
Restricted	18.8 weeks

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is allocated to mental health care per capita *(a)* for patients in prisons and *(b)* for patients who are not in prison, in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [43557]

Jacqui Smith: The majority of funding for mental health care is allocated as part of health authority general allocations and separate figures for mental health care are not available. It is not therefore possible to provide details of funding allocated to mental health care per capita.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many clinics *(a)* in London and *(b)* in England offer electric shock therapy for forms of mental illness. [48868]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

Schizophrenia

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans the Government have to improve training and support for families and close friends of people suffering from schizophrenia; [47916]

(2) what additional support and training for families and close friends of people suffering from schizophrenia has been put in place since 1997; [47735]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Mental Health (MHNSF), launched in 1999, sets out clear standards for the modernisation of mental health services by setting out new standards for the delivery of specialised assessment, treatment and care.

It covers the main issues for mental health services, for service users, their carers and those working in local health and social care communities, including action on stigma and inequalities in mental health.

In the MHNSF, Standard Six was set to provide support specifically to carers. It states that

> All individuals who provide regular and substantial care for a person on care programme approach should:
>
> have an assessment of their caring, physical and mental health needs, repeated on at least an annual basis;
>
> have their own written care plan which is given to them and implemented in discussion with them.

By October 2004, mental health services are expected to have identified and assessed all carers of those people with mental health problems as well as agreeing and implementing their carer support plans. To ensure that the friends and families of those people with mental health problems receive the information they need to support them in their role, the Department has produced a leaflet, "A Commitment to Carers", that informs families and friends what they should expect from mental health services. This leaflet was widely distributed not only to service users and their families but also to mental health services and helps to outline that modern, responsive mental health services need to acknowledge the importance of the support networks that families and friends provide to those people with mental health problems.

The NHS Plan, launched in 2000, states that:

> by 2004, 700 more staff will be recruited to increase the breaks available for carers, and to strengthen carer support networks. There are very few such staff at present. By then around 165,000 carers will be receiving the support they need to continue to provide care.

The Department is developing guidelines on a service specification for support of carers of people with mental health problems. These guidelines will be included in the Mental Health Policy Implementation guide by May 2002.

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research *(a)* has been carried out since 1997 and *(b)* is planned to assess (i) the importance of swift treatment for patients suffering from schizophrenia and (ii) the impact on their recovery of delayed treatment and care; [47924]

(2) what research is planned to assess the different rates of recovery of patients suffering from schizophrenia, according to *(a)* different social groups and *(b)* whether they received private or public care; [47920]

(3) what research *(a)* has been carried out since 1997 and *(b)* is planned to assess the effectiveness of different non-drug treatments and combinations of treatments, with particular reference to (i) one-to-one and (ii) group therapy for schizophrenia. [47917]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. In 1999–2000 MRC spent £17.6 million on mental health disorders research which includes the investigation, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of the whole spectrum of mental health problems ranging from mild depression to severe psychosis.

The Department has funded a number of projects on schizophrenia since 1997.

Ongoing projects

The CUTLASS Study: a multi-centre randomised controlled trial of atypical anti-psychotic drugs in severe schizophrenia.

The management of patients with a diagnosis of schizophrenia in primary care.

Group cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) for schizophrenia.

Implementing family interventions for people with schizophrenia in a routine clinical service.

South Thames evidence-based practice: implementation and evaluation (STEP).

Completed projects

Suicide in Schizophrenia: a systematic review of risk factors and review of effects of pharmacological and psychosocial treatments in preventing suicide.

A systematic evaluation of the clinical and cost effectiveness of 'atypical' anti-psychotics in the treatment of schizophrenia.

Systematic reviews of (i) comparative studies of depot neuroleptic drugs, and (ii) studies of oral *v.* depot neuroleptic agents for patients with schizophrenia: clinical, social and economic outcomes.

Systematic review of the effectiveness of day care for people with severe mental disorders.

The clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of the use of the newer (atypical) anti-psychotic drugs in the treatment of schizophrenia.

Development and evaluation of personalised patient information for patients with schizophrenia living in the community.

What factors are associated with continuing contact with specialist psychiatric services among people with chronic psychosis identified in general practice.

A pilot study of the mental health crisis cards.

Details of all Department of Health funded research are available on the National Research Register (NRR) www.doh.gov.uk/research.

A number of initiatives are either in progress or identified for future action. The Department has commissioned a literature review and scoping exercise relating to the early intervention in psychosis for the development of service models. Further primary research in this area may be required. In addition, the Department has also commissioned work in relation to services for women, in-patient care and assertive outreach. Although not explicitly targeting people with schizophrenia, they will clearly also be addressed as part of these studies. Future priorities include dual diagnosis (substance misuse and severe mental illness) and the management of mental health in primary care.

The Department has recently conducted a review of mental health research carried out in the NHS. Future research strategy will take account of the gaps identified.

Public Health

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on *(a)* the statutory responsibility for public health matters, *(b)* the responsibility for preventative action in support of public health and *(c)* the funding responsibility for these functions in cases where the boundary of a primary care trust is not wholly within or consistent with the boundary of a proposed strategic health authority. [43136]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* We have set out in "Shifting the Balance of Power: the Next Steps" the public health functions and responsibilities of NHS bodies. Necessary and appropriate legislation and regulations to implement these functions are being laid before Parliament.

The NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill currently before Parliament includes a requirement for each primary care trust to have a director of public health as a board member. This will form part of a public health delivery system which will have a strong public health team in every PCT focused on improving health, preventing serious illness and reducing health inequalities

in the populations served to ensure maximum improvement to health through prevention and other interventions.

In future the intention is that allocations will be made direct to primary care trusts subject to the passage of legislation through Parliament. PCTs will receive an allocation for their relevant population. Therefore the small number of PCTs who have partial co-terminosity with strategic health authorities will not be affected adversely nor will their use of funding to support public health programmes locally.

Cataracts

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was for cataract extraction in *(a)* England and *(b)* each NHS trust for each year since 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [44275]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the average median waiting time for cataract extraction in England and each NHS trust for each year since 1997–98 has been placed in the Library.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in his Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47798]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 were published in the Budget report on 17 April.

Fire Safety

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money he intends to make available this year to improve fire safety in the NHS. [47854]

Mr. Hutton: Every year we make available to national health service trusts significant funds in the form of block capital allocations for the purpose of improving fire safety together with other priorities. A separate figure for fire is not identified. Further, we are currently implementing the largest ever hospital building programme in the history of the NHS which is replacing increasing amounts of worn out stock with modern, high quality buildings, which is contributing to our drive to raise the standards of the estate.

Worcestershire Royal Hospital

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of car parking facilities at the new Worcestershire Royal hospital. [47591]

Yvette Cooper: I am advised that the car park requirements for the new Worcestershire hospital have been prepared by traffic consultants for the trust, using planning standards. Both Worcester city and Worcestershire county planning and highways officers have agreed the car park calculations for the site.

At a meeting on 10 January 2002 the Worcester city council planning sub committee approved the provision of 337 additional car parking spaces on the south car park and this work is due for completion at the end of June 2002. This will bring the total of available spaces on site to 1,322.

In the meantime, I am advised that the trust has negotiated with the new owners of the Ronkswood site to allow staff to park there until September 2002, freeing up car parking spaces for visitors. Two mini buses run to and from Ronkswood and various points around the Worcestershire Royal hospital between 6 am and 10 pm daily.

Adult Protection

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 941W, regarding protection of vulnerable adults, if he will list the relevant stakeholders that will be consulted in the exercise. [50504]

Jacqui Smith: We are planning to begin the consultation exercise in the early summer. The stakeholders that will be consulted will be all councils with social services responsibilities, a wide range of relevant independent sector agencies, the NHS and independent health care sector and employment organisations. The consultation document will also be published on the Department's website.

Residential Care

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average daily number of available beds in residential care for *(a)* mental illnesses and *(b)* learning disabilities in (i) St. Helens and Knowsley health authority, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the North West (iv) England and (v) Scotland in (1) 1998, (2) 1999, (3) 2000, (4) 2001 and (5) the quarter to 31 March 2002. [48664]

Jacqui Smith: Annual information on the average daily number of available NHS residential care beds for England, regional office areas and each NHS trust is on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity. Information on the number of places in local authority and independent sector care homes at 31 March for the relevant years in given in the table.

Information relating to Scotland is a matter for the devolved Administration.

Places in local authority and independent sector residential and nursing care homes for mentally ill an learning disabled people

Rounded numbers at 31 March

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
St. Helens and Knowsley HA				
Mental illness[1]	390	430	430	450
Learning disability	410	300	310	320
Merseyside				
Mental illness[1]	2,760	2,860	2,740	2,880
Learning disability	1,930	1,850	1,840	1,940
North West				
Mental illness[1]	9,300	9,910	10,030	9,620
Learning disability	5,390	5,020	5,440	5,360
England				
Mental illness[1]	66,500	66,180	68,760	68,880
Learning disability	53,480	55,290	57,410	47,090

[1] Includes homes for elderly mentally ill people

Source:
DH Returns

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the eligibility criteria for people with dementia towards help in meeting their costs should they require residential care; and if he will make a statement. [49925]

Jacqui Smith: The Government expect that access to care services should be determined on the basis of individuals' needs and risks to independence, rather than reference to particular health conditions or other circumstances. Guidance on fair eligibility criteria for adult social care will be published shortly.

When individuals need to enter residential care their eligibility for financial support from local councils, and the contribution they should make to care home fees, is determined in accordance with the National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Regulations 1992. All residents are treated equally under these regulations.

Stroke Services

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which general hospitals have plans to introduce a specialist stroke service by April 2004; [49733]

(2) what action he will take to ensure that general hospitals without a plan to introduce a specialist stroke service by April 2004 address this issue; [49734]

(3) if all general hospitals providing care for people with strokes have met the April 2002 milestone, as stated in the National Service Framework for Older People, to develop plans for the introduction of a specialist stroke service by April 2004; and if he will make a statement; [49732]

(4) what resources are available to assist general hospitals treating people with stroke to introduce a specialist stroke service by April 2004. [49735]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS National Planning Framework for 2002–03, published at the end of last year establishes the delivery of the milestones set within the National Service Framework for Older People including the first Stroke milestone of April 2002 as a national priority for actin and achievement. The year on year increases in the funding of the NHS and social care provide the basis for appropriate financial support and priority setting at local level in relation to the development of stroke care, depending on the starting point in each individual area.

Progress against the April 2002 Stroke milestone will be available in the summer. Informal reports from regional offices indicate that the milestone should be met in all but a few cases. Any hospital identified by the strategic health authority in this monitoring process as not having plans will be offered appropriate advice.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the target date of April 2001 for the establishment of new performance appraisal arrangements for all staff of the Food Standards Agency was met. [49225]

Yvette Cooper: New performance appraisal arrangements were introduced for staff employed by the Food Standards Agency with the first reports being completed from April 2001.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the result is of the examination by the Food Standards Agency, in co-operation with the Public Health Laboratory Service and others, of the best means of gathering data for the food poisoning baseline. [49213]

Yvette Cooper: At its public board meeting on 9 May 2001, the Food Standards Agency's board agreed that laboratory reports of the major foodborne bacteria, excluding those cases reported to have been acquired abroad, provided the most robust basis for setting the baseline for its target to reduce foodborne disease over a five-year period. Information on laboratory-reported cases is provided to the agency by the National Surveillance Centres. Based on laboratory reports for the year ending 31 December 2000, the baseline figure is 62,209. This was announced by the agency on 23 August 2001.

Hospital Beds

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available in *(a)* England and *(b)* each NHS trust in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [48923]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the average daily number of available and occupied beds for England and for each national health service trust in each of the last five years is on the Department's website:www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average daily number of *(a)* available beds open overnight and *(b)* occupied beds for wards open overnight for (i) acute wards, (ii) geriatric wards, (iii) mental illness wards (iv) maternity wards and (v) learning disability wards, in (A) St Helens and Knowsley Health Authority, (B) Merseyside, (C) the North West, (D) England and (E) Scotland in (1) 1998, (2) 1999, (3) 2000, (4) 2001 and (5) the quarter to 31 March 2002. [48663]

Jacqui Smith: Annual information on the average daily number of available and occupied beds for England, regional office areas and each NHS trust is on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Information relating to Scotland is a matter for the devolved Administration.

Advisory Group on Radiation, Risk and Society

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 438, what the membership is of the Advisory Group on Radiation, Risk and Society; what the *(a)* terms of reference, and *(b)* criteria for the choice of members are; and if he will make a statement on what guidelines individual members of the group have been given on (i) disclosing proceedings and ii) publishing material subsequently, that relates to the advisory group. [49689]

Yvette Cooper: The National Radiological Protection Board's Radiation, Risk and Society Advisory Group (R,RSAG) was set up by NRPB in 2001. The R,RSAG is an independent advisory group that reports to the board of NRPB whose minutes are published on the NRPB website (www.nrpb.org). R,RSAG membership and terms of

reference are set out. Members have been drawn from a number of academic disciplines. Criteria for membership are academic experience in how to explain risk in general and radiological risk in particular to the public and a willingness to serve. The constraints on membership are the need for a group that is not too big to allow views to be debated adequately and the need for several academic disciplines to be represented.

The group has discussed disclosure of its proceedings. It was agreed that the group's considerations and discussions would remain confidential until an agreed position was ready to be made public. Papers and reports from the group would be published but would not be released during the drafting process. Minutes of meetings would be published on the web.

Radiation, Risk and Society Advisory Group

Membership

Chairman

Professor Sir Kenneth Calman, University of Durham

Members

Professor Ruth Byrne, Trinity College, Dublin

Ms Deborah Cohen, BBC

Professor William Gelletly, University of Surrey

Mr. Edward McConnell, The Marlborough School

Professor Jim McQuaid, Royal Academy of Engineering

Dr. Michael Murphy, University of Oxford

Professor Nick Pidgeon, University of East Anglia

Professor Simon Wessely, Institute of Psychiatry

Dr. Hilary Walker, Department of Health, also attends by invitation.

Secretariat

Mr. John Croft, National Radiological Protection Board, Chilton

Dr. Roy Hamlet, National Radiological Protection Board, Chilton

Dr. Jill Meara, National Radiological Protection Board, Chilton

Terms of Reference

The assessment, on a continuing basis, of what the public wants to know about radiation, risk, and how society will be affected by such issues. It will do this by

Listening to the public and understanding their concerns. The telephone inquiries are a rich source of such information. This would include meeting with the public and pressure groups.

Providing education and information on radiation and risk.

Ensuring that the public know how decisions are made in NRPB, including the role of scientific experts, and public involvement.

Enabling the public to understand and be involved in decisions involving radiation hazards.

Raising awareness of NRPB.

Making the findings and recommendations from the work of R,RSAG widely available within NRPB and to other organisations.

Dental Care

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he plans to introduce free dental care to those who are unemployed or on low incomes; [49678]

(2) what NHS dental services have to be paid for and by whom; and if he plans to lower dental charges. [49677]

Jacqui Smith: Many patients receiving national health service dental treatment are either exempt from charges or can receive partial help with the cost. People who fall into the following categories are exempt from charges:

Aged under 18.

Aged under 19 and in full-time education.

Receiving income support or income based jobseeker's allowance.

Pregnant or has borne a child within the last 12 calendar months.

Receiving working families tax credits or disabled person's tax credits, which are not reduced by more than £72.20 per week.

Patients not entitled to free treatment may be able to pay a reduced amount under the NHS low income scheme.

Patients who are not exempt from charges pay 80 per cent. of the cost of their treatment, up to a maximum of £366 per course of treatment. The NHS pays the remaining 20 per cent., and any charges over and above £366.

There are no immediate plans to change the exemption categories or the proportion of the charge paid by patients.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the provision of NHS dental care; and what measures the Government have taken to increase this provision; [49675]

(2) how many dentists there are in the NHS; and what action can be taken if someone cannot gain access to an NHS dentist. [49676]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for the provision of dental services in England. Provision of services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the devolved Administrations.

22,439 national health service dentists were working in England at 30 September 2001. This includes dentists working in the general dental service (GDS), personal dental service, community and hospital dental services and salaried dentists in the GDS.

This figure is on a headcount basis rather than whole time equivalent and includes those working part time. Some dentists work in more than one dental service. These dentists will be counted in each service apart from dentists working in both PDS and GDS who are counted in the GDS only.

Following the Prime Minister's pledge the systems are now operating for patients to obtain national health service dental treatment by phoning NHS Direct. NHS Direct is handling about 10,000 dental calls a month and directing patients on how to access local services. Where local dentists are not registering new patients, NHS Direct will be able to inform them of other local arrangements providing access to NHS dentistry.

We are committed to ensuring that NHS dentistry is available to all who want it. In supporting this commitment the Government have invested over £100 million in the last two years. Significant resources have been invested in personal dental service pilots to improve access to NHS dentistry in areas with significant problems.

Glenthorne Youth Treatment Centre

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1082W, regarding the square footage of the property that has been empty since July 2000, if the Glenthorne Youth Treatment Centre in Birmingham is occupied and functioning. [50332]

Jacqui Smith: The Glenthorne Youth Treatment Centre closed in July 2000, and has been unoccupied since its pending proposed re-use by an NHS trust.

Senior House Officers

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received Professor Temple's report on the modernisation of the Senior House Officer grade; and when he will publish it. [49788]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Chief Medical Officer chaired a working group last year to advise UK Health Ministers on a modern structure for basic specialist medical training throughout the UK and on the resulting consequences for work force planning and service delivery. The working group comprised a wide range of interests including those from the profession, the national health service and education. Health Ministers expect to receive the Chief Medical Officer's report shortly when we will consider carefully a suitable publication date.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects NHS trusts in Lancashire to provide digital hearing aids; and if he will make a statement. [50541]

Jacqui Smith: Digital hearing aids are provided in Lancashire by the Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust, a first wave site. An announcement about which second wave NHS trusts will be providing digital hearing aids this year was made in my reply to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreman (Mr. Loughton) and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 465W. Fairfield hospital, Bury and Southport and Ormskirk hospital did express an interest but were unable to gain the support of the respective primary care trusts. No other sites in Lancashire expressed interest in this round. In addition to the second wave sites, we hope to be able to provide at least a further 15 sites with the training and equipment they need to start fitting digital hearing aids from April 2003. Trusts in Lancashire, together with others in England, have an opportunity to participate in this next phase.

Warrington Primary Care Trust

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names and areas of residence of those people who formed the interviewing panel for the appointment of non-executive directors of the Warrington PCT. [48962]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The interview panel was chaired by Miss Rosemary Cooper, who is chair of Liverpool Women's Hospital Trust and lives in Liverpool. The other panel members were Mr. Robin Brown, recently appointed chair of Warring Primary Care Trust, who live in the Warrington, South constituency, and Mrs. Marlene Armitage, who was the independent panel member and lives in Oldham.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with *(a)* local and *(b)* national bodies on the failure of the Warrington PCT to appoint a chief executive; and if he will make a statement. [48957]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The appointment of primary care trust chief executives is a matter for each individual PCT. However, I am aware that the Department's north west regional office placed advertisements in early December for the appointment of chief executives to seven prospective PCTs, including Warrington. It is disappointing that this has not resulted in an appointment in Warrington. However, I understand the PCT chair is actively seeking to appoint the high calibre person needed to take on the full range of responsibilities required for this large PCT and is currently re-advertising the post.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, (1) if he will make a statement on whether the board membership of the Warrington PCT is considered to reflect the geographical area it serves; [48963]

(2) how many people from the *(a)* Warrington, North and *(b)* Warrington, South constituencies applied for positions as non-executive directors of the Warrington PCT; and what percentage of applicants from each constituency were (i) interviewed and (ii) appointed. [48960]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answers 15 April 2002]:* Appointments to the boards of national health service trusts, strategic health authorities, primary care trusts and care trusts are now a matter for the NHS Appointments Commission. While the commission does not take into account or have information on constituency boundaries, it always aims to ensure as far as possible that board membership reflects the geographical area served by the NHS body. However, board members do not serve in any representative capacity and all appointments are made on the merits of the candidates involved, in accordance with the criteria determined by the Secretary of State and the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Of the 51 applications received for non-executive appointments to the board of Warrington Primary Care Trust, 28 candidates (54.9 per cent.) live in the Warrington, North constituency and 23 in Warrington, South (45.1 per cent.). Of the 13 candidates subsequently interviewed, six (46.2 per cent.) live in Warrington, North and seven (53.8 per cent.) in Warrington, South. All of the three non-executives appointed to date live in Warrington, South. A further two appointments will be made shortly.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of applications for posts as non-executive directors of the Warrington PCT which were not acknowledged. [48961]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* All applications for appointment to the board of Warrington Primary Care Trust were acknowledged by the National Health Service Appointments Commission on 12 October 2001. Those applicants who were not called for interview

will receive a further letter from the Appointments Commission very shortly explaining that they have been unsuccessful.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Warrington PCT is taking to tackle health inequalities in Warrington; and if he will make a statement. [48959]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Warrington identified health inequalities as one of its four key priorities in its Primary Care Trust application. Prior to its establishment, the PCT raised the profile of health inequality in Warrington with the Local Strategic Partnership and particularly through the Health and Wellbeing Partnership. A health inequality sub-group has been established as part of the Health and Wellbeing Partnership to bring a multi-agency focus and resource to tackle poor health in central Warrington. The PCT is working with partners to identify a Warrington Health Improvement Zone, which will form the focus for targeting resources in the future.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with board members of the Warrington PCT on their priorities for action; and if he will make a statement. [48958]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Throughout the consultation and preparatory period applicant primary care trusts have been able to contact officials at the former NHS Executive regional office to discuss any aspects of their proposal.

All PCTs need to deliver against key national priorities such as those identified in the NHS Plan and National Service Frameworks. However PCT's, as the most local NHS organisation, are best place to understand the needs of their local population. As part of their role to improve the health of their populations, secure the provision of services and integrate health and social care, PCTs will identify priorities for action locally, in addition to national priorities that meet the specific needs of their population.

Correspondence

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to correspondence dated 26 November 2001, from the hon. Member for Leominster on behalf of a constituent, Mr. Andrew P. Shaw, transferred from the Home Office in January. [48964]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* A reply was sent on 16 April.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1415W, on asylum seekers, what evaluation he has made of the protocols put in place by West Sussex Social Services Department and Sussex police for tackling unaccompanied asylum seeking children in danger of being victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation; and what recommendations he has made for other local authorities to adopt these protocols. [48646]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* We have been pleased to learn that the number of children going missing from West Sussex has substantially reduced as a consequence of the collaborative multi-agency approach that the Social Services Department, the police and others have taken. The Department is closely involved in supporting and leading developmental and collaborative work among all local authorities which have significant numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Photodynamic Therapy

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of people who will purchase photodynamic therapy privately in each of the next four years. [50057]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The Department does not routinely collect information on treatment carried out privately and we are, therefore, unable to provide an estimate of the number of people who are likely to purchase photodynamic therapy privately in the next few years.

NHS Finance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much ring-fenced money was made available for spending on mental health services on the Isle of Wight in financial years *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [50066]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Funding is as follows:

(a) 2000–01: £34,000 for child and adolescent mental health services.

(b) 2001–02: no specific allocations.

(c) 2002–03: £207,000 earmarked allocation for NHS Plan Mental Health.

Total funds available for mental health services include those provided in the former Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority are and not solely for services on the Isle of Wight.

Infant Vaccines

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to require NICE to give comprehensive assessments of new infant vaccines. [51602]

Yvette Cooper: Progress in development of new vaccines is reviewed regularly by Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI), the independent expert committee on vaccines for the United Kingdom. This committee comprehensively assesses new vaccines as they become available. The agenda and working papers of JCVI are available to National Institute for Clinical Excellence. There are no plans at present to change this arrangement although this is kept under regular review.

Telecommunications Masts

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research into health the Government have initiated following the recommendations of the Stewart report in respect of telecommunications masts. [51605]

Yvette Cooper: The Mobile Telephone Health Research (MTHR) Programme was set up in February 2001 following the publication of a report in May 2000 by an Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones under the chairmanship of Sir William Stewart FRS, FRSE on

"Mobile Phones and Health". Radio signals from handsets were identified as a research priority because localised exposures of people using phones are in general appreciably higher than exposures to the whole body from base stations. In both cases, however, exposures need to comply with exposure guidelines.

The first group of proposals agreed for funding by the Programme Management Committee has generally related to the areas of research identified in the Stewart Report. Although the main focus of much of the funded research relates to the use of mobile phones, in practice many of the experimental studies will also be valuable in providing evidence on any possible effects on people of exposures to radio frequency (RF) radiation from base stations. The agreed programme includes a study on exposures from the newer types of base station that are being introduced in urban areas. Details of research now underway are given on the MTHR website at www.mthr.org.uk.

A second call for proposals was issued last year and applicants have been invited to submit more detailed research applications which will be considered by the Programme Management Committee in the summer. The aim of this call was to extend the range of research being carried out under the aegis of the MTHR programme and some of the proposals are of direct relevance to exposures to RF radiation from base stations.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average health expenditure per person was in *(a)* St. Helens, *(b)* Liverpool, *(c)* Manchester, *(d)* London, *(e)* England and *(f)* Wales in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, (iii) 2000, (iv) 2001 and (v) the quarter to 31 March 2002. [48675]

Mr. Hutton: Expenditure per weighted head of population is shown in the table for St. Helens and Knowsley, Liverpool and Manchester health authorities, for all health authorities within the London regional office area and for England. Information for Wales is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales. Information for 2001–02 is not available until the autumn.

£

	Expenditure per weighted head		
Health body	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
St. Helens and Knowsley HA	594.89	658.59	749.06
Liverpool HA	613.87	736.12	887.35
Manchester HA	664.41	773.81	869.02
London	649.43	764.49	886.12
England	627.77	721.10	825.38

Notes:
1. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year.
2. Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.
3. The expenditure is the total expenditure of the health authority and the commissioning expenditure of the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board. The majority of drugs expenditure in 1998–99 and a smaller element in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is accounted for by the Prescription Pricing Authority and not by health authorities.
4. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting in 2000–01 where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.
5. Some health authorities act as lead commissioners for particular specialties or training which inflates their figures when compared with others and also causes differences between years. Other factors may also distort the figures so the results are not all directly comparable with each other and with answers to similar questions for previous years.

Source:
Health authority audited accounts 1998–99
Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–01
Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01
Weighted population estimates for 1997–98 to 2000–01

Pertussis

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlay the period time available to general practitioners to introduce the pre-school pertussis booster in 2001. [51603]

Yvette Cooper: In 2001, general practitioners were asked to switch from providing diphtheria tetanus vaccine to diphtheria tetanus pertussis vaccine as soon as they had received their supplies of the replacement vaccine.

Parliamentary Questions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham can expect answers to his Questions Ref. *(a)* 7597 (holding answer 15.10.01), *(b)* 7600 (holding answer 15.10.01), *(c)* 7606 (holding answer 15.10.01), *(d)* 24676 (holding answer 15.10.01), *(e)* 24341 (holding answer 15.10.01), *(f)* 12606 (holding answer 5.11.01), *(g)* 19224 (holding answer 29.11.01), *(h)* 26497 (holding answer 11.1.02), *(i)* 26496 (holding answer 11.1.02), *(j)* 26496 (holding answer 11.1.02), *(k)* 24681 (tabled 17.12.01), *(l)* 24310 (tabled 17.12.01) and *(m)* 24326 (holding answer 8.1.02). [37144]

Yvette Cooper: Pursuant to the reply given to the hon. Member by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 285W, replies to the hon. Member's questions were given as follows:

7597—12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1066W
7600—11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 829W
7606—11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 846W
24676—11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1062W
24341—12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1062W
12606—12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 990W
19224—22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 755W
26497—26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1061W
26496—11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 811W
24681—13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 473W
24310—25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 973W
24326—12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 321W.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 23 April 2002

TREASURY

Higher-rate Income Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 195W, which part of Table 3.4, Inland Revenue Statistics gives the yield from the upper rate of income tax which is forecast for the years *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02, *(c)* 2002–03, *(d)* 2003–04 and *(e)* 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [26695]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* Available estimates of liabilities from the higher rate of income tax are given in the table.

Higher rate tax

	£ billion
1999–2000	30.0
2000–01[1]	33.3
2001–02[1]	35.0
2002–03[2]	37.0
2003–04[2]	40.7

[1] Provisional
[2] Projected

These estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the April 2002 Budget.

Housing Market Renewal Fund

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the proposed housing market renewal fund. [51781]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* We have received a joint representation from the National Housing Federation, Key Cities Housing Group and the Northern Housing Forums, proposing a Housing Market Renewal Fund to address the serious problems experienced by areas affected by low housing demand. We are considering this and other proposals as part of the current Spending Review and our conclusions will be announced in due course.

Motor Fuel Smuggling Duties (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs and Excise officers have been employed on motor fuel smuggling duties in Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [50026]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* Up to April 2000, 25 Customs and Excise officers were employed to tackle hydrocarbon oils smuggling in Northern Ireland. The number of staff was increased to 118 in September 2000 and since January 2001 it has been further increased to over 160. The Government plan further enhancements to Customs efforts in this area during the course of this year.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue the insurance premium tax has generated since 11 September 2001. [51475]

Ruth Kelly: Figures for receipts of insurance premium tax are shown in the Office for National Statistics publication "Financial Statistics".

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason there is no financial allowance for those who collect insurance premium tax for the Exchequer. [51477]

Ruth Kelly: It has always been a general feature of taxation policy that those who are legally liable to account for tax should bear the cost of carrying out their obligations.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to raise insurance premium tax. [51476]

Ruth Kelly: As will be clear from the Chancellor's Budget statement on 17 April, he has no current plan to raise the level of insurance premium tax.

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the functions of his Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [42991]

Ruth Kelly: Three functions were outsourced in the last five years, as follows:

The Central Reprographic Unit was outsourced during 2000–01. The money saving is estimated at £70,500, and the percentage saving is estimated at 22 per cent.

Historic file storage was outsourced in early 2000. An investment appraisal showed that the outsourcing would result in savings using various assumptions about the cost of storage space in the current Treasury accommodation.

The Goods Inwards and Post Room were outsourced in April 2001. The estimated money saving is £46,400, and the percentage saving is estimated at 15 per cent.

Monterrey Conference

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he had at the Financing for Development Conference in Mexico on debt relief with the *(a)* IMF, *(b)* World bank and *(c)* regional development banks. [46656]

Mr. Boateng: No Treasury Minister attended the Financing for Development conference, where Her Majesty's Government was represented by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development.

Beer and Wine

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of beer and wine personally imported into the UK was imported in quantities exceeding the maximum indicative limit in 2001. [50043]

Mr. Boateng: Figures for the revenue evaded from cross-channel passenger smuggling of beer and wine in 2001 are contained in the HM Customs and Excise document "Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud" which was published with the November 2001 pre-Budget report and a copy placed in the Library.

The latest figures for the revenue avoided through cross-border shopping of beer and wine relate to 1999–2000 and are contained in the same document.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rate of duty pass-on he assumes to retail prices for each increase of 1p in beer duty. [50045]

Mr. Boateng: Calculation of the expected effects on consumer demand, resulting from changes in duty rates on excise goods, assumes that any change in duty is passed on in full to the consumer.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Treasury Model of the economy shows to be the consequences of changes in the rate of beer duty on *(a)* the wider economy and *(b)* net revenues. [50046]

Mr. Boateng: Estimates of the impact of changes in the rate of beer duty are given in "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs" published in November 2001 by HMT, and available in the House of Commons Library.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the impact of each 1p change in UK duty on the volume of smuggled beer. [50047]

Mr. Boateng: No estimate is available.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the loss of revenue from other taxes on the hospitality industry consequent on each 1p rise in beer duty. [50048]

Mr. Boateng: No such estimate has been made.

Illegal Meat

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tonnage of illegal meat has been confiscated by UK Customs over the last 10 years. [50452]

Mr. Boateng: Central records of Customs seizures of meat and meat products are available only from 2000. Records for calendar years 2000 and 2001 show:

2000: 2.88 metric tonnes seized

2001: 9.17 metric tonnes seized.

There were in addition in 2001 136 seizures where the quantity was not recorded by weight.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been raised in the first full year of the climate change levy; and how this revenue has been allocated. [50449]

Mr. Boateng: Climate change levy receipts up to 31 March 2002 are £551 million. However, CCL was introduced on 1 April 2001, and revenue was not received until July 2001. Due to start-up effects, therefore, 2001–02 is not a full year.

Revenue is recycled to business through a 0.3 percentage point reduction in employers' national insurance contributions. The levy package also includes a targeted programme of support measures for businesses investing in energy-saving technologies and practices. The levy package as a whole is intended to be broadly revenue neutral.

European Union Funds

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the UK contribution to European Union funds has been for each of the past five years; and how much the UK has received in its rebate in each of those years. [51239]

Ruth Kelly: The UK's gross contribution to the EC budget in 2000–01 and 2001–02 was £10.6 billion and £9.2 billion respectively; the UK abatement for these years was £2.2 billion and £4.4 billion respectively. Details of the UK's gross contribution to the EC budget together with the value of the UK abatement for earlier years can be found in Table 14a of the Departmental Report of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments (Cm 5116) published in April 2001.

Premium Bonds

Mr. David: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the *(a)* amounts and *(b)* number of premium bond cash prizes in the past three years. [51540]

Ruth Kelly: The figures are as follows:

Financial year	*Total number of prizes*	*Total value of prizes (£)*
1999–2000	6,924,869	447,366,000
2000–01	8,464,046	593,308,400
2001–02	8,674,844	552,367,550
Gross total for 3 years	24,063,759	1,593,041,950

BCCI

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department has paid Freshfields Solicitors in each year since 1991 concerning the litigation regarding BCCI. [51517]

Ruth Kelly: Nothing in any year.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what monitoring the Financial Services Authority conducts of the number of providers of financial services and investment business advice in *(a)* cities, *(b)* small towns and *(c)* rural areas in (i) England and Wales and (ii) Scotland. [51973]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA does not, as a matter of course, monitor the numbers of providers of financial services and investment business advice in *(a)* cities, *(b)* small towns and *(c)* rural areas. The FSA conducts appropriate

risk-based monitoring of all financial services firms authorised by it under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, regardless of where these firms are located.

Professional Body Registration

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many firms of *(a)* solicitors and *(b)* chartered accountants in (i) Scotland and (ii) England and Wales were registered with their professional bodies for the purposes of conducting investment business under the Financial Services Act 1986 in (A) 1986, (B) 1990, (C) 1995 and (D) 2000. [51970]

Ruth Kelly: The number of firms certified by their recognised professional bodies are as follows:

	31 March 1990	*31 March 1995*	*31 March 2000*
The Law Society (ie England and Wales)	7,207	7,272	6,591
The Law Society of Scotland	964	800	540
The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales	6,173	4,964	4,780
The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland	536	456	420

Figures for 1986 are not available, as the Act did not come into effect until 1988.

Gibraltar

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the potential liability arising from the current Gibraltar pension arrangements, should these be found to be incompatible with EC law. [45173]

Peter Hain: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made in the House on 16 April 2000, *Official Report*, column 453. I wrote to both the chair of the Public Accounts Committee and the Chief Minister of Gibraltar on 8 March to inform them that the contingent liability, in the event of a successful challenge in the European Court of Justice against Gibraltar's financial arrangements for those of pensionable age, was now estimated at £77 million. I also reminded the Chief Minister of Gibraltar that this liability would fall to the Government of Gibraltar as HMG have repeatedly warned them. I have today placed copies of both letters in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Publications

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if she will make a statement. [12272]

Mr. Morley: The Department has no information relating to the years in the question, as DEFRA was created in June 2001.

Undertaking a retrospective analysis using the resources of the predecessor Departments and policy divisions would incur disproportionate costs and the resulting information could not be regarded as reliable or specific to questions about DEFRA expenditure.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the publications issued by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34204]

Mr. Morley: As DEFRA was created in June 2001, retrospective annual data analysis is not available. Our records show that 491 publications were commissioned and produced by DEFRA at a total cost of £1,038,469.

Print production records are held by product/job code, not by publication title; to extract and tabulate these by title, would result in a disproportionate cost.

Circulation figures are between 500 and 180,000 depending on the target audience.

Postage expenditure for DEFRA, which is additional to production and distribution, was £831,049.

The purpose of these publications is to raise public awareness and to convey information to specific target audiences and stakeholder groups. They may have Government statutory significance, be an EU directive or provide guidance on one of the diverse range of subjects covered by DEFRA's ministerial responsibilities.

Departmental Name Change

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost has been to the public purse of re-branding her Department to accommodate its name change following the last General Election. [14449]

Mr. Morley: Our records currently show that the cost to the public purse of the re-branding of DEFRA following the last General Election was:

	£
Design—conceptual design and graphics	4,200.00
Stationery—print-related expenditure	21,804.00
New name plaques	4,763.00
Miscellaneous—production, installation of signage and photographic charges	2,977.00
Miscellaneous—forms control costs	950.00
Preparation of designs—graphics manufacture and the production of signage with alternative names, which were not chosen	14,798.00

Note:
All expenditure net of VAT

Carbon Trust Board

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those members of the Carbon Trust board with *(a)* skills and *(b)* experience gained from (i) central Government and the

devolved Administrations, (ii) local government, (iii) the energy supply industry, (iv) the energy efficiency industry, (v) the non-governmental sector and (vi) other sectors. [16320]

Mr. Meacher: The Carbon Trust is a company limited by guarantee and appointments to its board are not made by the Government.

Currently five directors are senior civil servants in national and devolved Government with responsibility for low carbon issues. Two of these also have experience of local government issues.

Seven other directors have direct experience of delivering energy efficiency, through the development and deployment of energy efficiency products and services and/or the management of energy budgets in private companies. Five of these directors also have energy supply experience, and four are closely involved with Government low carbon energy policy initiatives.

The remaining five directors work or have experience in the NGO and other sectors. One is environment director of a leading business representation organisation. One was recently a director of a leading investment bank. One is a leading trade union general secretary. One was recently the chief executive of a research council. One is the head of environmental policy of a leading green NGO.

Biographical details of all the Carbon Trust board members are available on the Carbon Trust website at www.thecarbontrust.co.uk.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the total real terms expenditure of her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if she will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36158]

Mr. Morley: As DEFRA was created on the 8 of June 2001 annual retrospective budget expenditure does not exist.

Our records show centrally funded budget expenditure for publicity activities that included advertising, press and public relations, for the period June 2001 till March 2002 totalled £3,196,519, this excludes expenditure relating to publicity and communications support in dealing with the foot and mouth disease crisis.

Further analysis, and information not held centrally for non-departmental public bodies, agencies and decentralised DEFRA budget expenditure could only be supplied at a disproportionate cost.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for her Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39918]

Mr. Morley: As DEFRA was created on the 8 June 2001 retrospective annual budget information is not available for the new Department. The budget for the Communications Directorate for DEFRA for 2001–02 was £10,264,900.

Non-departmental public bodies, agencies and DEFRA directorates, where the expenditure has not been centralised have not been included, as recovering this information would be at a disproportionate cost.

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost to his Department of litigation was in each year. [41114]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is not available.

Fluoride

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what tests have been commissioned by the Government to examine the effects of excess fluoride. [42978]

Mr. Meacher: So far as the effects on the aquatic environment are concerned, a review of the effect of fluoride on a range of aquatic life was carried out for the Environment Agency as part of the work in drawing up the Proposed Environmental Quality Standard for Fluoride in Water which was published in 2000. The review draws on research carried out by a range of recognized scientific laboratories. A copy has been deposited in the Library of the House.

As for tests to examine the effects on human health, this is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Waste Disposal Authorities

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of how much financial support *(a)* Merseyside and *(b)* other metropolitan waste disposal authorities will receive from central Government over the next financial year. [44308]

Mr. Meacher: Joint Waste Disposal Authorities (JWDAs) are funded by their constituent Waste Collection Authorities, not central Government.

However, the Government recently announced plans for the distribution of the £140 million fund for local authority waste minimisation and recycling schemes. Greater Manchester and Merseyside Metropolitan JWDAs may apply for a grant from this fund but the Government have made no estimate of how much either authority might receive, should they choose to apply.

Environmental Protection

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken to assess the *(a)* environmental, *(b)* economic

and (c) economic impacts of exploiting natural resources in environmentally fragile ecosystems; and what account these have taken of research on the circumstances of those areas assessed. [46556]

Mr. Meacher: In the appraisal of policies it is standard practice within DEFRA to consider the economic, social and environmental impacts of policy options, taking into account all relevant information. This will include the results of research relating to the area being assessed.

The environmental effects of development proposals are assessed in accordance with the EU Environmental Impacts Assessment Directive, and the Wild Birds and Habitats Directives. Consenting regimes take account of factors shown by environmental assessment by setting conditions to monitor and mitigate possible impacts on these fragile ecosystems. Additionally, in the marine zone we are working through the OSPAR Convention to develop and pilot ecological quality objectives for threatened and fragile ecosystems.

Farm Biodiversity Action Plans

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) since the launch of the farm biodiversity action plan, how many plans have been implemented and how much money has been spent on all plans; [48537]

(2) what monitoring systems are in place to ensure that the farm biodiversity action plans are properly implemented; [48540]

(3) of the farm biodiversity action plans implemented, what percentage have fully achieved all objectives within the individual plans. [48542]

Mr. Meacher: Farm biodiversity action plans are provided commercially by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), and are not implemented or monitored by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. DEFRA provides financial and other support to FWAG, but not specifically for farm biodiversity action plans.

Male Fish

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evidence she has received that male fish in inland waterways are changing gender; and if she will make a statement. [48560]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Results of a five-year research programme, funded by NERC, DEFRA, the water industry and the Environment Agency, were published by the agency on 26 March. This followed on from an earlier programme of research, which demonstrated the presence of feminised roach in a number of UK rivers, an apparent relationship between severity of feminisation and proportion of treated sewage effluent in rivers, and implicated natural and synthetic steroids in effluent as the causal agents.

The results of the second phase of research can be summarised as follows:

The continued presence of feminised male roach in several UK rivers was confirmed and reported in a second species, the gudgeon, although to a lesser extent.

In laboratory studies, severely feminised male roach produced fewer and less viable sperm than control fish. Consequently their fertility was reduced.

The oestrogenic (feminising) components in treated effluents include natural and synthetic steroids and alkylphenol ethoxylates and their degradation products, which may act in combination.

Natural steroids degrade rapidly in rivers, but synthetic steroids are more persistent. Some may adsorb on to suspended or bed sediments, although levels were below the limit of detection in field studies in two rivers.

There does not appear to be a problem with feminised male fish in every UK catchment and it does not seem to be an issue in Scotland.

DEFRA will be discussing these findings with the Environment Agency and the water industry in order to establish any implications for sewage treatment processes.

DEFRA, together with other Government Departments and agencies and the European chemical industry has also funded a programme of research to investigate whether endocrine disruption is occurring in marine life, including in estuaries, around the UK. This programme will conclude this spring.

Animal Health Bill

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reintroduce measures contained in the Animal Health Bill; and if she will make a statement. [48563]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The recent motion passed in another place has had the effect of suspending further consideration of the Animal Health Bill.

However, the Government continues to believe that the measures contained in the Bill are necessary and are a proportionate response to the very real threat of a future outbreak of serious animal disease in this country. Were there to be another outbreak of serious animal disease in the near future we would hope to see co-operation from Opposition parties in introducing any necessary emergency powers.

Processing and Marketing Grant

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to decide grants for the year 2002–03 under the Processing and Marketing Scheme [49321]

Mr. Morley: Decisions on awards under the Processing and Marketing Grant are generally made quarterly. In 2002–03, this will be in May, August, November and February. Regional Managers of DEFRA's Rural Development Service, who chair the Regional Appraisal Panels at which grant awards are made, may however hold such Panels more frequently if the number of applications to be considered are sufficient to ensure an appropriate level of competition.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what EU criteria there are regarding maximum and minimum grants for individual applications under the Processing and Marketing Scheme. [49322]

Mr. Morley: Maximum and minimum grants under the Processing and Marketing Grant were approved by the European Commission as part of national rural development programmes.

The England Rural Development Programme states that:

The maximum rate of grant will be 30 per cent. of the total eligible cost; There is a minimum total project cost threshold of £70,000. Projects may be of any size above this figure but there is a ceiling on the maximum grant payable of £1.2 million per project.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* maximum and *(b)* minimum amounts are payable to individual applicants under the Processing and Marketing Scheme in (i) cash terms and (ii) percentage terms. [49319]

Mr. Morley: The maximum cash amount payable to individual applicants under the Processing and Marketing Grant is £1.2 million on a single project.

The rate of grant under the Processing and Marketing Grant is 30 per cent. of total eligible costs.

There is a requirement for a minimum total project cost of £70,000. The minimum cash amount payable is dependent on the eligible costs of the project.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total budget was for the Processing and Marketing Scheme for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01, *(e)* 2001–02 and *(f)* 2002–03; and what the largest individual grant was in each year in (i) cash terms and (ii) as a percentage of the total sum of all grants. [49320]

Mr. Morley: The Processing and Marketing Grant was re-introduced as part of the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) in 2000. The previous scheme was closed in England in 1996.

A budget for the ERDP Processing and Marketing Grant was first held in 2001–02; this was £4 million. The budget for 2002–03 is £8 million.

The largest individual grant awarded in 2001 was £314,949.21 which represents 17.12 per cent. of the total sum of all grants approved in 2001.

The largest individual grant awarded in 2002 (to date) was £596,043 which represents 18.11 per cent. of the total sum of all grants awarded in 2002 (to date).

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the cost was to her Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated; [49111]

(2) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49153]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. friend the Leader of the House on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which Bills introduced by her Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans she has for the future use of such clauses. [49627]

Mr. Morley: None.

Meat Imports

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to change the legislation permitting visitors to the United Kingdom to bring their own meat for personal consumption. [50451]

Mr. Morley: UK import rules permit personal imports from third countries of no more than 1 kg of meat for personal consumption. This meat must be heat treated in a hermetically sealed container (e.g. a tin). This is somewhat more restrictive than EU rules. We have raised with the European Commission the need to tighten up EU rules on personal imports and we understand the commission are preparing proposals for further discussion.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if computer systems in the Rural Payments agency are capable of handling payments in euros; and if she will make a statement. [50458]

Margaret Beckett: The Rural Payments agency is operating a system for paying traders in euro where requested. This system covers schemes outlined in a statement by the Minister in 1998, for example export refunds, internal market schemes and intervention. Due to the complexities of the legacy computer systems direct aid payments to farmers are not yet covered.

The Rural Payments agency (RPA) has included euro capability in the design for its new business system. The needs of the RPA's customers will be central to the development work which we plan on completing by the end of 2004.

Communities

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has for the future assessment of community vibrancy according to parish. [50616]

Alun Michael: We announced in the Rural White Paper that we were asking the Countryside agency to bring together, and report on in their State of the Countryside report, a set of headline indicators including one on Community vibrancy, under the theme A Vibrant Countryside. This was to measure "percentage of parishes in four categories (vibrant, active, barely active, sleeping) assessed on numbers of meeting places, voluntary and

"cultural activities, contested parish elections". The purpose of the indicator is to measure on a national basis the trend over time.

The indicator which was first reported on in April 2001 in the State of the Countryside report is still under development and we recognise that there are a number of short-comings in the data from which it has been compiled. For instance, the indicator does not reveal the extent to which smaller settlements and parishes are able to take up community activities in neighbouring parishes. Furthermore, communities in all sizes of parish may exhibit community vibrancy in other ways than those assessed through the Rural Services Survey.

The Countryside agency intends to look at the whole issue again, through consultation on the methodology, rather than amending individual classifications. This will include working with DEFRA and the National Association of Local Councils. The revised approach will be piloted with a number of communities or their representative bodies.

Differing views over individual classifications is inevitable but the Countryside agency would prefer to address these in a review of the indicator rather than on a case-by-case basis. In particular, the naming convention of the groups may be re-considered to more accurately reflect the underlying information.

Refrigerator Disposal

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government expect to announce their intentions regarding the reimbursement of the additional expenditure incurred over refrigerator disposal. [R] [50867]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* An initial statement on funding for local authorities was made on 4 December 2001. The £6 million announced then was to cover costs in 2001–02. A Government announcement on further local authority funding will be made shortly.

Foot and Mouth

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the reliability rate of the computer model used during the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak to predict the spread of the virus; what percentage of error was expected from the model; if her Department has commissioned a new computer programme for predicting disease spread; and if she will make a statement. [51457]

Mr. Morley: The "Interspread" model was used extensively and on a daily basis in the 2001 foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. It proved to be of great value to epidemiologists as an aid to understanding the epidemic and providing advice on control. The simulation proved to be accurate in determining the ultimate size of the epidemic.

Two other models were developed during the course of the epidemic by research groups at Imperial college and Edinburgh and Cambridge universities. Results from all models were broadly consistent.

DEFRA is considering what future work it needs to commission into modelling of disease outbreaks and control measures and will be discussing its requirements with the relevant part of the research community next month.

Mari Geni

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the hon. Member for Scunthorpe's, answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 130, on the Mari Geni, under which sector of the United Kingdom fleet the Mari Geni was registered; and what was the total amount of *(a)* tonnage and *(b)* kilowatts the sector has been reduced by due to the decommissioning of the Mari Geni. [51445]

Mr. Morley: The Mari Geni was registered under the "Demersal trawls, seines and nephrops" segment. The vessel had a gross tonnage of 315 and a kilowatt power of 709.

Fish Quotas

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 375, on fish quotas, if she will make a statement on the relationship between the Shetland Island Council and *(a)* the Shetland Development Trust and *(b)* the Shetland Leasing and Purchasing Company; and how much money was expended by SLAP for the purchase of fish in the years (i) 1998 (ii) 1999 (iii) 2000 and (iv) 2001. [51443]

Mr. Morley: The relationship between the Shetland Island Council, the Shetland Development Trust and Shetland Leasing and Property Ltd. (SLAP) was explained in the Official Journal of the European Communities for 12 February, (*Official Journal*, 12 February 2002, c. 38–39). As stated in my answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 375, SLAP spent £2 million on quota purchase in 1998: there was no expenditure on quota purchase by SLAP in 1999, 2000 or 2001.

Advisory Panels (Political Affiliation)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the political affiliations are of each member of each existing advisory panel that she appoints. [51720]

Mr. Morley: Ministerial appointments to DEFRA's advisory committees, which are non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), fall within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments and are covered by the OCPA Code of Practice. Applicants are not required to declare their political affiliation and appointment is on merit.

For other bodies such as the Rural Affairs Forum for England, we did not request nor are we aware of members' political affiliations.

Departmental Consultations

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultations *(a)* her Department is conducting and *(b)* have been conducted by her Department since May 2001. [51416]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* *(a)* The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is currently conducting 22 consultations. These consultations are listed in reverse chronological order of deadline date:

Consultation	*Deadline*
Consultation on Stage II Petrol Vapour Recovery	9 July 2002
Review of seed certification in England: draft seeds regulations and registration, licensing and enforcement regulation	8 July 2002
Consultation on draft code of recommendations for the welfare of cattle	28 June 2002
Economic evaluation of the Apple and Pear Research Council	27 June 2002
Consultation on UK Ratification of the 1998 Protocol to the 1979 Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution on Heavy Metals	11 June 2002
Consultation on proposed Agricultural Development Scheme	31 May 2002
Consultation on Public Rights of Way: Rules for procedures for Inquiries and Hearings held under The Highways Act 1980, Wildlife And Countryside Act 1981 and Town and Country Planning Act 1990	31 May 2002
Consultation on proposals for amendment to the Potato Industry Development Council Order 1997 (as amended)	29 May 2002
Review of agri-environmental schemes in England	27 May 2002
Consultation on Food And Environment Protection Act 1985 (Part II): Charges for Licences to Deposit Materials At Sea and Approval Of Oil Spill Treatment Products	25 May 2002
Consultation on proposals for an EU Directive on environmental liability	24 May 2002
Consultation on flood and coastal defence funding review	17 May 2002
Consultation on Fees for Seed Certification 2002–03	13 May 2002
Consultation on fees for National Listing and Plant Breeders' Rights	13 May 2002
Consultation on developing a draft strategy for antimicrobial resistance in animals (VMD consultation)	7 May 2002
Consultation on detailed rules for determining the mesh size of fishing nets	6 May 2002
Consultation on an Animal Welfare Bill	30 April 2002
Consultation on the environmental impact of growing sugar beet	24 April 2002
Consultation on the Environment Agency's Objectives and Contribution to Sustainable Development	18 April 2002
Consultation on proposals for Regulations on Dedication of Access Land under Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	15 April 2002
Consultation on the Hills Task Force Report	See Papers
Consultation on the Deregulation of Livestock Quotas: Review of Overgrazing Controls in England	Suspended

(b) Since May 2001, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has conducted and closed the following 44 consultations, which are listed, also in reverse chronological order:

Consultation	*Deadline*
Consultation on proposals for Regulations on Dedication of Access Land under Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	15 April 2002
Consultation on conservation of native freshwater fish stocks—amendments to the Prohibition of Keeping or Release of Live Fish (Specified Species) Order 1998	1 April 2002
Consultation on quinquennial review and better quality services review of the UK Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS)	31 March 2002
Consultation on draft guidance to Local Highway Authorities on the preparation of Rights of Way Improvement Plans	28 March 2002
Consultation on quinquennial review of Horticulture Research International (HRI)	22 March 2002
Consultation on proposals for regulations on the exclusion or restriction of access to open countryside and registered common land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	22 March 2002
Consultation on changes to the EU sheepmeat regime	15 March 2002
Consultation on proposed national ambient noise strategy for England	15 March 2002
Consultation on managing radioactive waste safely	12 March 2002
Amendments to 'The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995' (Wask)	5 March 2002
Consultation on Better Quality Service review of the Egg Marketing Inspectorate	28 February 2002
Consultation outlining two options for reducing nitrate pollution of waters from agriculture in England	28 February 2002
Consultation on Proposals for Regulations on Provisional and Conclusive Maps under Section 11 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	8 February 2002
Quality town and parish councils—consultation	31 January 2002
Consultation on review of Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976	31 January 2002
Consultation on guidance to draft codes of practice to minimise noise	31 January 2002
Consultation on Distribution of the £140 million Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund	21 January 2002
Consultation European Commission proposals on measures for the control and prevention of zoonoses	5 January 2002
Consultation on flood and coastal defence managed realignment: land purchase, compensation and payment for alternative beneficial land use	31 December 2001
Consultation on guidance on the role of flood and coastal defence in nature conservation in England	31 December 2001
Pollution Prevention and Control (England and Wales) Regulations 2000: Consultation on a Deferral of the Relevant Period for Applications of certain A2 and B Installations	19 December 2001
Consultation on Radioactive Substances: Proposed Natural Gas Exemption Order	19 December 2001
Air Quality Strategy: Particles, Benzene, Carbon Monoxide and Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons	12 December 2001
Milk Quotas: Consultation on new consolidated Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations	10 December 2001
Consultation on DEFRA voluntary Code of Practice for the prevention and control of salmonella in broiler flocks on farm	3 December 2001
Consultation on distribution of the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund	27 November 2001
Second consultation on Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Scheme Prioritisation System	26 November 2001
Consultation on implementation of Council Directive 1999/22/EC on the keeping of wild animals in zoos	23 November 2001
Consultation on changes to the BSE Offspring Slaughter Regulations	22 November 2001
Consultation on recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste in 2002	7 November 2001
Consultation on National Park Authorities and Broads Authority review	2 November 2001
Second Consultation on Implementing the Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas Provisions of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive	31 October 2001
Consultation on waste management controls: proposed amendment to the duty of care	26 October 2001
Consultation on implementation of Council Directive 1999/31/EC on the landfill of waste (second consultation paper)	26 October 2001

Consultation	Deadline
Consultation on proposed EC Directive on the Energy Performance of Buildings	26 October 2001
Consultation on Implementation of Directive 2001/18/EC on deliberate release of genetically modified organisms into the environment	26 October 2001
Proposals for regulations on Local Access Forums under sections 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	23 October 2001
Consultation on draft Groundwater Protection Code for Fuel Dispensing Facilities Involving Underground Storage Tanks	19 October 2001
Energy Efficiency Commitment—2002–05: Consultation Proposals	12 October 2001
Consultation on draft Regulations on vehicular access over common land, under Section 68 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	1 October 2001
Consultation on DEFRA Aim and Objectives	28 September 2001
Consultation on Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Appeals Regulations	23 August 2001
Technical Amendments to the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994	23 August 2001
Consultation on the proposed reform of the EU sheepmeat regime	20 July 2001

Further information on all of the consultations can be obtained from the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk

State Veterinary Service

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many veterinarian surgeons left the State Veterinary Service in each year since 1990; what the reasons were for their departure; and what employment they left for. [51733]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* Details of the numbers of veterinary surgeons leaving the State Veterinary Service and the reasons for their departure are set out in the table.

Information about employment destination is not readily available in all cases and could be identified only at disproportionate cost.

	Number leaving SVS	Reasons for departure
1990	13	Retirement 3 Resignation 10
1991	21	Retirement 13 Resignation 5 Death in Service 2 Discharged 1
1992	9	Retirement 5 Resignation 3 Death in Service 1
1993	12	Retirement 4 Resignation 6 Death in Service 1 Transfer to OGD 1
1994	11	Retirement 4 Resignation 4 Death in Service 2 Transfer to OGD 1
1995	16	Retirement 10 Resignation 5 Death in Service 1
1996	12	Retirement 8 Resignation 4
1997	8	Retirement 3 Resignation 3 Death in Service 2
1998	13	Retirement 8 Resignation 3 Death in Service 1 Transfer to OGD 1
1999	6	Retirement 3 Resignation 3
2000	14	Retirement 4 Resignation 9 Transfer to OGD 1
2001	11	Retirement 6 Resignation 4 Death in Service 1
2002[1]	6	Retirement 3 Resignation 3

[1] To date

Departmental Employment Practice

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 271W, on gender-based assessments, if she will publish the assessment reports relating to her Department's gender, ethnic, disability and full time/part time categories completed since June 2001. [51741]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was created on 9 June 2001. The new Department brings together staff previously employed in parts of both DETR and the Home Office with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Robust data on staff in post in DEFRA were not available until recently. An assessment was undertaken on 15 March 2002 and the resulting data are included in the table. This position reflects the staff profile for permanent staff in the core-Department on that date.

	Total
Men	
Number	3,701
Percentage	52
Women	
Number	3,483
Percentage	48
Part time	
Number	703
Percentage	10
Ethnic minority[1]	
Number	384
Percentage	5
Disabled	
Number	406
Percentage	6

[1] Due to current ethnic re-survey, ethnicity data are incomplete and should therefore be interpreted with care. The figures in the table are based on a 70 per cent. response rate. Estimated overall margin of error for staff in post currently = ±1.5 per cent. Data exclude casual staff.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to ensure that secondary treatment is provided for all sewage discharges from towns with a population of at least 15,000 by 31 March will be met. [47218]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* As at 31 March 2002, 536 (99 per cent.) of waste water treatment plants in England serving communities greater than 15,000 population (or its equivalent) met this target. We will continue to monitor that secondary treatment for the few remaining discharges is provided as soon as practicable.

Rio Earth Summit (Implementation)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken by the Government since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to *(a)* set goals on environmental protection and *(b)* improve eco-efficiency and resource productivity relating to minerals and metal issues; and what these (i) goals and (ii) improvements have been. [44342]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have been working with others within the EU to set emissions standards which will protect the environment but also strike an appropriate balance with the economic and social aspects of sustainable development.

More specifically, as they are dominated by multi-nationals, we have been actively encouraging the minerals and metals industries to work globally to establish their sustainable development credentials. Work on indicators to measure performance are being developed.

Forests

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken at international level to increase forest protection and improve forest management; and if she will make a statement. [51237]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

The UK has a long record of contributing to the shaping of international forest policy. This takes place at the level of expert working groups, as well as intergovernmental negotiations such as: the United Nations Forum on Forests; the Convention on Biological Diversity; and the G8 Action Programme on Forests. All of these processes seek to improve the management and protection of forests.

The UK leads on tackling illegal logging within the G8. We have made progress domestically, with the introduction of the Government's new timber procurement policy, and internationally, through collaborative work with a number of key timber exporting countries. The Memorandum of Understanding singed between Indonesia and UK on 18 April is the first of its kind and signals a real determination to deal with this problem.

DFID's bilateral programmes and DEFRA's Darwin Initiative provide support to forest management and protection in many developing countries.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [47055]

Dr. John Reid: As the information you have requested is not held centrally, an answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46844]

Dr. John Reid: As the information you have requested is not held centrally, an answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which Bills introduced by his Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans he has for the future use of such clauses. [49619]

Dr. John Reid: Over the past five years two Bills introduced by my Department contained sunset clauses: the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997 and the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning (Amendment) Act 2002. Each contains a provision limiting the maximum duration of the amnesty period under a decommissioning scheme.

I shall continue to use such clauses where it is appropriate to do so.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the services of his Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50308]

Dr. John Reid: The Northern Ireland Office's executive services are delivered by the Department's three agencies—the NI Prison Service, Compensation Agency and Forensic Science Northern Ireland. The requirements of the Better Quality Services Initiative were addressed in the terms of reference of recent quinquennial reviews of each of the agencies. No definite timetable has yet been determined for the other, mainly policy, functions of the Department, which will be considered as appropriate as the extent of the NIO's future role becomes clearer.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in his Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions he has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within his Department. [50484]

Dr. John Reid: Electronic access control systems, many of which operate by smart cards, are extensively used in all premises occupied by my Department. Suppliers in the private sector are consulted as necessary.

SCOTLAND

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the recovery of Scotland's rural economy from last year's outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [41471]

Mr. Foulkes: 2002 will continue to present challenges but I am confident that the FMD recovery measures implemented by the Scottish Executive and the sympathetic approach of the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise will help the rural economy in Scotland withstand the effects of the outbreak.

Child Poverty

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to combat child poverty in Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [45671]

Mr. Foulkes: We are making good progress in tackling child poverty although we acknowledge that much still needs to be done. Full details of the measures taken, and the results achieved, can be found in the Government's annual report on tackling poverty. "Opportunity for All" and the Scottish Executive's annual Social Justice report, "A Scotland where everyone matters".

Tackling child poverty in Scotland requires action from both Government and the Scottish Executive. The "Opportunity for All" report highlights five headline indicators of child poverty: low income, worklessness, health inequalities, educational attainment and housing. Health, education and housing are devolved matters for the Executive. The Government have taken direct action in the areas it is responsible for. On income, for example, the working families tax credit benefits over 119,000 families in Scotland. And we are currently reforming the tax credits system, to improve it further. On worklessness, we have, for example, invested in the new deal: the new deal for lone parents has helped around 14,500 people into employment.

The Government have taken a number of other measures which help reduce child poverty including the national minimum wage; action on personal indebtedness and family-friendly employment measures to help people stay in work and meet family commitments. Tackling child poverty is, and will remain, one of our top priorities.

Train Drivers (Strikes)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she has taken to represent Scottish interests to the DTLR on the current strikes by train drivers. [46349]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with DTLR Ministers on a wide range of matters.

Scotland Act

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to introduce proposals to amend the Scotland Act 1998. [47650]

Mrs. Liddell: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member on 14 March, *Official Report*, column 1205W.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

St. Helena

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has for the construction of an airport runway on St. Helena; and if she will make a statement. [51479]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 21 March, *Official Report*, column 472W. Further discussions are expected to take place over the coming months.

Angola

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid her Department plans to make available to Angola in the next five years. [51298]

Hilary Benn: We are planning to spend some £4 million on humanitarian support and urban poverty reduction in Angola in the current financial year. Spending plans for subsequent years are not yet firm, but are likely to amount to at least as much as the current figure.

Following my right hon. Friend's visit to Angola earlier this month and the positive recent developments in the Angolan peace process we are also examining the potential for a specific DFID contribution to assist in building Government capacity in support of envisaged programmes with the IMF and World bank, particularly in the area of the demobilisation of fighters and transparent financial management.

Millennium Declaration

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the timetable is for implementation of the Millennium Declaration; what steps have been taken to set interim targets for 2005 and 2010; and if she will make a statement. [51922]

Hilary Benn: The Millennium Development Goals have a deadline of 2015 in most cases. (Eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education has a 2005 deadline and improving the lives of slum dwellers is a 2020 target.) Individual developing countries are being encouraged to set and monitor country-relevant interim targets within their poverty reduction strategies. DFID's PSAs/SDAs set targets based on the MDGs for the period up to 2006. Analysis of progress towards these targets is set out in DFID's Departmental Report 2002, which will be published on 24 April. Plans for the implementation of the Millennium Declaration are set out in the UN Secretary General's report "Road map towards the implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration". The UN will report annually on global progress and indicate whether we are on track to meet the goals. As well as setting development targets, the Millennium Declaration renews the commitment of member states to the fundamental principles of the UN, including freedom, equality, tolerance, human rights, peace and security and respect for the environment; and emphasises the needs of Africa and the need to strengthen the UN.

Cheap Drugs

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with drug companies to ensure that their products are made available to third world countries cheaply. [52145]

Hilary Benn: The Working Group on Access to Medicines, which I chair, brings together UK Government, the pharmaceuticals industry and others to look at options for bringing about widespread, sustainable and predictable differential pricing of medicines at reduced prices for the poor in third world countries. The Group has met twice and made good progress in identifying the best ways to address under-investment in research and development for diseases affecting the poor. The third meeting will discuss donations, pricing and affordability issues. The Group is scheduled to complete its work and report back to the Prime Minister in July.

In addition we have committed over £1 billion since 1997 to strengthening developing countries' health systems, building their capacity both to deliver medicines to the poor and to make effective choices about the selection and use of drugs.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid was given by her Department to Zimbabwe in the last year for which figures are available. [51537]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development provided assistance worth £16 million for Zimbabwe in 2001–02, focused on humanitarian relief including HIV/AIDS programmes.

Israel

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation within Palestinian refugee camps; what assistance her Department provides to the refugee camps; and if she intends to increase aid to the refugee camps. [48966]

Hilary Benn: *[pursuant to Clare Short's reply, 15 April 2002, column 730W]:* I apologise for the error contained in my right hon. Friend's reply. The answer should read:

We have steadily increased our financial and technical support to UNRWA, from £6 million in 1997 to £25 million in 2001 in response to the rising needs.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Stadium

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the £20 million investment into Wembley National Stadium in addition to the £120 million Lottery grant, will be exclusively to fund transport and infrastructure improvement in the Brent area with no other Treasury moneys being made available to this project. [46190]

Tessa Jowell: Subject to the Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Limited meeting the conditions I set out to the House on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 291–93, it is the Government's intention to make up to £20 million available for non-stadium infrastructure improvements. The current intention is that the Government's grant would repay funds spent by WNSL arising from its agreement with the London borough of Brent pursuant to section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to contribute towards a number of specified infrastructure projects in the Brent area including improvements to stations, roads and public amenities in the area.

The London Development Agency (LDA) has decided to commit up to £21 million to the National Stadium project subject to certain conditions. Any LDA funding will be subject to Treasury approval and will be conditional on the Football Association and WNSL meeting the Government's conditions which I set out on 19 December.

In addition, I would draw my hon. Friend's attention to the announcement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions made in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North on 12 March 2002, and which appeared on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 238W that a further £7 million would be made available from his transport provision for improvements to Wembley Park Underground station and that the Mayor of London had also agreed to make available a similar sum.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the replacement of the directors of the Wembley Board. [52136]

Tessa Jowell: The Football Association announced on 11 April a new board of Wembley National Stadium Ltd. The FA wished to move from a 'representative' board of 12 to a smaller board of seven which contained the core skills of construction/capital project management; finance and marketing. My officials continue to co-operate closely with the FA and Sport England as the FA and WNSL work to address the issues I set out to the House on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 291–93.

ITV Digital

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Independent Television Commission concerning ITV Digital's entry into administration. [50709]

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Independent Television Commission concerning ITV Digital's entry into administration. [50669]

Dr. Howells: The Independent Television Commission has kept me closely informed about the regulatory implications of ITV Digital's decision to place the company into administration.

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made

of the impact of ITV Digital's collapse on plans for digital television take-up in the UK. [50666]

Dr. Howells: Section 33 of the Broadcasting Act 1996 places a duty on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to keep under review the development of digital television, the availability of existing analogue services in digital form and the possession of digital receiving equipment, in order to decide when analogue services might be switched off. This review is being carried out and the results will be published in due course. The review will of course take account of the eventual outcome of the current administration of ITV Digital.

Sports Action Zone

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much Sports Action Zone money has been spent in the Workington constituency since the initiation of the scheme; and on what projects. [51267]

Mr. Caborn: The Needs Assessment and Action Plan for the West Cumbria and Barrow Sport Action Zone identifies a range of projects which are priorities for the zone. The following relate specifically to the Workington constituency:

Project	*Location*	*Partners*	*Funding (£)* *Total project cost*	*SAZ funding*
Commonwealth Games Co-ordinator to raise awareness of the Games and deliver a local programme in line with the Games	Allerdale	Allerdale borough council, NW Economic and Social SRB, Learning and Skills Council	50,000	15,000
Sports Co-ordinator to develop a sustainable sporting infrastructure	Allerdale, particularly Salterbeck, Harrington, Moorclose and Westfield wards	Impact Housing Association, Salterbeck Sports Association, Allerdale borough council, Youth Sport Trust, Women's Sport Foundation, West Lakes college, Age Concern	112,000	54,000
Young people in speedway	Allerdale—priority Northside	Groundwork West Cumbria, Allerdale borough council, Cumbria Waste Management, Workington SRB, Workington town council, Auto Cycle Union, St. John's Ambulance, Cumbria constabulary	18,766	1,500
Sport for Health Manager	Allerdale—including Oval Centre in Salterbeck, Copeland	Steering Group consisting of: West Cumbria CVS, Sport Action Zone, Health Action Zone, Primary Care Trust	[1]70,000	[2]30,000
Directory of sport and physical activity in West Cumbria	Allerdale, Copeland	West Cumbria CVS	19,700	8,500
Development of Adult Other than teacher (AOTT) programme	Allerdale—including Harrington and Ashfield schools in Workington, Barrow, Copeland	Cumbria Sport	24,800	7,500
Community Chest for funding smaller projects particularly in rural areas	Allerdale, Barrow, Copeland	Allerdale borough council	—	7,000

[1] For two years.
[2] For two years with commitment of £45,000 for further three years.

Film Council

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the films funded by the Film Council for which *(a)* members of staff and *(b)* members of the board of the Council have received an on-screen credit, stating for each (i) the nature of and (ii) the reason for the credit. [51078]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The following table details the films funded by the Film Council (since 1 April 2000) for which members of staff have received an on-screen credit. It is normal practice in the film industry to provide on-screen credits which reflect the work undertaken by the various partners.

No member of the board has received an on-screen credit through their membership of the board of the Film Council. However, some Film Council board members are employed by, or are directors of, the three lottery film franchise companies—DNA, the Film Consortium and Pathe Pictures Ltd. They may be credited by virtue of that role on relevant franchise films. Those titles have not been listed in the following table.

Film title	*Reason for the credit*
Gosford Park	Executive Producer for the Film Council's Premiere Fund
	Business Affairs
	Production Finance
	Production Executives
Mike Bassett: England Manager	Executive Producer
	Production Executives for the Premiere Fund
	Business Affairs
	Production Supervisor
Bloody Sunday	Executive Producer
	Legals Film Council for the Film Council

Digital Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of *(a)* the number

and *(b)* the percentage of households in the United Kingdom that (i) receive and (ii) can receive digital television by (A) digital terrestrial, (B) digital satellite, (C) digital cable and (D) other means. [51071]

Dr. Howells: The information available is as follows:

(A) Digital television take up

(i) 5.7 million subscribers to Sky Digital.

0.7 million subscribers to Telewest.

1.25 million subscribers to NTL

1.26 million subscribers to ITV Digital

Source:

Pay television subscriber figures December 2001

(ii) The Office for National Statistics has available the following figures for Great Britain from the National Statistics Omnibus Survey, October 2001. These figures were released on 18 December 2001.

	Percentage
Proportion of households in Great Britain by whether there is digital TV in the household; October 2001	
Households with digital TV	29
Households without digital TV	71
Proportion of households in Great Britain with digital TV broken down by service provider; October 2001	
Digital TV service provider	
ONDigital/ITVDigital	11
Sky Digital	64
NTL (Cable-Digital)/Telewest	25
Other (including other cable and terrestrial)[1]	1

[1] The majority of these households had digital terrestrial TV.

Note:

These percentages are proportions of all households with digital TV (29 per cent. of GB households). Like all estimates from sample surveys these figures are subject to sampling variability.

Source:

National Statistics Omnibus Survey

(B) Digital television coverage

The latest figures available from the Independent Television Commission are as follows:

(1) Digital terrestrial television (DTT) as at July 2001

UK coverage	*Percentage population*	*Number of homes*
Multiplex 1 BBC	81	20,261,000
Multiplex 2, Digital 3&4	80	19,851,000
Multiplex A, SDN	78	19,455,000
Multiplex B, ITV Digital	79	19,546,000
Multiplex C, ITV Digital	76	18,963,000
Multiplex D, ITV Digital	74	18,441,000
Core coverage[1]	68	16,929,000

[1] Core coverage is the ability to receive all six multiplexes

The BBC and ITC, who are responsible for the DTT transmission network, are considering, in consultation with Government and stakeholders, how to improve coverage of all DTT multiplexes across the UK.

(2) Digital satellite is predicted to reach about 98.2 per cent. of the UK population.

(3) The ITC does not have figures for the number of homes passed by digital cable.

(4) Data is not available for other technologies.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment she has made of the likelihood of digital television transmission reaching homes that are not receiving analogue reception in North Devon; and if she will make a statement; [51779]

(2) what efforts have been made to encourage digital television switchover in areas that do not receive analogue television reception. [51780]

Dr. Howells: The Digital Television Action Plan, posted on www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk on 20 December, sets out a series of actions for Government and stakeholders to promote digital television and to prepare for switchover. We began a consultation on 11 December 2001 seeking views on the basis on which we should plan the use of spectrum once analogue transmissions cease, including what level of coverage would be required by terrestrial television for public service broadcasting and for pay-tv services. The consultation closed on 5 April 2002 and we are considering the responses.

Television Reception

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many and what proportion of homes in North Devon, and what proportion of total geographical area in North Devon, were unable to receive *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite, *(c)* cable and *(d)* none of those television signals in each of the past seven years; and if she will make a statement. [51776]

Dr. Howells: The information can be provided only in the form requested at disproportionate cost. However, estimates of coverage of digital television services in North Devon, provided by the Independent Television Commission are as follows:

(i) digital terrestrial: approximately 46,000 viewers in North Devon can receive BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 services from the Huntshaw Cross transmitter, 42,000 of whom are able to receive all digital terrestrial services;

(ii) digital satellite: UK coverage is around 98 per cent. of the population; and

(iii) cable services: these are not available in the North Devon area.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many homes are unable to receive analogue television signals in north Devon; and if she will make a statement. [51777]

Dr. Howells: I understand from the Independent Television Commission (ITC) that around 2,000 homes in north Devon may experience difficulty in receiving good quality analogue signals. However, the ITC also advise that, depending on the quality of individual aerial installations, reception is often possible in areas where signal strengths are low, though a degradation in picture quality may be noticeable.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to improve *(a)* television and *(b)* radio reception in north Devon; and if she will make a statement. [51778]

Dr. Howells: The provision of television and radio services in the UK is a matter for the BBC, the Independent Television Commission, the Radio Authority and the commercial broadcasters to determine, subject to spectrum availability.

UK Sport (Drugs Inquiries)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will make a statement on UK Sport's inquiry into matters relating to the life ban on participation in athletics imposed on Mr. Paul Edwards; [51420]

(2) if she will have discussions with UK Athletics and King's college, London, on co-operation with UK Sport's inquiry into matters relating to the life ban on participation in athletics imposed on Mr. Paul Edwards. [51419]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* UK Sport is the lead agency for the Government's anti-doping programme. Its Chairman Sir Rodney Walker has met Mr. Paul Edwards and his advisers to hear his concerns regarding his life ban on participation in athletics. This resulted from a second positive drug test, which was the subject of an independent review of the evidence, a disciplinary hearing chaired by an independent QC and an appeal hearing also chaired by a QC. UK Sport are seeking further information and views from the parties concerned. It would not be appropriate for Ministers to intervene in individual doping cases.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will take measures to ensure that UK Sport has sufficient powers to conduct inquiries into previous rulings on the alleged use of performance-enhancing substances. [51418]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* UK Sport is the lead agency for the Government's anti-doping programme. The National Anti-Doping Policy, recently launched by UK Sport, sets out standardised procedures to ensure that governing bodies of sport have consistent, transparent and accountable anti-doping procedures. The National Anti-Doping Policy has clearly defined independent review, disciplinary and appeal processes built into it.

Public Entertainment (Licensed Premises)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what recent representations she has received concerning the licensing of premises for public entertainment; and if she will make a statement; [51752]

(2) what plans she has to change the law on the licensing of premises for public entertainment, with regard to the number of performers allowed to perform at unlicensed premises. [51753]

Dr. Howells: I have received a number of representations recently from hon. Members on behalf of their constituents and from performers of live music calling for the abolition of the exemption which provides for up to two musicians to perform live in public houses without a public entertainment licence. These include a number of similar letters sent to me as part of a campaign. I have also received representations arguing that all live music should be exempt from licensing, that some licence fees are excessive, that some conditions attached by local authorities are disproportionate and that the current licensing regime deters spontaneous singing in public houses.

Our plans for the modernisation of the licensing regimes were set out clearly in the White Paper "Time for Reform" (Cm. 4696) published on 10 April 2000. We proposed that the current exemption from public entertainment licensing that allows two musicians to perform live in premises licensed for the sale of alcohol should end. This is because one or two live musicians using powerful microphones and amplifiers can make more noise and so generate more nuisance for local residents than three without. Alcohol and public entertainment licensing will be integrated into a single scheme. This would remove at a stroke a considerable amount of existing red tape and reduce the licensing costs which currently deter many venues from providing live music and dancing. The reforms will be implemented by means of primary legislation to be brought forward as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Complaints

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many complaints were registered against her Department and its predecessor Departments in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the parliamentary ombudsman in those periods. [51584]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The information on complaints received for the periods requested in *(a)* and *(b)* is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. There is one current complaint. The number of complaints (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the parliamentary ombudsman is contained in the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration's annual reports for the periods specified, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Playing Fields

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the statistics compiled by the DCMS monitoring group on playing field sales on the number of applications reported to the group for the disposal of playing fields over the past two years. [51920]

Mr. Caborn: Data on playing field sales are not available. The Playing Field Monitoring Group will shortly be publishing combined figures for (a) applications from schools submitted to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for the disposal or change of use of school playing fields (which are already published monthly), and (b) figures from Sport England giving details of planning applications affecting playing fields which have been referred to them as statutory consultee (which are already published quarterly), along with (c) relevant data from the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

PRIME MINISTER

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in his Office; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50408]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 22 April 2002, at column 91W.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Vacant Teaching Posts

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many vacant head teacher posts there were in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools, *(c)* special schools and *(d)* all schools, expressed as a percentage of the total number of head teachers, in each year since 1997 broken down by local education authority. [48259]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made in *(a)* reaching agreement on outstanding liability on the Department to pay Individual Learning Account contributions to training providers and *(b)* making such payments. [46713]

John Healey: My Department wrote to all registered learning providers on 31 January 2002 setting out future payment arrangements. Claims have been invited from providers for learning booked on the ILA centre system, but not confirmed by the closure of the Individual Learning Account programme on 23 November, with start dates between 1 September 2001 and 31 March 2002. Pay runs are now being made on a monthly cycle. Where we have complaints or other concerns, payments are withheld pending the outcome of validation checks and investigations.

Since the closure of the Individual Learning Account programme on 23 November: payments of £8.16 million have been made to 2,883 registered learning providers; and payments of £15.12 million to 223 learning providers have been withheld pending results of validation checks and investigations.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the ILA providers who were *(a)* deregistered because of failure to register between June and August 2001 and *(b)* deregistered (i) temporarily or (ii) permanently for non-compliance with the scheme's rules. [49879]

John Healey *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* It is not appropriate to list individual learning account providers as the information requested is held as commercial in confidence. The number of providers who failed to re-register between June and August 2001 is 485. Prior to the closure on 23 November 2001 47 providers had been suspended from the register of learning providers. None had been permanently removed from the register. From 23 November 2001, we have withheld payments from 239 providers, including 17 of those originally suspended, pending completion of validation checks and investigations into claims.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46816]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The annual budget for the Department for Education and Employment/Department for Education and Skills press office for 1996–97, 2000–01 and 2001–02 (spend to date) are:

Press office budget figures

£

	Spend to date	*Year to date*
1996–97	n/a	1,387,834
2000–01	n/a	2,086,576
2001–02	1,877,461[1]	n/a

[1] To date

Curriculum Online

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made with the Curriculum Online programme; and if she will make a statement. [48848]

John Healey: We are currently working on the design/build phase of the programme to prepare for the September roll-out of the Curriculum Online service. The service will offer teachers a range of educational material, both free and priced, and will give them the freedom to access the resources that best suit their teaching needs, using the advanced search technology which will feature on the portal.

Pay Scales

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the differential between upper pay scales in further and secondary education in the last three years for which records are available. [50038]

Margaret Hodge: The upper pay scale range for qualified teachers in secondary education over the two years for which we hold comparable details is as follows:

2000: £25,959 to £30,018;

2001: £26,919 to £31,128.

The equivalent pay scale range for lecturers in further education sector colleges, as recommended by employer and employee representative bodies, over the same period is:

2000: £24,039 to £31,771;

2001: £24,928 to 32,947.

Although the scales are broadly comparable, as independent corporations colleges have their own pay policies and the way in which the recommended pay scales are used will vary from college to college.

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) pursuant to her answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, regarding planned funding of further and higher education, if the planned cash increase of £412 million in 2001–02 was all spent. [50415]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, regarding planned funding of further and higher education, if the planned cash increases of £268 million and £298 million for 2002–03 and 2003–04 will all be spent in the years for which they were allocated. [50416]

Margaret Hodge: The increase in publicly planned funding for higher education institutions in England in 2001–02 over 2000–01 is now estimated to be £396 million, the difference being due mainly to the re-classification of planned expenditure to support widening participation in that year. The accounts for 2001–02 are not yet closed and will not be finalised until November 2002.

For the subsequent two years the increases are now expected to be £292 million and £304 million respectively. The differences are due to provision of funding for the British Academy being made via the Higher Education Funding Council for England from 2002–03, and this increase being offset by a further re-classification of planned expenditure for widening participation in those years. It is intended that these increases will be spent in the years for which they are allocated.

Student Financial Support

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to review the Government's policies on student financial support. [50544]

Margaret Hodge: The Government have announced a review of student finance. We are considering a number of options and a decision will be made in due course.

Universities

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress is being made on lifting the cap on university enrolment. [50674]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has accepted the recommendation of the board of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) that they dispense with the Maximum Student Number (MaSN) control from 2002–03. It has been agreed that should the removal of the control have undesirable effects, the policies would be reconsidered. Details were announced in the HEFCE publication "Recurrent Grants for 2002–03" (March 02/11) and sent to the heads of all HEFCE-funded institutions and heads of universities in Northern Ireland.

Medicine

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she will take to increase the number of applications to study medicine from social classes IV and V, between 1996 and 2001. [49805]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* Widening access was a criterion in the exercise to distribute new medical places, completed in 2001. Under the "Widening Participation in Medicine" programme universities were encouraged to put forward innovative proposals to support the admission of students from a broad range of social and ethnic backgrounds. The aim is to reflect the population served by the NHS.

In addition, the Council of Heads of Medical Schools, working closely with the Commission for Racial Equality, has set up guiding principles and a model action plan for handling applications and admissions. These have been adopted by all 24 medical schools in the UK.

This Government are committed to raising the participation rates for people from low income backgrounds. We have a £290 million programme under Excellence Challenge, to raise the aspirations of those who traditionally would not consider enter higher education. Moreover, students from lower income families do not pay tuition fees.

As a result of these measures, between 1996 and 2001 the number of applicants from social class IV accepted on to medical courses increased by 32 per cent. and by 50 per cent. for social class V.

Railways

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what shortages of *(a)* drivers, *(b)* signallers and *(c)* tracklayers exist within the railway industry; and how many vacancies there are within the industry for (i) middle managers, (ii) graduates and (iii) others. [50904]

John Healey: The Progress Report on "Delivering the Framework for Skills in the Rail Industry", published in December 2001 by the Strategic Rail Authority and my Department, gives the following information on skill shortages for these occupations:

Occupational group	*Population*	*Number of skill shortages*	*Percentage*
Trade Occupations			
Train driving	19,000	855	4.5
Signal operation (and control)	6,500	[1](795) 100	[1](12.3) 1.5
Track laying and maintenance	10,000	1,200	12
First line/middle management	18,650	755	4
Graduate and professional staff	20,000	1,638	8
Other occupations	45,050	[2]—	[2]—

[1] These figures have been amended since the report was published, as new information became available.
[2] Not available.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 119W, on skills shortages in the railway industry, if she will place in the Library copies of the "Framework for Skills in the Rail Industry"

and the progress report; to whom, and where, she announced the funding for new adult apprenticeships; and to which significant skill shortages she refers. [51034]

John Healey: Copies of the "Framework for Skills in the Rail Industry" and the progress report on it have been placed in the Library. I announced the funding for adult apprenticeships for the rail industry at the Transport Skills Seminar on 14 February 2002. The significant skill shortages I referred to are those for train driving, signal operation (and control), electrification and track laying and maintenance.

EU Council of Ministers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who attended the education meeting of the EU Council of Ministers on 8 June 2001 on behalf of the UK; and who led the UK delegation. [51037]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* There was no meeting of the EU Education Council on this date. However, the UK was represented, at the meeting of 8 June 2000, by Nicol Stephen MSP. This is one of only two occasions, when a Minister from Scotland has led the UK delegation at a meeting of the EU Education Council.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who attended the education meeting of the EU Council of Ministers on 12 February 2001 on behalf of the UK; and who led the UK delegation. [51038]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The UK was represented at the EU Education Council of 12 February 2001 by Nicol Stephen MSP. This is one of only two occasions, when a Minister from Scotland has led the UK delegation at a meeting of the EU Education Council.

School Sports Provision (Bristol)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many letters Ministers in her Department and officials have received about the provision of sports facilities at Cotham School, Bristol. [51074]

John Healey *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Department has received 28 letters concerning PE facilities at Cotham School in Bristol, up to and including 16 April 2002.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the provision of sports in schools in Bristol. [51077]

John Healey *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Bristol city council has received a provisional allocation of just under £4.5 million from the New Opportunities Fund for the provision and enhancement of sports and physical education facilities in the 361 schools in Bristol. The New Opportunities Fund is a National Lottery distribution body, independent of central Government. The Fund has asked local education authorities to consult with other organisations in the area to determine priorities, and assesses applications to ensure that they demonstrate that there is a local need. Case managers work with LEAs to develop applications.

Central Government cannot influence the outcome of local consultation.

Computer Training (Over-50s)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the Government have done to help people over 50 learn how to use computers and to receive training in information technology. [51234]

John Healey: The Department for Education and Skills is committed to enabling people to learn later in life and to widening access to ICT skills. By the end of 2002 there will be over 6,000 UK online centres throughout England with access points in public libraries, colleges, local community centres and elsewhere. Older people are one of the key client groups for this initiative. In addition there are over 1,600 learndirect centres, which along with FE colleges and Adult and Community Learning centres, offer opportunities for older learners to improve their ICT skills.

Learndirect

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what estimate she has made of the number of people resident in the Buckingham constituency who are studying a Learndirect course *(a)* online and *(b)* at a Learndirect centre; [51384]

(2) which *(a)* Learndirect and *(b)* UK online learning centres are based in the Buckingham constituency; and if she will indicate the date they were established in each case. [51385]

John Healey: Just under 2,000 people in the Buckingham constituency have studied, or are studying, a learndirect course with an element of online learning. A large proportion of these will have used a learndirect centre for some or all their learning. It is, however, not currently possible to gather information on where learners are accessing their learndirect learning.

There is a learndirect centre, a learndirect access point and a UK online centre in the Buckingham constituency:

The Winslow Centre in Winslow, established in November 1999. This is a learndirect and a UK online centre.

Tomorrowclub Ltd. in Aylesbury, established in January 2001. This is a learndirect access point.

Teachers' Pay Regrading

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the cost to local education authorities in England and Wales in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04 of her regrading of teachers' pay scales. [51392]

Mr. Timms: In addition to the cost of the general pay award of 3.5 per cent., the 0.1 per cent. cost of the additional allowance of £33 payable to teachers in respect of the fees they are required to pay to the General Teaching Councils for England or Wales, and the cost of pay progression for performance or experience, the cost of shortening the main pay scale to six points is estimated to be 0.4 per cent. of the pay bill in 2002–03 and 1 per cent. in 2003–04.

Complaints

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints were registered against her Department and its predecessor Departments in

(a) 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in those periods. [51224]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The number of complaints received by the Department and its predecessor Departments for the dates stated can be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Any and all complaints referred to the Parliamentary Ombudsman are accounted for in their annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library of the House, or on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/document/par01/index.

The Department's current complaints procedure complies with Standard Five of the Six Service Standards for Central Government. Complaints can be made in writing, by fax, by e-mail, by telephone or in person (by appointment). More information can be found on the DfES website at www.dfes.gov.uk/compl.shtml.

Education (Herefordshire)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes the Budget of 17 April will make to the provision of education in Herefordshire. [51649]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget an additional £95 million investment in 2002–03 in school and college buildings in England. This means that every maintained school in England, including those in Herefordshire, will receive in 2002–03 an additional allocation of about 20 per cent. of New Deal for Schools Devolved formula capital for schools. Details of changes to funding for education will be announced when the spending review has been completed in the summer.

Asylum Seekers (Education)

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provisions of race relations statutory provision apply to access to school places for children of asylum seekers. [51801]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are no specific statutory provisions that apply in respect of the access to school places for children of asylum seekers.

Section 17 of the Race Relations Act 1976 makes it unlawful for school admission authorities to discriminate against a person *(a)* in the terms that it offers to admit a child to the school, *(b)* by refusing or deliberately omitting to accept the application for the child's admission to the school as a pupil, or *(c)* where the child is a pupil at a school (i) in the way that the pupil is granted access to any benefits, facilities or services or by refusing or deliberately not allowing the pupil access to them or (ii) excluding them from the school or subjecting them to other detriment.

Section 18 of the same Act makes it unlawful for an LEA to perform any act which constitutes racial discrimination, not covered by section 17, when carrying out any of its functions under the education legislation.

These apply to all children, including those of asylum seekers.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the availability of places in schools in the vicinity of the proposed sites for accommodation centres. [51660]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: No such assessment has been made. The proposed sites for the accommodation centres have not yet been decided.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether accommodation centres which provide education for asylum seekers will be required to have a governing body. [51663]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The administration and management of accommodation centres will be a matter for contractors who will run the centres. Bids to operate them have not yet been invited but contractors (once appointed) will run the centres within parameters defined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether children seeking asylum have the same right to education as other children in England and Wales; and if she will make a statement. [51176]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* Asylum seeking children have the same right to education as all other children in England and Wales.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which bodies have been consulted on removing some refugee children from the application of sections 13 and 14 of the Education Act 1996; and which bodies were in favour. [51782]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The views of a number of chief education officers and interested organisations were sought informally. All those who responded asked for LEA duties in respect of asylum seeker children in accommodation centres to be clarified. The majority were not in favour of any changes to LEA duties.

Departmental Circular

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the circular documents that were sent by her Department to *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools during March; and how many pages each document contained. [51595]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The Department sent five documents to all primary schools and eight documents to all secondary schools in March 2002 as listed below.

Communications to primary schools	*Page numbers*
Letter from Secretary of State—performance points on the upper pay scale	3
Spectrum	11
Standards and school workload. Letter from Secretary of State +poster	3
Teachers Pay confirmation 2002–03	8
Write Here . Write Now 2002—competition/letter	3

Communications to secondary schools	Page numbers
14–19: More opportunities, Higher Standards—Young People's version of the Green Paper	18
Connexions Card launch	2
Key Stage 3 National Strategy Designing and timetabling the Key Stage 3 Curriculum	31
Letter from Secretary of State—performance points on the upper pay scale	3
Progress file to replace the National Record of Achievement	3
Spectrum	11
Standards and school workload. Letter from Secretary of State +poster	3
Teachers' pay confirmation 2002–03	8

Maintained Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the occasions on which a maintained school applying for a change of status has been refused permission by the school organisation committee, stating the grounds for refusal in each case. [51944]

Mr. Timms: Only one proposal for a change of school category has been rejected by a School Organisation Committee since the change of category regulations were introduced in September 2000. Proposals published by the governing body of Olney Middle Community School, to become a Foundation School, were rejected by Milton Keynes School Organisation Committee in March this year. The Committee stated that their reason for rejection was that the proposals were not in the best interests of education in the area because they did not demonstrate how the change would support improving standards.

In another five cases, the School Organisation Committee was not able to arrive at a unanimous decision, so the change proposals were referred to the Schools Adjudicator, who approved them.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which maintained schools have changed status between *(a)* foundation, *(b)* community, *(c)* voluntary aided and *(d)* other in each year since the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 created the categories, giving the initial status and the new status in each case. [51945]

Mr. Timms: The following schools have changed category since the Education (Change of Category of Maintained Schools)(England) Regulations came into force on September 2000:

School	LEA	New category	Decision by	Change date
(a) Foundation				
Repton Primary	Derbyshire	Community	SOC[1]	1 January 2002
(b) Community				
Churston Ferrers Grammar	Torbay	Foundation	SOC[1]	1 September 2001
St. Edmund's Community	Norfolk	Foundation	SOC[1]	1 January 2002
New Bradwell Combined	Milton Keynes	Foundation	SOC[1]	1 January 2002
Ousedale	Milton Keynes	Foundation	SOC[1]	1 January 2002
Mayfield School and College	Redbridge	Foundation	Schools adjudicator	1 January 2002
Stanton Middle	Milton Keynes	Foundation	Schools adjudicator	1 February 2002
Torquay Grammar School for Girls	Torbay	Foundation	SOC[1]	1 April 2002
Loughton Middle	Milton Keynes	Foundation	SOC[1]	1 April 2002
Southwood Middle	Milton Keynes	Foundation	SOC[1]	1 April 2002
Cleeve Secondary	Gloucestershire	Foundation	SOC[1]	1 April 2002
Shenley Brook End	Milton Keynes	Foundation	Schools adjudicator	1 September 2002
Hayesfield Secondary	Bath and north-east Somerset	Foundation	Schools adjudicator	1 September 2002
(c) Voluntary aided				
Kirkbie Kendal VA Secondary	Cumbria	Foundation	SOC[1]	1 September 2001
(d) Voluntary controlled				
Springwood High	Norfolk	Foundation	SOC[1]	1 September 2001
Heddington CE Primary	Wiltshire	Voluntary aided	SOC[1]	1 September 2001
Zeals CE First	Wiltshire	Voluntary aided	SOC[1]	1 September 2001
Verwood CE VC First	Dorset	Voluntary aided	SOC[1]	1 September 2001
St. George's CE Primary, Bourton	Dorset	Voluntary aided	SOC[1]	1 September 2001
Keevil CE Primary	Wiltshire	Voluntary aided	SOC[1]	1 January 2002
Crockerton CE Primary	Wiltshire	Voluntary aided	SOC[1]	1 January 2002
Stoborough CE First	Dorset	Voluntary aided	Schools adjudicator	1 September 2002

[1] SOC = local School Organisation Committee

LEA Funding

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of education funding was delegated to schools by local education authority area in the latest year for which figures are available, estimating the extra spending per pupil in each authority delegated at the highest percentage level. [52085]

Mr. Timms: The following table sets out, for each local education authority, *(a)* the percentage of the Local Schools Budget (LSB) delegated to schools in 2001–02 and *(b)* the additional amount per pupil which would have been delegated to schools if the LEA had delegated 90.6 per cent. of its LSB (this being the highest delegation percentage achieved by any LEA).

LEA name	Column 1 Percentage of LSB delegated 2001–02	Column 2 Increase in delegated funding if LEA had delegated at level of highest delegating authority £ per pupil
Havering	90.6	0
Southend-on-Sea	90.3	8
Lincolnshire	90.3	7
Barnet	90.2	11
Sefton	89.5	32
Northamptonshire	89.0	44
Rotherham	88.9	47
Wigan	88.8	50
West Berkshire	88.7	53
Trafford	88.6	55
Brent	88.5	70
Kingston upon Thames	88.5	62
Kirklees	88.5	59
Halton	88.4	66
Lewisham	88.3	89
Hillingdon	88.3	68
Stoke-on-Trent	88.3	64
Northumberland	88.3	62
Redbridge	88.2	75
Peterborough	88.1	75
Tower Hamlets	88.0	115
Bournemouth	88.0	74
Sandwell	87.9	80
Slough	87.9	87
Cumbria	87.8	79
Birmingham	87.7	96
St. Helens	87.7	82
Salford	87.6	89
Devon	87.6	80
Shropshire	87.6	79
Poole	87.5	86
Rochdale	87.4	91
Durham	87.4	92
Plymouth	87.4	91
Hammersmith and Fulham	87.3	136
Redcar and Cleveland	87.3	93
Brighton and Hove	87.3	101
West Sussex	87.3	93
Wirral	87.1	101
Norfolk	87.1	98
Sutton	87.0	109
South Tyneside	87.0	107
Warrington	87.0	97
Hounslow	86.9	126
Solihull	86.9	97
Liverpool	86.9	121
Hartlepool	86.9	106
East Sussex	86.9	107
Southampton	86.9	115
Warwickshire	86.9	101
Walsall	86.8	108
Wolverhampton	86.8	113
North Tyneside	86.8	108
North Lincolnshire	86.8	108
North Yorkshire	86.8	108
Suffolk	86.8	106
Southwark	86.7	152
Bexley	86.7	111
Enfield	86.7	128
Oldham	86.7	115
Sunderland	86.7	113
East Riding of Yorkshire	86.7	109
Rutland	86.7	114
Swindon	86.7	103
Bury	86.6	106
Barnsley	86.6	110
Dorset	86.6	112
Darlington	86.6	110
Newham	86.5	145
Richmond upon Thames	86.5	123
Bradford	86.5	122
Cambridgeshire	86.5	112
Ealing	86.4	144
Hampshire	86.4	117
Portsmouth	86.4	130
South Gloucestershire	86.3	118
Middlesbrough	86.3	132
Stockton-on-Tees	86.3	126
Surrey	86.3	123
Barking and Dagenham	86.2	145
Knowsley	86.2	143
Essex	86.2	130
Medway	86.2	130
Isle of Wight	86.2	133
Islington	86.1	178
Wandsworth	86.1	172
Harrow	86.1	143
Gateshead	86.1	137
City of Bristol	86.1	139
Wiltshire	86.1	118
Wokingham	86.1	125
Cheshire	86.1	124
Waltham Forest	86.0	171
Hertfordshire	86.0	132
Coventry	85.9	144
Bromley	85.8	140
Calderdale	85.8	139
Leeds	85.8	145
City of Kingston Upon Hull	85.8	148
Luton	85.8	147
Cornwall	85.8	135
Somerset	85.8	135
Greenwich	85.7	190
Westminster	85.7	208
Dudley	85.7	131
Sheffield	85.7	139
Blackburn with Darwen	85.7	148
Camden	85.6	218
Croydon	85.6	156
Derbyshire	85.6	134
Blackpool	85.6	144
Merton	85.5	160
Manchester	85.4	175
Newcastle upon Tyne	85.4	154
North Somerset	85.4	137
Lancashire	85.4	150
Nottinghamshire	85.4	143
Oxfordshire	85.4	147
Bolton	85.3	148
York	85.3	151
Milton Keynes	85.3	156
Staffordshire	85.3	138
Windsor and Maidenhead	85.3	159
Kent	85.3	156
Hackney	85.2	219
Tameside	85.2	153
Bath & North East Somerset	85.2	155
Derby	85.2	155
Gloucestershire	85.2	147
Haringey	85.1	205
Stockport	85.1	146
Bedfordshire	85.1	161
Buckinghamshire	85.1	151
Leicester	85.1	169
Bracknell Forest	85.1	153
Herefordshire	85.1	149
Telford and Wrekin	85.1	158
Wakefield	85.0	154
North East Lincolnshire	85.0	164
Leicestershire	85.0	148
Reading	85.0	168

LEA name	Column 1 Percentage of LSB delegated 2001–02	Column 2 Increase in delegated funding if LEA had delegated at level of highest delegating authority £ per pupil
Torbay	85.0	157
Nottingham	85.0	185
Thurrock	84.8	177
Doncaster	84.7	169
Lambeth	83.7	296
Worcestershire	83.7	190
Kensington and Chelsea	83.6	314

Notes:

1. The percentages in column 1 are those shown for each LEA in the annual comparative table published by the Department on 29 June 2001, except in the cases of Halton and Westminster, whose figures have been revised in the light of subsequent information. (Subsequent information from two other LEAs does not affect the calculation of their delegation percentages rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent.). As in the case of the annual comparative table, the Corporation of London and the Isles of Scilly have been omitted.

2. The calculations underlying column 2 are based on the rounded percentages in column 1. As in column 1 and in the annual comparative table, delegated funding includes devolved Standards Fund grants, but not School Standards Grant.

Playing Fields

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money was realised by each local education authority from the disposal of school playing fields in each of the past five years. [51919]

Mr. Timms: The exact amount of money raised by each local education authority from the disposal of school playing fields is not known. In those cases where disposal has been approved, the disposal transaction, whether it is a sale, land exchange or the granting of a lease, might not yet be concluded. It is not possible, therefore, to say exactly what proceeds have been raised. Proceeds from the disposal of school playing fields can only be used to help improve sports and education facilities at maintained schools.

The table shows the proceeds that each local education authority expects to raise from approved applications to dispose of areas equal to, or larger than, a small sports pitch of 2000m^2 suitable for use by the under-10s.

Estimated proceeds by local education authority in England arising from approved applications to dispose of school playing fields larger than a sports pitch under section 77 and Schedule 22 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, October 1998 to 19 April 2002

Local education authority	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Barking and Dagenham	—	—	—	—	—
Barnet	—	—	8,650,000	—	—
Barnsley	—	—	—	—	—
Bath and North East Somerset	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	—	72,000	—	100,000	—
Bexley	—	—	650,000	—	—
Birmingham	—	—	—	900,000	—
Blackburn with Darwen	—	—	—	—	—
Blackpool	—	—	450,000	—	—
Bolton	—	800,000	—	—	—
Bournemouth	—	—	—	—	—
Bracknell Forest	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford	—	—	—	—	—
Brent	—	—	—	—	—
Brighton and Hove	—	—	—	—	—
Bristol	2,200,000	—	—	—	—
Bromley	—	—	—	—	—
Buckinghamshire	—	468,000	4,500,000	—	—
Bury	—	—	—	—	—
Calderdale	1,038,000	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	—	500,000
Camden	—	—	285,000	—	—
Cheshire	—	—	3,175,000	308,000	—
County Durham	—	32,600	6,520	—	—
Cornwall	—	—	—	—	—
Coventry	—	—	—	—	—
Croydon	—	3,000,000	—	—	—
Cumbria	—	—	—	—	—
Darlington	—	—	—	—	—
Derby, City of	—	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	—	218,000	363,000	—	—
Devon	—	750,000	150,000	—	—
Doncaster	—	—	—	—	—
Dorset	—	—	—	1,500,000	—
Dudley	—	—	—	—	—
Ealing	—	—	1,000,000	—	—
East Riding of Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—
East Sussex	—	—	—	—	—
Enfield	—	1,200,000	—	—	—
Essex	—	1,000,000	7,500,000	4,000,000	—
Gateshead	—	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	99	—	900,000	—	—

Estimated proceeds by local education authority in England arising from approved applications to dispose of school playing fields larger than a sports pitch under section 77 and Schedule 22 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, October 1998 to 19 April 2002

Local education authority	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Greenwich	—	—	—	—	—
Hackney	—	—	—	—	—
Halton	50,000	—	—	—	—
Hammersmith and Fulham	—	400,000	—	—	—
Hampshire	—	—	—	10,000	—
Haringey	—	—	—	—	—
Harrow	—	—	—	—	—
Hartlepool	—	—	—	—	—
Havering	—	—	6,850,000	—	—
Herefordshire	—	—	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	—	10,650,000	—	800,000	—
Hillingdon	—	700,000	—	—	—
Hounslow	—	—	—	—	—
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	—	—
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—	—
Islington	—	—	—	—	—
Kensington and Chelsea	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	—	480,000	2,585,000	75,000	—
Kingston upon Hull	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston upon Thames	—	—	—	—	—
Kirklees	—	—	—	—	—
Knowsley	—	—	—	—	—
Lambeth	—	—	—	—	—
Lancashire	—	1,225,000	—	315,000	—
Leeds	—	650,000	—	720,000	—
Leicester, City of	—	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire	—	—	—	—	3,500,000
Lewisham	—	—	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—
Liverpool	—	—	—	2,500,000	—
London, Corporation of	—	—	—	—	—
Luton	—	—	—	—	—
Manchester	—	—	—	—	3,020,100
Medway Towns	—	—	600,000	—	—
Merton	—	—	—	—	—
Middlesbrough	—	—	—	—	—
Milton Keynes	—	5,480,000	—	—	—
Newcastle	—	1,250,999	—	—	—
Newham	—	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	—	—	181,500	—	—
North East Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—
North Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—
North Somerset	—	—	—	—	—
North Tyneside	—	95,000	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	4,000,000	—
Northumberland	—	1,350,018	5,158,000	5,850	—
Nottingham	—	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	—	—	140,000	—	—
Oldham	—	—	—	—	—
Oxfordshire	—	980,000	3,700,000	—	—
Peterborough	—	—	—	1,985,000	—
Plymouth	—	—	—	—	—
Poole	—	—	—	—	—
Portsmouth	—	—	—	—	—
Reading	—	—	—	—	—
Redbridge	—	—	—	—	—
Redcar and Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—
Richmond upon Thames	—	—	—	—	—
Rochdale	—	300,000	—	400,000	—
Rotherham	—	—	—	—	—
Rutland	—	—	—	—	—
Salford	—	—	—	—	—
Sandwell	—	—	—	—	—
Sefton	—	5,000	—	—	—
Sheffield	—	160,000	—	—	—
Shropshire	—	—	—	600,000	—
Slough	—	—	278,615	—	—
Solihull	—	—	—	—	—
Somerset	—	—	—	—	—
South Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—
South Tyneside	—	—	—	—	—

Estimated proceeds by local education authority in England arising from approved applications to dispose of school playing fields larger than a sports pitch under section 77 and Schedule 22 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, October 1998 to 19 April 2002

Local education authority	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Southampton	—	—	—	—	—
Southend on Sea	—	—	—	—	—
Southwark	—	—	—	—	—
St. Helens	—	—	—	—	—
Staffordshire	—	1,700,000	—	—	—
Stockport	—	—	—	—	—
Stockton on Tees	—	—	—	—	—
Stoke on Trent	—	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	—	120,000	—	—	—
Sunderland	—	—	—	—	—
Surrey	—	4,413,000	1,950,000	—	—
Sutton	—	—	—	—	—
Swindon	—	—	—	—	—
Tameside	—	—	—	—	—
Telford and Wrekin	—	—	300,000	—	—
Thurrock	—	—	—	—	—
Torbay	—	—	—	—	—
Tower Hamlets	—	—	—	—	—
Trafford	—	—	2,900,000	—	—
Wakefield	—	1,505,000	48,000	—	—
Walsall	—	2,000,000	—	3,100,000	—
Waltham Forest	—	—	—	—	—
Wandsworth	—	—	—	—	—
Warrington	—	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	245,000	300,000	800,000	3,000,000	—
West Berkshire	—	—	—	—	—
West Sussex	—	7,900,000	2,945,000	—	—
Westminster	—	—	—	—	—
Wigan	—	1,380,000	600,000	—	—
Wiltshire	—	—	—	2,010,000	—
Windsor and Maidenhead	—	—	—	—	—
Wirral	2,414,000	—	—	—	—
Wokingham	—	—	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	—	—	2,387,500	—	—
Worcestershire	—	—	—	2,000	—
York	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

1. Excludes applications that have been withdrawn or rejected.
2. Excludes applications covered by a general consent.
3. Includes applications to dispose of playing fields at foundation, voluntary and former grant-maintained schools.
4. 'Sports pitch' means areas of open grassed land which are equal to, or larger than, the Football Association's recommended area for games played by under-10s, that is 2,000m^2 and which have a configuration making them suitable for sports pitches.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Social Housing

11. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review the guidance to local authorities on developing the expansion of social housing through planning gain. [49404]

Ms Keeble: We have consulted on proposals to replace the present system of negotiated planning obligations with an approach based upon the application of a more transparent tariff-based approach applicable to commercial as well as residential developments.

Wealden Line

12. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received regarding the time scale for the electrification of the Wealden line. [49405]

Mr. Spellar: We have received correspondence from Members of Parliament and others about the "Wealden" line between Lewes and Tunbridge Wells. In addition I have met the Wealden Line Group, who made a useful presentation.

Partly, representations have been in relation to possible electrification of the line between Uckfield and Eridge, but mainly in relation to possible reinstatement of the lines between Lewes and Uckfield and between Eridge and Tunbridge Wells.

Bedfordshire County Council

13. **Alistair Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he plans to visit Bedfordshire to discuss local government funding with the county council. [49406]

Dr. Whitehead: There are currently no plans for Ministers to visit Bedfordshire county council to discuss local government funding.

Local Authority Housing

14. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans for changes to the level of local authority housing investment. [49407]

Ms Keeble: The level of Government support for local authority housing investment is being considered as part of the spending review. Since 1997–98 this Government has increased support for local authority housing investment by more than two and a half times. The spending review is considering what further increases should be made.

Network Rail

15. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guarantees he is providing for loan finance raised by Network Rail; and what discussions he has had with the European Commission about support for the company. [49408]

Mr. Spellar: The Network Rail bid, if successful, would involve a subordinated standby credit facility from the SRA.

This would enable Network Rail to raise the bridging finance required to release Railtrack from administration as soon as possible; and provide a longer term, last resort, loan facility.

The process of explaining the possible financial arrangements to the commission has now started with a view to obtaining any necessary state aid clearances.

Disabled Access

16. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what good practice his Department has recently recognised in respect of councils promoting better physical access and mobility within their areas. [49409]

Ms Keeble: Earlier this month we announced that Telford and Wrekin Council, Nottingham County Council, and the London borough of Lewisham had been awarded beacon status for their good practice on access and mobility. Aided by increased local transport plan funding, and the sharing of good practices, authorities can help to make our society more inclusive by improving access to work, healthcare, education, and other key services and facilities.

Road Traffic Reduction

17. **Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the extent to which local authorities are meeting their obligations under the Road Traffic Reduction Acts 1997 and 1998. [49410]

Ms Keeble: It is only the 1997 Act that places an obligation on local authorities. Local authorities in England (outside London) submitted road traffic reduction reports as part of their full local transport plans in July 2000. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. In the Government's view the majority of the reports met local authorities' obligations under the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 in full.

Grant Distribution System

18. **Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish details of the grant distribution system intended for 2003–04. [49411]

Dr. Whitehead: We are currently working with local government to develop options for the new grant distribution system. As we recently announced in the local government White Paper implementation plan, we will consult over the summer. We will then implement our decisions in time for the 2003–04 local government finance settlement.

Multi-modal Studies

19. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what funding his Department has provided to implement the recommendations of the Midman multi-modal study. [49412]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10-year plan provides the funding for transport investment up to 2010, including schemes which are approved following a multi-modal study.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the estimated tax revenues are that would be generated if the road charging proposals in the DTLR Multi-Modal Study Infrastructure charging seminar summary papers were introduced; [49465]

(2) at what time the Multi-Modal Study Infrastructure charging seminar summary papers were published on the DTLR website on 9 April; [49461]

(3) what factors underlay the decision to publish the Multi-Modal Study Infrastructure charging seminar summary papers on 9 April; [49463]

(4) if he will deposit in the Library the complete versions of the DTLR Multi-Modal Study Infrastructure charging seminar papers. [49466]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The papers are already available on the Department's website. However, I have arranged for them to be placed in the Libraries of the House. The papers do not reflect Government policy.

The papers were produced for an internal seminar. Although under no obligation to publish publicly a request for the papers was received from Transport 2000. It was agreed to provide them with the papers and to make them more widely available by posting them on the Department's website.

The website team were to post the documents in the week commencing 8 April. They tried to post the documents on Monday 8 April but were prevented by technical difficulties faced by our external contractors.

Further technical problems faced by the Internet Service Provider meant a delay of approximately two hours between website staff processing the documents for posting at 10.30 on 9 April and when they actually appeared on the website.

At no stage were Ministers involved in deciding any aspect of the timing of the posting of the papers on the website.

The Government has made no estimate of the tax revenues that might be generated.

Council Tax

20. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the average percentage increase in band D council tax this year across England. [49413]

Dr. Whitehead: The average Band D increase across England for 2002–03 is 8.2 per cent.

Dartford Bridge

21. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Dartford bridge. [49414]

Mr. Jamieson: Following a public consultation the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced on 4 April 2002 that we intend to introduce a road user charging scheme at the Dartford Crossing using powers in the Transport Act 2000 when the powers to toll expire. It is expected that the charging scheme will commence on 1 April 2003.

Local Government Review

22. **Peter Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for a further local government review. [49415]

Dr. Whitehead: The recently published Local Government White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership, Quality Public Services", sets out the future of local government in England. The forthcoming Regional Governance White Paper will set out our proposals for elected regional assemblies for England, including the implications for local government.

Rail Links (Scotland)

23. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in modernising the railway lines to Scotland. [49416]

Mr. Jamieson: Modernisation of the West Coast Main Line is under way, and proposals for upgrading the East Coast Main Line are under development.

Parish Councillors

24. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received with regard to the proposed code of conduct for parish councillors. [49417]

Dr. Whitehead: Since the new year, there have been 148 representations received by my Department about the model code of conduct for Parishes.

London Underground

25. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received from *(a)* Transport for London, *(b)* Mr. Bob Kiley and *(c)* the Mayor of London about future funding and management arrangements for the London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [49418]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State receives frequent correspondence from the Mayor and Mr. Kiley, on behalf of Transport for London, in relation to the future of London Underground.

DTLR provided TfL with detailed proposals for an unprecedented commitment of long-term grant funding in February 2002. I expect a full response from TfL shortly.

Planning

26. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had to ensure that a coherent planning system is implemented across the United Kingdom. [49419]

Ms Keeble: Ministers and officials in DTLR have had discussions with colleagues in other Departments and in the devolved administrations about the Green Paper "Planning—Delivering a Fundamental Change". Although responsibility for most aspects of the planning system outside England is for the devolved administrations, similar reform consultation exercises are being undertaken in those areas. The planning system is, and is likely to remain, fundamentally similar across the United Kingdom.

Bus Regulation

27. **Jim Dobbin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for further regulation of buses. [49420]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport Act 2000 gives local authorities new powers to promote better bus services, including powers for joint ticketing schemes and for quality contracts. If necessary my Department is willing to consider further regulatory changes to improve services and value for money.

Antisocial Behaviour

28. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that local authorities are able to deal effectively with antisocial behaviour. [49422]

Ms Keeble: The Department has recently issued a consultation paper, "Tackling Anti-Social Tenants", which is directed towards enabling social landlords to tackle anti-social behaviour more effectively. The proposals and guidance in the consultation paper cover the fundamental areas of enforcement, prevention and rehabilitation. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

33. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to give local authorities additional powers to deal with antisocial behaviour. [49427]

Ms Keeble: The Department has recently issued a consultation paper, Tackling Anti-Social Tenants, which is directed towards enabling social landlords to tackle anti-social behaviour more effectively. The paper includes proposed new powers for social landlords. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Walton Ashcott Bypass

29. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his decision on the Walton Ashcott bypass. [49423]

Mr. Jamieson: We decided to turn down Somerset county council's bid because the scheme had not been considered sufficiently in a wider strategic context, including SWARMMS; it is inconsistent with Regional Planning Guidance and the County Structure Plan; and improving road access is considered to have the capacity to generate development of a scale inappropriate to Glastonbury and Street.

Local Government White Paper

30. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the response he has had from local government regarding the local government White Paper, with special reference to local government finance. [49424]

Dr. Whitehead: We have received a number of responses to the White Paper from local government on both finance and non-finance proposals. We are taking these into account in taking forward the commitments in the White Paper. Our White Paper implementation plan has been published on the DTLR website.

Rail Congestion

31. **Mrs. Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress his Department has made towards tackling overcrowding on the rail network. [49425]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA's Strategic Plan sets out how the objectives and targets for rail established in the Government's 10-Year Plan are to be delivered.

Fares Policy Review

32. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Strategic Rail Authority's review of fares policy. [49426]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Railway Authority's review of fares policy is timely, as from January 2003 the current regime can be varied to reflect changes since privatisation. The industry cannot proceed on a blind assumption that existing policies in areas such as fares which are key to the further development of the railways can continue indefinitely. The review will consider the advantages and disadvantages of change.

Parish Councils

34. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of parish councils. [49428]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government's rural White Paper "Our Countryside: The Future—A Fair Deal for Rural England" sets out our proposals for strengthening the future role of town and parish councils in England.

Connex Train Services

35. **Clive Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about his plans to improve Connex train services in south-east London. [49429]

Mr. Jamieson: We encourage the SRA to ensure that all train operating companies, including Connex, comply with the terms of their franchise agreements. The new directions and guidance, issued to the authority by the Secretary of State on 11 April, include an objective to secure progressive improvements in the performance of franchised rail services.

Sports Pitches

36. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action is he taking to increase protection for sports pitches in planning legislation. [49430]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 824W, in which I said that I have no plans to extend the provisions of The Town and Country Planning (Playing Fields) (England) Direction 1998 to cover all playing fields.

South Coast Multi-modal Study

37. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of the South Coast Multi-Modal study. [49431]

Mr. Jamieson: The South Coast Multi-Modal study is consulting on a preferred strategy in May/June 2002 and will be looking to produce a consultant's report in July. This should be in a position to pass to the Regional Assembly in August 2002 for consideration in their November plenary session.

Local Government Finance

38. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received from local authorities about local government finance reform. [49432]

Dr. Whitehead: We have received a number of responses to last December's White Paper from local government on both finance and non-finance proposals. We are taking these into account in taking forward the commitments in the White Paper. Our White Paper implementation plan has been published on the DTLR website.

Building Regulations

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list those organisations consulted regarding S.I. 2001, No. 3335 introducing self-certification under the Building Regulations; [49861]

(2) how his Department will ensure that reputable builders are not disadvantaged by the cost and time involved with self-assessment, as laid out in S.I. 2001, No. 3335; [49863]

(3) what effect the self-certification of building firms, allowed under the Building Regulations S.I. 2001, No. 3335, will have on building firms. [49862]

Dr. Whitehead: S.I. 2001, No. 3335, did not introduce self-certification. Self-certification was introduced into the Building Regulations through S.I. 2002, No. 440. This recognises schemes for the self-certification of the installation of combustion appliances, replacement glazing and plumbing work.

Moving towards self-certification and non-notification by identified competent firms will significantly enhance compliance with the procedural and technical requirements of the regulations; it will reduce costs for firms joining recognised schemes; promote training and competence within the industry; help tackle the problem of 'cowboy builders' by identifying reputable firms to consumers; and will start to assist local authorities with enforcement, as they can devote more resource to tackling those, who either wilfully or in ignorance, fail to comply with the Building Regulations.

The regulatory impact assessment we undertook prior to laying the regulations, identified that the financial benefit to firms of introducing self-certification would be £104,685,000, taking into account the cost of joining the recognised schemes. These savings arise from firms not having to pay building control fees. Other savings, such as those that would arise from relief from the internal administrative expense and delay in complying with the procedural requirements of the Building Regulations, were not calculated. I understand that the schemes involved have experienced very considerable interest from potential members, and the savings are likely to be higher than the earlier conservative estimate.

Prior to laying these regulations we undertook extensive consultation. Proposals for self-certification were first consulted on in 1997, with the consultation document 'Proposals for reducing the administrative burden with the prospect at the same time of enhancing health and safety'. The results of the consultation were favourable. We consulted again in 1999 with the document 'Taking Forward Self-Certification Under the Building Regulations'. The consultation went to 250 organisations and a list of these has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

I believe that self-certification is a very significant step forward for promoting competence in the construction industry, and providing rewards for those who voluntarily subscribe to schemes which are designed to protect society from the adverse effects of poor building work.

Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 667W, how many grants were made by and what the total value of grants was in each local authority in London running a cash incentive scheme in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [48715]

Ms Keeble: The information requested is set out in the table.

Cash incentive scheme grants made by London boroughs, 1997–98 to 2000–01

	Number of grants made				Total value of grants (£ thousand)			
	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Barking and Dagenham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Barnet	53	34	23	31	856	545	380	618
Bexley	21	0	0	0	284	0	0	0
Brent	76	46	0	0	1,536	1,034	0	0
Bromley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Camden	28	15	10	50	538	287	198	1,138
City of London	12	7	0	0	150	82	0	0
Croydon	105	92	135	44	1,580	1,397	1,258	858
Ealing	111	48	3	0	1,202	682	50	0
Enfield	76	68	53	41	1,316	1,442	1,234	809
Greenwich	74	4	0	0	802	47	0	0
Hackney	160	120	0	9	3,198	2,190	0	224
Hammersmith and Fulham	50	12	0	0	820	155	0	0
Haringey	84	68	16	25	1,392	1,083	175	398
Harrow	45	22	14	10	1,600	533	275	180
Havering	37	20	132	4	463	275	186	69
Hillingdon	52	31	36	20	811	433	527	317
Hounslow	89	48	0	0	1,506	923	0	0
Islington	102	79	0	0	2,440	1,854	0	0
Kensington and Chelsea	29	9	3	1	630	217	66	25
Kingston upon Thames	29	27	18	14	594	520	387	283
Lambeth	59	23	0	0	884	345	0	0
Lewisham	31	13	0	13	429	223	0	280
Merton	42	20	9	10	578	365	171	198
Newham	113	73	22	0	1,404	572	255	0
Redbridge	14	10	0	0	171	178	0	0
Richmond	71	57	24	2	1,488	1,405	653	59
Southwark	226	171	0	0	3,289	2,329	0	0
Sutton	38	16	9	7	728	251	186	143
Tower Hamlets	117	84	46	36	1,258	855	489	500
Waltham Forest	53	39	23	21	1,028	863	647	846
Wandsworth	89	86	38	42	1,747	1,651	796	930
Westminster	52	32	16	23	1,029	644	335	498
Total	2,138	1,374	630	403	35,748	23,380	8,368	8,373

Heathrow

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what constraints exist on the development of *(a)* new and *(b)* improved rail links to Heathrow from the West. [49470]

Mr. Byers: The overriding constraint for new or improved rail services is the heavy traffic already using the Great Western and South West Trains lines around Heathrow. The Strategic Rail Authority is considering how a package of service changes could assist in serving Heathrow from the West.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made as to the future demand for rail links to and from Heathrow from and through Berkshire; [49469]

(2) what plans exist to create new rail links to Heathrow from the west. [49468]

Mr. Byers: The Strategic Rail Authority is actively working with BAA on developing proposals for rail service improvements to Heathrow, including the possibility of new and improved links to the west. The SRA is sponsoring the train service demand forecasting phase of this work, which will include services from Heathrow to the west.

Rail Use

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the estimated increase in use of *(a)* diesel trains and *(b)* electric trains, for passenger journeys over the lifetime of the 10-year plan. [49717]

Mr. Byers: The Government are committed to seeing a 50 per cent. increase in passengers over the next decade. No estimate has been made of a split between diesel and electric train usage.

Pollution

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requirements must be satisfied by diesel rolling stock with regards to levels of *(a)* nitrogen oxide, *(b)* carbon dioxide and *(c)* noise emissions, for use on the UK rail network. [49708]

Mr. Byers: Railways are covered by the following:

(a) policy on local air quality, including emissions of nitrogen oxide, is set out in the UK National Air Quality Strategy. In areas where the Air Quality Objectives will be exceeded from whatever source, the relevant local authority must draw up an action plan to meet the objectives. The levels of emissions along railway lines, however, meet the National Air Quality Strategy targets;

(*b*) on carbon dioxide the Government's goal is for transport to reduce its overall impact on the environment thereby contributing to the United Kingdom moving towards a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. by 2010;

(*c*) railway noise is covered by the Noise Insulation (Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems) Regulations (1996), and, potentially, the Environmental Protection Act (1990).

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which of the services of his Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50313]

Dr. Whitehead: The Better Quality Services (BQS) programme was launched in 1998 and adopted by the Cabinet Office in the Modernising Government White Paper of 1999 as a means of delivering continuous improvements in the quality and effectiveness of Government activities and services. It requires all Government Departments to review every activity and service over a five-year period starting in October 1999. The scheme covers all activities in Departments, agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies, and is similar in remit to the Best Value programme in local government.

The review of the Department's activities and services under the scheme started in 1999. The central Department has completed 12 reviews to date and others are on-going. There are still 53 activities and services to review. Our agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies have their own programmes of performance review.

Following an evaluation of the BQS scheme in September 2001, the management of the scheme by the Cabinet Office ceased. However, experience has shown that BQS is a useful management tool, particularly in examining central corporate management functions. Departments have therefore been encouraged not to discontinue its use simply as a result of central co-ordination ceasing, but to consider its use alongside other management tools, as appropriate.

Council Tax Arrears

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2000, *Official Report*, column 84W, regarding rent and council tax arrears in England and Wales, for what reason his Department does not provide information on council tax arrears by local authority in England. [50329]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department does not at present collect information from local authorities on the level of council tax arrears, and so individual figures are not available. National estimates of the level of council tax arrears are derived from the results of a voluntary survey that is carried out each year by the Institute of Public Finance. These estimates were given in my answer of 4 March.

The Department is giving active consideration to collecting this information for future years.

Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in his Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50407]

Dr. Whitehead: The estimated cost in 2001–02 of the pay increase to staff in the Departments agencies and the non-departmental public bodies is given in the table.

	£
Central Department	5,000,000
Agencies	
Driving Standards Agency	1,240,000
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	5,600,000
Fire Service College	140,000
Highways Agency	1,300,000
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	1,000,000
Planning Inspectorate	780,000
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	40,000
Rent Service[1]	180,000
Vehicle Inspectorate	1,930,000
Vehicle Certification Agency	75,000
Non-departmental public bodies	
Audit Commission[2]	3,000,000
English Partnerships[3]	164,000
Health and Safety Executive	4,000,000
Housing Action Trusts	201,000
Housing Corporation	740,000
Local Government Commission[4]	63,000
Northern Lighthouse Board	347,000
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England and Wales	12,000
Strategic Rail Authority	278,000
Trinity House Lighthouse Service	735,000

[1] For the Rent Service the cost cannot be given in full as the 2001–02 pay increase for two of the agency's three pay bargaining units have not yet been agreed. The cost was £180,000 for the pay increase for the pay bargaining unit which has been agreed (covering administrative staff who transferred to the agency from local authorities in 1999).

[2] The Audit Commission's financial year ends on 31 October.

[3] English Partnerships is a national body for regeneration and development bringing together the Urban Regeneration Agency and the Commission for the New Towns for which details of the cost of the pay increase is provided.

[4] The Local Government Commission's responsibilities were transferred to the Electoral Commission on 1 April.

Note:

The Standards Board for England (a new NDPB) was created on 1 February and will seek the first pay increase for its staff during 2002–03.

The Department is unable to provide these costs for 2002–03 as the pay increases for that year have not yet been agreed.

Environmental Targets

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what environmental targets have been set by the EU with regard to transport provision in the UK over the course of the 10-year plan. [50522]

Mr. Byers: The European Commission recently set out its proposals for the future direction of transport policy in its White Paper, 'European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide' (http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/wpr/

2001/com2001–0370en.html). No environmental targets regarding transport provision have been set by the EU at member state level.

Motoring Charges

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the list of local authorities that *(a)* are planning to introduce congestion or work place parking taxes and *(b)* have expressed interest in introducing such taxes. [49460]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Mayor has announced his congestion charging plans for London. I am considering a draft scheme order from Durham county council for a road user charging scheme in the historic core of the city of Durham.

No other local authority has yet undertaken formal public consultation on proposals for a road user charging or work place parking levy scheme.

Renovation Grants

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what account is taken of *(a)* other family support and *(b)* the financial means of any manager of the property when means testing (i) landlords and (ii) tenants of a property who are applying for a renovation grant; [50657]

(2) what facilities exist for local authorities to provide loans to people for renovation of their property; [50655]

(3) under what circumstances a tenant can refuse to allow grant-aided renovation to a property to be carried out, if it has been applied for by the landlord; [50656]

(4) under what circumstances people are eligible for local authority renovation grants. [50654]

Mr. Byers: The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 requires that where an applicant for a renovation grant is a tenant or owner occupier then he is subject to a prescribed means test. This test requires that if any such applicant is receiving voluntary help from a third party towards meeting general living expenses, such as food, clothing, fuel for heating and local taxes, then this support, other than the first £20 of any such regular payment, is treated as part of an applicant's income for the purpose of the means test.

The Act also specifies that a tenant can only qualify for a renovation grant if he is required by the terms of his lease to carry out the relevant works. In these circumstances no regard is paid to the financial means of the property manager. Local authorities have discretion to decide the level of grant they should make available to a landlord but are required to have regard to the extent to which the landlord is able to charge a higher rent for the premises following the completion of works.

Local authorities presently have powers under the Housing Act 1985 to give loans at commercial interest rates for private sector housing renewal.

Landlords have a right of access to property they have let to carry out repairs where the works are necessary to maintain the property in the condition under which it was agreed to be let. Where the works are such that they would improve the condition of the property beyond that under which it was agreed to be let, then the tenant may refuse access to carry out such works unless a right of entry for that purpose is specifically reserved in the tenancy agreement.

Under the 1996 Act, local authorities currently have discretion as to whether they should make grants available in their area, but they may make such grants to landlords, owner-occupiers and tenants with a repairing obligation in their lease. The principal purposes for which grants may be paid are for making a dwelling fit, putting a dwelling into reasonable repair, providing home insulation or heating facilities, providing satisfactory internal arrangements or conversions. Grants may also be made for the cost of radon remedial works.

Railways

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many rails are listed as defective and in need of replacement; [50662]

(2) what the average time taken was to replace a rail once it has been identified as defective in the last 12 months; and in what way defective rails are prioritised for replacement; [50663]

(3) how many rails were identified as defective in each of the last five years; and how many of these *(a)* were replaced before they broke, *(b)* broke and *(c)* have yet to be replaced. [50661]

Mr. Byers: These are matters for Railtrack, the Office of the Rail Regulator and the Health and Safety Executive. My Department does not hold such information.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what investment has been made as part of the 10-year plan for improved detection techniques of broken rails. [50659]

Mr. Byers: As part of the Periodic Review, the Rail Regulator has provided for £150 million of expenditure over the current control period to fund Railtrack's target of reducing the number of broken rails.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what factors can lead to rails breaking. [50660]

Mr. Byers: Many factors can cause rails to break. These are not only matters of the metallurgy, manufacture and maintenance of the rails themselves, but are also strongly influenced by the volumes of traffic, the design of the vehicles running over the track and the quality of maintenance of those vehicles. The industry's Wheel Rail Interface System Authority (WRISA) is investigating all aspects of this complex technical interaction.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in his Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions he has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within his Department. [50482]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* My Department does not use smart cards at present although a contactless magnetic card is used for buildings entry in London and elsewhere. We are considering the use of a single smart card with encryption for identification of individuals for access to and authorisation of a range of e-services and buildings access. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency will be issuing smart cards as part of the EU-wide "Smart Tachograph" project. DVLA is reviewing other uses for a personal smart card such as a driver licence possibly with other identification-based applications such as travel rights within the EU.

We are sponsoring pilot card projects in local authorities as part of the local government on-line programme and a number of LAs and passenger transport executives are using local transport plan funds for smart card schemes in transport particularly for ticketing. We have sponsored the development of card standards for transport so that as far as possible applications can be interoperable between different LAs and PTEs to ensure seamless travel and through ticketing. We may launch other initiatives once the Office of the e-Envoy has issued its smart card policy paper.

It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of discussions with private individuals or companies. However Departmental officials have been involved in a number of discussions with companies, either individually or at meetings of organisations such as the Transport Card Forum or the Integrated Transport Smart Card Organisation, as part of the planning for the projects noted above.

Tropical Hardwoods

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives transport undertakings concerning the use of tropical hardwoods in renewing and repairing infrastructure. [50683]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department's policy, contained in the Greening Operations Policy Statement is to provide advice to those transport undertakings for which the Department sponsors on Government policy aims and best practice in relation to timber and other environmental issues. This is done by forwarding all the latest guidance to these bodies.

Comfort Letters

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 512W, on comfort letters, when the notification period will now end; for what reason the customary notification period was not initially provided; and if he will make a statement. [51452]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the Minute from the DTLR concerning London Underground PPP letters of comfort that was laid before Parliament on 20 March. A copy is available in the Libraries of the House. The notification period will now end 14 parliamentary sitting days from 20 March.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the implications of paragraph 24, section 3.1 of the Community guidelines on state aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty (1999/c 288/02) for the timing of state aid to Railtrack in administration; [50769]

(2) if he will make a statement on the implications of paragraph 48 of the Community guidelines on state aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty (1999/c 288/02) as it relates to the Government's ability to extend state aid for Railtrack in administration beyond 7 October; [50773]

(3) if he will make a statement on section 3.1, paragraph 23, subsections b and d of the Community guidelines on state aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty (1999/c 288/02) as it relates to Railtrack in administration; [50768]

(4) what assessment his Department made of the implications of paragraph 24, section 3.1 of the Community guidelines on state aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty (1999/c 288/02) before it took the decision to provide financial support for the Network Rail bid for Railtrack; [50770]

(5) if the stipulation in paragraph 51 of the Community guidelines on state aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty (1999/c 288/02) prevents Network Rail from receiving state aid to purchase the assets of Railtrack in administration. [50774]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Secretary of State has had full regard to the implications of the Community guidelines on state aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty as it relates to Railtrack in administration and any financial support to be provided to Network Rail if its bid for Railtrack plc is successful. The Government's guarantee of commercial borrowing by Railtrack plc is consistent with section 3.1, paragraph 23, subsections b and d of the Guidelines.

Rescue aid under these guidelines can be extended beyond the initial period of six months in duly substantiated exceptional circumstances (paragraph 24). If the administration of Railtrack plc is likely to continue beyond 30 September 2002 clearance for an extended period of aid would be sought from the European Commission, either as an extension of the existing clearance or as a separate notification if more appropriate.

If the Network Rail bid were to be successful in accordance with the timetable as currently projected the Government guaranteed loans to Railtrack plc (in administration) would be reimbursed in full before 30 September. Any state aid granted to Network Rail would be notified separately. The Government will ensure that any aid provided to Network Rail is compatible with the provisions of the EC treaty in particular Article 73 and Article 86(2).

Deep-sea Ports (Freight)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the average length was of the onward journey for freight arriving in deep-sea ports, destined for the UK that was taken to its

destination by *(a)* road, *(b)* rail, *(c)* a combination of road and rail and *(d)* short sea shipping in the last 12 months; [51186]

(2) what percentage of freight leaving deep-sea ports by road was later transferred on to the rail network in the last 12 months; [51184]

(3) what percentage of freight *(a)* carried to and *(b)* carried from deep-sea ports, went by (i) road, (ii) rail and (iii) sea in the last 12 months. [51183]

Mr. Byers: The information is not available in the form requested.

Trans-european Network

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what conditions projects must satisfy in order to be eligible for funding from the EU trans-european transport network budget. [51199]

Mr. Byers: General rules for the granting of community financial aid in the field of trans-European networks are set out in Council Regulation (EC) 2236/95.

The Community guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network (Decision No. 1692/96/EC) sets out the objectives projects must pursue. Annexes I and II to that Decision illustrate the network by way of maps and set out for each mode of transport the project eligibility criteria and specifications.

Sea Shipping (Freight)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the environmental costs associated with the sea shipping of freight. [51187]

Mr. Byers: My Department is in the process of assessing relevant scientific and economic evidence on external costs including environmental from a number of sources in the UK and elsewhere. This assessment is part of a review of values to be used in considering freight facility grants.

Road Signs

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the aesthetic impact of road signs and markings. [51250]

Mr. Byers: Traffic signs and road markings have to attract the attention of road users in order to fulfil the purpose for which they are provided, but local traffic authorities have a statutory duty to take account of the effects on amenity when installing signs and markings at particular locations. Chapter 7 of the Traffic Signs Manual, published in 1997, gives guidance on designing signs so as to produce aesthetic as well as functional designs.

Ballast Water

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made as to the contamination caused by the release of ballast water by ships; and what guidelines exist as to the *(a)* location and *(b)* frequency with which ballast water should be released. [51249]

Mr. Byers: With relation to oil, the MARPOL Convention has contained requirements for the segregation of ballast water from cargo oil in tankers constructed after 1983. Since August 1999 the seas around the UK and out to the west of Ireland have had Special Area status under the MARPOL Convention; this means a total prohibition on the discharge of any cargo-related oil which may be entrained with ballast water.

Joint Nature Conservation Council, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department have conducted studies in a number of ports to identify the presence of non-indigenous organisms, some of which are thought to have been introduced via ships' ballast water. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has urged ships to follow the IMO's guidelines on ballast water management practices to reduce the risk of introducing non-indigenous species. The agency has issued a Marine Guidance Note on the matter. The UK continues to play a leading role within the International Maritime Organisation to develop mandatory requirements.

Windows

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what climatic factors were taken into account by the Government in proposing the standards for new windows insulation under S.I. 440. [51436]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* S.I. 2002/440 requires, among other things, that members of the Fenestration Self-assessment Scheme, who seek to self-certify their work, must comply with the relevant requirements of the Building Regulations (S.I. 2000/2531 as amended by S.I. 2001/3335). These regulations apply in England and Wales. Guidance on achieving compliance in relation to window insulation standards is given in Approved Documents L1 and L2. The standards given in the guidance have been derived using Meteorological Office data for winter temperatures in the UK, and in particular how often ambient temperature falls below a pre-determined level.

Humber Bridge Board

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to address the levels of debt accumulated by the Humber Bridge board. [51819]

Mr. Spellar: The debt owed to the Government is subject to an agreement with the Humber Bridge board dated 29 March 1972, this agreement was supplemented by a further agreement made 1 July 1998.

The 1998 agreement includes a provision for reviewing the debt by 1 September 2002 and at five yearly intervals thereafter.

Planning System

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what

action he has taken to prepare a statutory definition of the purpose of the planning system; and if he will make a statement. [52091]

Mr. Byers: In response to the Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change", a number of bodies have suggested that there should be a statutory purpose for the planning system. My officials have written to a range of organisations seeking views on this proposal.

Concessionary Travel

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the estimated cost is to his Department of supporting the half-fare concession bus pass in 2002–03; [50027]

(2) what estimate has been made of the cost of providing concessionary travel for men aged 60 to 64; [50028]

(3) what estimate has been made of the cost of providing a free transport concession to all pensioners. [50029]

Ms Keeble: Government support for local authorities' concessionary fares scheme is met through general grant. The Local Government Finance Settlement 2002–03 increased general grant in the current financial year by 5 per cent. on a like for like basis. Local authorities are responsible for decisions on their spending priorities bearing in mind their statutory responsibilities and the wishes of their electorate.

Estimated total expenditure on concessionary travel schemes on all transport modes in England is about £504 million. Of this we estimate that some £443 million is for travel for pensioners and disabled people on local bus services, including schemes that are more generous than the statutory half-fare requirement. We have no separate figures for the cost of half-fare travel on buses.

It is estimated that the additional cost of providing concessionary travel for men aged 60–64 on all modes will be £50 million per year.

We have no estimate for the cost of providing free transport for pensioners. However we estimate that the additional cost of providing free travel on local bus services for pensioners and disabled people would be in the order of £300 million per year.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [52257]

Mr. Ingram: The key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency (AFPAA) for the financial year 2002–03. The targets build upon progress made by the agency since it formed on 1 April 1997, and are set against three main groupings as follows.

Delivery of service

To make 99.9 per cent. of all pay payments by the due date (excluding late payments caused by events determined to be outside the control of the agency).

To make 100 per cent. of all pension payments by the due date (excluding late payments caused by events determined to be outside the control of the agency).

To keep the error rate within 1 per 1,000 for payments of pensions.

To keep the error rate within 1.5 per 1,000 for payments of pay and allowances.

To respond to all pay, pension, records of service and manpower inquiries in accordance with the requirements of each service level agreement (SLA) and emerging customer service agreements (93–96 per cent. within 10 working days).

Service enhancement

To deliver minor change in accordance with agreed programs and major change in accordance with individual project plans to implement approved policy aspects of the modernisation agenda (95–98 per cent. over the planning period).

Efficiency

Reduce the unit cost by 12 per cent., over a four year period, for delivery of core pay and personnel administration. Consistent with this the agency will target a 3.5 per cent. saving in year 2002–03.

Gibraltar

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the MOD facilities in Gibraltar; what the future of the MOD facilities in Gibraltar under the Brussels Process is; and what arrangements have been made under the Brussels Process for the continued use of military facilities in Gibraltar by UK forces in the event of a 'yes' vote in the referendum [51017]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence maintains a wide range of facilities in Gibraltar, including HM Naval Base; RAF Gibraltar; the Royal Naval hospital; ammunition, fuel and stores depots; a training area; maritime exercise areas; communications facilities; sport and recreational facilities; St. Christopher's school; and accommodation for service and civilian personnel. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe told the House on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 451, the United Kingdom will retain full control over the British military base in Gibraltar.

Beaufort Trench (Mustard Gas)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much mustard gas is stored in the Beaufort trench; and what recent assessment has been carried out to determine the health risks associated with the site. [51570]

Dr. Moonie: Detailed inventories of chemical weapons and other munitions disposed of in Beaufort's Dyke are no longer available; many records were destroyed after the disposals as a matter of routine custom and practice in view of the fact that sea dumping of munitions, including CW-filled items, was then an acceptable method of disposal. Where records of disposals do remain in existence, they have been released to the Public Record Office. From those existing records, it is known that some 14,500 tons of 5 inch artillery rockets filled with phosgene were dumped in Beaufort's Dyke in July 1945. There are no records which indicate that other chemical weapons, including mustard gas, have been disposed of to that dump

site. As to the potential risk posed by chemical weapons, the long-held consensus of international scientific opinion is that munitions on the sea bed present no significant risk to safety, human health or the marine environment, provided they remain undisturbed.

Phosgene is destroyed by hydrolysis on contact with seawater. The surveys of Beaufort's Dyke conducted by the then Scottish Office in 1995 and 1996 found no residual traces of chemical weapons in that dump site. A copy of the 1996 report by the Scottish Office, entitled 'Fisheries Research Service Report 15/96', which confirms the findings of the surveys, is available in the Library of the House.

Heavy Lift Aircraft

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent *(a)* representations he has received from the NATO Secretary-General and *(b)* discussions he has had with his European counterparts concerning the possibility for European countries to come together in order to obtain a fleet of C-17s and C-130Js to fill the gap until their orders for the A400M come forward; and if he will make a statement. [51021]

Mr. Hoon: Transport aircraft are one of the capability shortfall areas which European Union member states have identified in the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP). The shortfall is primarily in outsized transport aircraft (larger than a C130). An ECAP panel led by the UK is looking at a number of possible options for member states to address this.

Progress against the ECAP is discussed regularly by EU Defence Ministers, most recently at the informal meeting in Zaragoza on 22–23 March. As capability improvements achieved through the ECAP also benefit NATO, there are regular contacts with the NATO Secretary-General on this topic.

Sentry Duty (Edinburgh Castle)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with representatives of the armed forces regarding the removal of the traditional sentry duty of Edinburgh castle. [51271]

Mr. Ingram: Such decisions are quite rightly a matter for the local army commander. In this case, the decision to withdraw the traditional sentries from continuous duty at Edinburgh castle between April and September was taken by the General Officer Commanding, 2nd Division, after due consideration. The hon. Member should note however that castle guard will continue to be mounted during state ceremonial occasions during the summer months.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations the Government have received regarding the decision to remove the traditional sentry duty of Edinburgh castle. [51274]

Mr. Ingram: The General Officer Commanding 2nd Division has received a number of letters and pre-printed coupons, cut from an Edinburgh evening newspaper, seeking reinstatement of the sentries. He has also received a letter from Sarah Boyack, a Member of the Scottish Parliament. I too have received a copy of Ms Boyack's letter and I will be replying to her shortly.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the costs associated with the traditional sentry duty of Edinburgh castle were in the last 12 months. [51272]

Mr. Ingram: The direct costs of mounting the sentries at Edinburgh castle are in the order of £84,000 each year. The indirect cost is the fact that the soldiers concerned are not available for military training or other duties. These costs cannot be readily quantified.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment the Government have made of the impact the traditional sentry duty of Edinburgh castle has on *(a)* morale of army soldiers and *(b)* army resources. [51273]

Mr. Ingram: Soldiers acting as sentries at Edinburgh castle are aware that they have no guarding or security role, and this is not conducive to good morale. In terms of resourcing, providing these sentries throughout the summer months is a heavy drain upon the single battalion which is available for public duties in Scotland and, as such, represents an inappropriate use of highly trained military manpower.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to provide the figure for the total number of operational nuclear warheads in the United Kingdom's stockpile; and if he will make a statement. [51138]

Mr. Ingram: In line with the policy set out in the Strategic Defence Review, we have fewer than 200 operationally available warheads. It would not be in the interests of national security to be more precise than this, and I am therefore withholding the information sought under Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The right hon. Member may like to note that the United Kingdom is widely agreed already to be the most transparent country in the world about its holdings of nuclear weapons.

Falkland Islands

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance he is giving to South Atlantic veterans to visit the South Atlantic to mark the 20th anniversary of the recapture of the Falkland Islands. [51719]

Mr. Ingram: It is not the Government's policy to provide assistance in the form of free or subsidised travel for veterans who wish to attend commemorative events overseas, and there is no provision in the Defence budget for such expenditure. The one exception is the war widows pilgrimage scheme operated on behalf of the Ministry of Defence by Remembrance Travel, the pilgrimage department of the Royal British Legion, which enables widows of servicemen who died while serving overseas in or before 1967 to visit their husband's grave once at a reduced rate.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he is making to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the recapture of the Falkland Islands. [51718]

Mr. Ingram: The Falkland Islands authorities are planning a series of events later this year, culminating in a cathedral service in Stanley on Liberation Day, 14 June. The armed forces will take part in a tri-service parade with each of the services represented and the Royal Marines will provide a band. I will visit the Falkland Islands at this time and will attend the cathedral service on behalf of the armed forces.

Service Personnel

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* army personnel, *(b)* navy personnel and *(c)* RAF personnel are (i) assigned to operations, (ii) training for operations, (iii) recovering from operations and (iv) training for their assigned role; and what the percentage is of each service in each case. [49674]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 3 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1019–20W. The table shows the total number and percentage of trained service personnel deployed on military tasks at home and abroad. This includes personnel deployed on operations (e.g. in Afghanistan) and ongoing commitments (e.g. in the Falkland Islands), but excludes those personnel undertaking public duties.

	Number	*Percentage*
Navy (including Marines)	5,707	15.3
Army	23,440	23.2
Air Force	6,324	12.9

The remaining data requested are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, we estimate that around 5–6 per cent. of trained service personnel are either preparing for, or recovering from, deployments on military tasks.

Those service personnel not accounted for in the above figures are engaged in a wide range of other activities, including collective and individual training.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Israel

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to Israel in respect of its failure to implement in full United Nations Security Council resolutions. [49268]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government have called for an immediate and full Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian towns in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1402. The Foreign Secretary most recently stressed our concerns to Israeli Foreign Minister Peres in a telephone conversation on 15 April. We have called on both parties to implement UN Security Council Resolutions 1397, 1402 and 1403.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his current estimate is of the quantity of *(a)* nuclear weapons and *(b)* chemical weapons possessed by Israel. [49480]

Mr. Bradshaw: Any such estimate would be based on sensitive intelligence sources. It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on intelligence matters.

We regularly call upon Israel to resolve international concerns about its nuclear status by acceding to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear weapons state.

Israel is a state party to the 1925 Geneva Protocol which prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons. It has also signed, but not ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling and retention of chemical weapons. We continue to urge Israel to ratify the convention whenever an appropriate opportunity arises.

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received the UN Secretary General's report to the Commission on the Status of Women on discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan (E/CN.6/2002/5 dated 24 January); and what action he will take to ensure the recommendations are implemented. [50698]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have received the UN Secretary General's Report to the Commission on the Status of Women on discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan (E/CN.6/2002/5 dated 24 January). We welcome its recommendations. At the UN, the UK co-sponsored a Consensus Resolution on women and girls in Afghanistan (E/CN.6/2002/L.4/Rev.2) approved on 25 March, which urges the Interim Administration to undertake a series of steps aimed at improving the quality of life for women.

As stated in my reply of 28 February to my hon. Friend, *Official Report*, columns 1638–39W, we have always said that the restoration of human rights, including women's rights, will be key to the establishment of stable systems of government in Afghanistan.

We welcome the role that women are playing in the Afghan Interim Authority, both in the Interim Administration and on the Loya Jirga Commission. While the form of any future Afghan Government is for the Afghan people to decide, we expect that women will be involved.

On reconstruction, our projects have always involved women and this will continue in the recovery and rehabilitation process. The involvement of women in projects, and use of expertise on gender issues will help to ensure that the rights of women are promoted—particularly recognising the complexity of gender issues in Afghanistan.

Mr. Salah Zanie

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will reply to the letter dated 21 February from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. Salah Zanie. [51427]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend's letter crossed with the Secretary of State's letter of 20 February. A further copy will be sent and I apologise for any confusion caused.

East Timor

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the British Government were informed that East Timor was to be taken over by Indonesian-backed forces; and if he will make a statement. [51251]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British Government were of course aware of reports of Indonesian involvement in East Timor ahead of the invasion in 1975, but the situation was far from clear and reports were difficult to verify. In the absence of any British representation in the area, HMG had no independent means of doing so. The UK deplored the Indonesian invasion and did not recognise the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia.

Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* the date and *(b)* the outcome was of meetings his Department has held with representatives of the *(a)* Portuguese, *(b)* Indonesian, *(c)* Australian and *(d)* New Zealand Governments concerning the deaths of Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters; and what matters were discussed. [51309]

Mr. Bradshaw: Ministers and officials have regularly discussed this case with representatives of other Governments. Full details of the significant number of meetings could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

The British Government continue to take an active interest in the events surrounding the deaths of Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters and will raise our concerns with other Governments at every appropriate opportunity.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indonesian Government in relation to Yumus Yosfiah and the deaths of Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters. [51308]

Mr. Bradshaw: Ministers have regularly raised this case with the Indonesian authorities. The most recent discussion took place in Jakarta in August 2001 when I met the Indonesian Attorney-General.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United Nations transitional administration in East Timor in relation to Yumus Yosfiah and the deaths of Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters. [51307]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have discussed this case on a number of occasions with Sergio Vieira de Mello, Head of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor. I did so most recently when we met in London in October 2001.

Ministerial Meetings (President Kostunica of Serbia)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met President Kostunica of Serbia; and what was discussed. [51241]

Mr. MacShane: FRY President Kostunica visited the UK on 28–29 November and had an audience with Her Majesty The Queen. He also met my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary, and the Secretary of State for International Development. The Foreign Secretary held a meeting with Foreign Minister Svilanovic.

The Government underlined their support for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's development as a democratic state and partner in Europe. The FRY needed to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and send a clear message to Bosnian Serbs that their future lay in Bosnia. Continued positive FRY engagement in Kosovo was necessary, as was a resolution of the constitutional position of Montenegro. Further internal reforms were needed, including in the FRY Army.

Macedonia/Kosovo Border

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest developments on the Macedonia/Kosovo border. [51240]

Mr. MacShane: The situation on the Macedonia/Kosovo border is stable. A demarcation agreement was signed between the Federal Yugoslav and Macedonian Governments in February 2001. UNMIK and the Macedonian authorities have established a joint committee to agree working arrangements to allow farmers access to their land and to relax Macedonia's visa regime for Kosovo citizens in possession of UNMIK travel documents.

The UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR), in conjunction with the Macedonian authorities, have taken action against organised crime and extremism, confiscating arms and ammunition and detaining suspected traffickers.

Complaints

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many complaints were registered against his Department in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in those periods. [51220]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Information on the number of complaints registered and that are current is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, information on the outcome of statutory investigations that were concluded between 1990 and 1996 is set out in the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Annual Reports. Copies of the Annual Reports covering the period specified are available in the Library.

Information on the proportion of complaints taken up and upheld by Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration between 1990 and 1996 is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Between 1997 and 2002 69 complaints were taken up by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. Of these, 44 were either rejected or discontinued and 10 were informally resolved. In the remaining 15 cases, where a full investigation was carried out, the PCA found that three complaints were justified, 10 partly justified and two not justified.

Complaints received by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are handled in line with FCO complaints procedure, details of which are publicised on the FCO website at www.fco.gov.uk.

Voluntary Sector (Funding)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1185W-86W on Government funding of the voluntary sector, if he will list the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Westminster Foundation for Democracy distributes funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51403]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The FCO may award grants to both national and international voluntary sector organisations from its Conflict Prevention Fund, Human Rights Project Fund, Economic Recovery Fund, Environmental Projects Fund and other funds administered by specific geographical or policy Departments. Individual projects are assessed for awards against criteria based on the FCO's aims and objectives.

Decisions on support for projects made by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy are made by their board, drawing on the advice of the FCO.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 724W, on Zimbabwe, if he will make his substantive reply. [51948]

Mr. Straw: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. James Purnell) on 19 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1208W.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible in each of the last five years. [50298]

Mr. Leslie: The salary costs of the Equal Opportunities Commission can be found in the annual report and accounts for the years in question up to 2000–01. Copies are held in the Library.

The Cabinet Office currently has 12 advisory NDPBs. Information on the salary costs of these NDPBs is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Family-friendly Working Practices

Julie Morgan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent action he has taken to encourage family-friendly working practices in the civil service with special reference to the weekly hours worked. [48829]

Mr. Leslie: Over 14 per cent. of civil servants (some 60,000 staff) now work a flexible hours pattern.

Officials in the Cabinet Office have been working in partnership with Departments and consultants on work-life balance issues over the last 12 months.

Projects have been undertaken with the Inland Revenue and Department of Trade and Industry and guidance is being produced for Departments and agencies. These will address issues of particular concern to part-time staff in the Civil Service Diversity Survey:

'A Managers' Guide to Flexible Working'; and

'A Compendium of Best Practice for Work Life Balance'.

These guides are currently in working draft with Government Departments and will be available on the Cabinet Office Diversity website (www.diversity-whatworks.gov.uk) in autumn 2002.

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the functions of his Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [43001]

Mr. Leslie: In the last five years no Cabinet Office functions were outsourced.

In that period COI outsourced the following:

COI-Picture Library

(i) cost saved £32,000 per annum

(ii) 100 per cent.

COI Film and Video Library

(i) cost saved £148,000 per annum

(ii) 100 per cent.

Pensions Administration

(i) cost saved £10,130 per annum

(ii) 45 per cent.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the policy of the Department is for ensuring responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 are completed within 40 days; and what their procedure is to achieve this. [33476]

Mr. McCartney: The Department's policy is to reply to all subject access requests as soon as possible and in any event within the 40-day mandatory deadline. The 40 days do not start "ticking" until sufficient information is received from the data subject to satisfy the data controller [DWP] as to the identity of the data subject making the request and to enable him to locate the information that they are seeking.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out for each civil service grade within his *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39154]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Leslie) on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1072W.

Verification Framework

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what has been the cost of setting up the verification framework; and what assessment has he made of the costs to local authorities in excess of central Government funding; [42256]

(2) what have been the costs of setting up and implementing the verification framework; what are the costs of operating the verification framework; and what information he holds about the shortfall in funds from central Government; and what information he has collated about the costs of local authorities in setting up and operating the verification framework. [45126]

Malcolm Wicks: The verification framework (VF) was introduced in May 1998 and aims to tighten the gateway onto housing benefit and council tax benefit. It does so through a set of defined standards for collecting and checking evidence before a claim can be paid and during the lifetime of the claim. From April 2002 the VF has been separated into three modules allowing authorities to introduce the scheme incrementally.

Authorities who apply to join the scheme receive a one-off payment as set-up funding and funding to continue operating once they become fully compliant with the scheme module or modules that they have chosen.

Details of total sums spent to date are in the table.

In August 2000, a number of local authorities already compliant with the VF took part in a departmental survey[1] of the cost to local authorities of setting up and running the framework. The results of the survey indicated that implementation and operating costs vary considerably between local authorities, so it is not possible to provide a generalised estimate of the costs for local authorities.

Amount spent on set-up and continuing costs for the verification framework

£000

	Set-up costs	*Continuing costs*
1998–99	4,900	580
1999–2000	15,465	13,662
2000–01	3,484	20,898
2001–02	7,244	31,338
Total to date	31,093	66,478

Notes:
1. 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 data obtained from published departmental accounts.
2. 2001–02 data obtained from departmental housing benefit/council tax benefit administrative payments system.
3. The data does not account for costs repaid after the close of the relevant financial year.

[1] Cost of the Verification Framework, DSS Operational Research, Analytical Services Division 2A, published April 2001.

Child Support

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate when the Child Support Reforms New Rules Implementation computer system will *(a)* have completed full systems testing, *(b)* be fully operational, *(c)* deal with new cases assessed under the new formula and *(d)* deal with existing cases which are transferred onto the new formula; [43362]

(2) who has been awarded the contracts for the *(a)* development, *(b)* systems testing and *(c)* maintenance of the Child Support Reforms New Rules Implementation computer system; [43363]

(3) if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of non-resident parents who (i) fully comply, (ii) partially comply and (iii) do not comply with the CSA maintenance assessments. [43364]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 14 March 2002]*: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made to this House by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 315–16.

Employment Zones

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many personal job accounts have been established as part of the Employment Zone scheme since its introduction in April 2000. [47931]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The personal job account is the amount spent on a participant in step 2 of the Employment Zone process. Step 2 is the stage at which a costed action plan, developed in step 1, is implemented and the participant undertakes their concentrated jobsearch.

Between April 2000 and January 2002, 46,399 Employment Zone participants had moved from step 1 to step 2.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many jobseekers have been provided with *(a)* mobile phones, *(b)* driving lessons and *(c)* financial assistance to buy a motor vehicle as part of (i) the Employment Zone initiative and (ii) the Action Teams for Jobs scheme. [47925]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Higher Education

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discretion local Benefit Agency offices have to discount the availability of student loans when assessing income support for part-time students pursuing higher education courses. [47615]

Malcolm Wicks: Since a student loan is intended to help towards everyday living costs it is taken into account as income. However, before the weekly income is assessed, £319 of the annual loan is disregarded towards the cost of travel and £260 towards the cost of books and

equipment. In addition, any grants made specifically for these costs are disregarded in full. Once the weekly loan income has been calculated a further £10 a week is disregarded.

Local offices do not have any discretion to discount student loans as income when assessing entitlement to any income-related benefit. However as part-time students generally receive an annual loan of £500, which is below the amounts allowed for travel, books and equipment, the loan will normally be disregarded in full.

If a student loan is available, it is taken into account regardless of whether it has been applied for or received. If a loan is not available, a student must provide evidence to that effect.

Pension Credit

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what will be the average gain per person for pensioners benefiting from the new pension credit; [48579]

(2) what advice is available to pensioners about the pension credit and how it can be accessed; [48581]

(3) if he will make a statement on the benefits of the new pensioner credit for people in Middlesbrough, South and East Cleveland; [48582]

(4) what impact will the new pension credit have on pensioners receiving housing and council tax benefits; [48583]

(5) how the savings credit element of the new pension credit will operate. [48584]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the booklet, "The Pension Credit: the Government's proposals" which sets out how pension credit will work. A copy is available in the Library.

Subject to successful passage of the State Pension Credit Bill, pension credit will be introduced in October 2003. About 4.1 million pensioner households (over 5 million pensioners) will be eligible. On average they stand to gain around £400 a year.

Pension credit will ensure a guaranteed minimum income for those aged 60 and over so they need not live on less than £100 a week (£154 a week for pensioner couples). It will also ensure that pensioners no longer lose a pound in their benefit for every pound of pensions or other savings they have built up. From age 65 pension credit will give pensioners a cash addition of 60p for every £1 of income they have above the level of basic state pension up to a maximum of £13.80 week (£18.60 a week for couples). Pensioners with incomes up to £135 a week (£200 a week for couples) will benefit.

The housing benefit and council tax benefit schemes will be modified at a cost of £450 million a year to ensure that people who gain from pension credit do not lose those gains because of knock-on effects. As a consequence, almost 1.9 million pensioner households will be entitled to more help, or entitled to help for the first time, with their rent or council tax from October 2003.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Employment Service IT Partnership by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49658]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The savings to public funds were estimated to be £64 million (net present value) over the 10 year life-span of the contract with Electronic Data Systems. These savings were based on the comparison of the estimated costs of continuing to provide the service in-house and were forecast on the basis of planning assumptions known at the time the contract was let.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Private Finance Initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50287]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: None.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people who had to make a claim for the 2001–02 winter fuel payment; and of that number how many failed to do so by 31 March. [50990]

Mr. McCartney: For winter 2001–02, an estimated 500,000 people became newly entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment. At least 255,00 of these people were paid automatically.

Exact numbers of people who need to claim are not available. However, by the deadline of 30 March, around 220,000 claims forms have been received. It is up to the individual to choose whether to claim.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to transfer responsibility for the administration of local authority benefits to Jobcentre Plus offices. [52084]

Malcolm Wicks: We are encouraging Jobcentre Plus and local authority managers to build on the framework of liaison and service level agreements that already exist. This will help to ensure the efficient administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, which is so important for many of the people using our services, not least in helping the transition to work.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [49598]

Mr. McCartney: The Department sponsors 11 non-departmental public bodies. Of these, only four employ people. The Disability Rights Commission, the

Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority and the Pensions Ombudsman employ around 430 people between them. Many of these have been employed because of their particular expertise in their field. Remploy employs over 10,000 people, the majority of whom are disabled people in supported employment.

None of these bodies has employed anyone under the New Deal for Young People in the last four years.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47143]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since May 1997, the expert adviser for the Lord Chancellor's Department has accompanied a Minister overseas only once. On that occasion the Lord Chancellor, a senior Departmental official, the expert adviser, and a private secretary went to Brussels on official business. The total cost of the visit for the whole party was £1,670.00. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, (1) what the cost was to her Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated; [49109]

(2) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49151]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by the President of the Council and the Leader of the House on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible in each of the last five years. [50293]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The answer covers the Legal Services Commission and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

Salary costs for staff working in the Legal Services Commission are set out as follows. The figures include overtime payments, but exclude social security and pension costs, and have been subject to audit.

1997–98—£24,310,000
1998–99—£25,563,000
1999–2000—£25,240,000
2000–01—£28,775,000
2001–02—£32,859,000.

The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) came into existence in April 2001. Salary costs for 2001–02 totalled £37,021,259.

Census Information

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on Government policy relating to publication of census information, with special reference to information contained in the website at http://learningcurve.pro.gov.uk/FocusOn/census/what is/intro.htm printed on the census forms for England and Wales; and what action the Public Record Office has taken to amend the information published on its website. [51181]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The specific reference is to the PRO's Learning Curve website, which is an on-line teaching resource, structured to tie in with the History National Curriculum from Key Stages 2 to 5. Its investigation "Focus On ... The Census" is intended to encourage schools to consult census material. At one point it states "To encourage people to provide the correct details, the Government has always guaranteed that any personal information will not be made available to the public for 100 years."

This statement compresses into a single sentence the various assurances which Governments have provided about the confidentiality of census returns at different times. Early census schedules assured individuals that the information collected from them would be published in "General Abstract only" and would not be used for "the gratification of curiosity". Although the precise wording has differed for each census, all assurances given on the forms have been to the effect that information would be kept confidential. In 1966, under Section 5(1) of the Public Records Act, the Lord Chancellor signed Instrument 12 which closed the decennial censuses for 100 years.

The PRO has now amended the wording on the Learning Curve website in order to increase its clarity.

Government Funding

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1185–86W, on Government funding of the voluntary sector, if she will list the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which the Legal Services Commission distribute funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51413]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Commission funds not for profit organisations in three ways. First it pays not for profit organisations under contract to deliver legal aid services to the public by means of the Community Legal Service Fund. This accounts for most of the payments to the not for profit sector.

Second the Commission pays grants to not for profit agencies in order to improve the delivery of legal aid services, for example by offering training and support to providers or developing standards to underpin new forms of service.

Third under the Partnership Innovation Budget (PIB), which was launched on 8 May 2001, the Commission makes grants on a joint funding basis with other Community Legal Service partner organisations. This scheme helps meet local needs with innovative services that do not fit within current funding mechanisms.

Data Protection Act

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has to amend the Data Protection Act 1998. [49317]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 188W.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Voting Procedures

Norman Baker: To ask the President of the Council if he will propose changes within the House to allow abstentions to be recorded. [49316]

Mr. Robin Cook: No.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list companies and organisations taking part in the United Kingdom's greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme. [50431]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

34 organisations entered the scheme as direct participants and bid in the auction, held in March 2002.

It is expected that the number of participants will increase later this year as nearly 6,000 companies with Climate Change Agreements who can chose to use the scheme to meet their targets, or sell any over-achievement, start to participate.

The 34 Direct participants are:

Asda Stores Ltd.
Barclays Bank plc
Battle McCarthy Carbon Club
Blue Circle Industries plc
British Airways plc
British Sugar plc
BP plc
Budweiser Stag Brewing Company Ltd.
Dalkia plc
Dana UK Holdings Ltd.
Dupont (U.K.) Ltd.
EGNI (Wales) Ltd.
First Hydro Company
Ford Motor Company Ltd.
General Domestic Appliances Ltd.
GKN (U.K.) plc
Imerys Minerals Ltd.
Ineos Fluor Ltd.
Kirklees Metropolitan Council
Land Securities plc
Lend Lease Real Estate Investment Services Ltd.
Marks & Spencer plc
Mitsubishi Corporation UK plc
Motorola GTSS
The Natural History Museum
Quantum Gas Management
Rhodia Organique Fine Ltd.
Rolls-Royce plc
Royal Ordnance plc
Shell UK Ltd.
Somerfield Stores Ltd.
Tesco Stores Ltd.
UK Coal Mining Ltd.
WatesGroup.

Cluster Munitions

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what Open Individual Export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of cluster munitions; and if she will provide the *(a)* number of cluster munitions exported, *(b)* category codes and *(c)* final end-use destination; [46156]

(2) what export licences have been granted since the introduction of the ELATE export licensing system for the export of cluster munitions; and what are *(a)* the number of cluster munitions exported, *(b)* the category codes and *(c)* the final end-use destination; [46247]

Nigel Griffiths: Licences issued covering cluster munitions are recorded on the ELATE database under ratings ML3 and ML4. These headings cover a range of other equipment including bombs, torpedoes, rockets, missiles as well as mine clearance equipment (as described on page 310 of the Government's annual report on strategic export controls for 2000). Cluster munitions are not recorded as a separate category in the annual report or on ELATE. For this reason, a breakdown by end use destination of the licences issued covering cluster munitions cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

The DTI's Export Control Organisation records details of licences issued and licences refused. We are reviewing how this information might be better collated.

Home Safety

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on what help is available to organisations for safer building and home safety from the modernisation fund. [47910]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The DTI's consumer protection Modernisation Fund was launched early in 2001. To date we have earmarked £2.5 million to support local projects which offer practical home safety interventions. Many of the projects involve improvements to make homes safer such as stair handrails, child-proof window locks, home safety checks and installation of smoke alarms. In 2001–02 we supported 12 projects across the UK and provided support to strengthen the

capacity of two national home safety charities, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Child Accident Prevention Trust. Applications for awards during 2002–03 closed on 15 February and I will announce the successful projects shortly.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [49611]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not available. The Department's non-departmental public bodies do not monitor future employment or otherwise of people taken on under the New Deal for Young People.

Exports (Tanzania)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she was informed that British Aerospace had received down payments for the Tanzanian Air Traffic Control System prior to an export licence being granted; and if she will make a statement. [49740]

Nigel Griffiths: This information is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part 2, Exemption 1 and 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Engineering Projects

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the projects undertaken by the Engineering Technology Board that her Department plans to support. [49878]

Mr. Wilson: Discussions between the Department and the Engineering Technology Board about project support have not, as yet, reached this level of detail. There is agreement in principle that some support will be offered.

Draft EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what Government policy is on the financial impact on councils of the draft EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive; [50914]

(2) what the Government's policy is on *(a)* individual company responsibility, *(b)* collective industry responsibility and *(c)* community responsibility through the general taxation system for costs of collection and recycling of waste equipment as required by the draft EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. [50919]

Mr. Wilson: The UK's approach to the implementation of the directive will depend on the provisions of the directive when finally adopted.

The Government will consult fully with all stakeholders on implementation options once the final text is available.

In addition, a further regulatory impact assessment will be carried out to assess the financial and other impacts of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive on local authorities and other stakeholders. Where the costs of EU initiatives fall disproportionately on local authorities, the lead Government Department is responsible for fully funding those costs.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the impact on the economic viability of *(a)* individual businesses and *(b)* defined business sectors from the implementation of the draft EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive; [50916]

(2) what assessment she has made of the cost to UK business of the draft EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. [50912]

Mr. Wilson: The Department submitted its updated Explanatory Memorandum and partial regulatory impact assessment of the proposal to both Houses on 15 March 2002. The regulatory impact assessment suggests that the costs to business lie in the range of £191 million and £391 million per annum in the UK.

The European Commission's Explanatory Memorandum suggests that product price increases could be between 1 and 3 per cent. if the costs of the proposal were to be passed on to consumers. Under these circumstances, economic viability of businesses or sectors would not be significantly affected.

Impacts on the economic viability of businesses or sectors will also depend on domestic implementation structures. The Government will consult all stakeholders while devising implementing legislation.

ITV Digital

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings she has had with representatives of *(a)* Granada plc and *(b)* Carlton Communications plc since ITV Digital's entry into administration. [50715]

Mr. Alexander: Neither I nor the Secretary of State have met representatives of *(a)* Granada plc and *(b)* Carlton Communications plc since ITV Digital's entry into administration, though DCMS and DTI officials are keeping abreast of the situation.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of ITV Digital's entry into administration on the Government's plans for digital television provision in the UK. [50714]

Mr. Alexander: The policies and targets which the Government have set for digital TV are not predicated on the actions of any one company. The Digital Television Action Plan sets out a wide range of tasks to be undertaken by Government and various stakeholders in order to achieve our aim for the UK to have the most dynamic and competitive market for digital TV in the G7, and to enable us to meet the criteria set for the switchover from analogue to digital terrestrial transmissions. The action plan is kept under review so that it can be developed to reflect changes in the market.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has met representatives of ITV Digital since it entered administration. [50713]

Mr. Alexander: Neither I nor the Secretary of State have met representatives of ITV Digital since it entered administration, though DCMS and DTI officials are keeping abreast of the situation.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to set a minimum rate at which electricity companies may buy electricity from owners of solar panels. [51194]

Mr. Wilson: I have no current plans to set a minimum rate for electricity purchased from owners of solar panels. In a liberalised electricity market suppliers can choose to offer special tariffs for electricity generated from renewable sources, and one or two are already offering equal tariffs for electricity generated from solar panels.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what incentives are available for people investing in solar energy. [51197]

Mr. Wilson: The £20 million First Phase of the Major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme, which I announced on 26 March, offers incentives to a variety of people and organisations to install solar panels.

Applications for individual systems of 0.5–5kWp will be accepted from householders, schools, community groups and SMEs on a rolling basis and 50 per cent. capital grant awards will be automatic, provided that the basic programme criteria are met. Applications for larger individual systems, or for multiple systems (e.g. from housing developers) will be considered on a quarterly competitive call basis. Grant levels will be subject to European Union State Aid rules and will vary from 65 per cent. for public bodies to 40 per cent. for private sector organisations other than SMEs.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what forecast she has made of the proportion of UK electricity generating capacity which will use solar energy in the next decade. [51192]

Mr. Wilson: DTI energy projections cover installed capacity in the electricity supply industry (ESI), which is defined as major power producers and those 'industrial' generators using renewable sources of energy. Latest DTI[1] projections for the ESI show zero installed solar PV capacity to 2010.

Installed UK solar PV capacity in building, non-building and off-grid applications was 1.95MW in 2000. Although no formal projections have been made about growth in this area, existing field trials and the First Phase of the Major PV Demonstration Programme (MDP) should add around 10–15MW of installed capacity over the next three years. This could rise to 200MW over the next decade if the full MDP is implemented.

[1] Energy Projections for the UK, DTI Energy Paper 68, "http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/energyprojections.htm"

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set a target for the installation of solar panels on domestic properties. [51193]

Mr. Wilson: Under the £20 million First Phase of the Major Photovoltaics (PV) Demonstration Programme (MDP), which I announced on 26 March, there is a target for 3,000 domestic roofs to receive solar panels over the next three years. The Government will take a decision on whether to proceed with a second phase, and if so the appropriate target for the number of systems, in the light of progress achieved with the first phase.

In addition, my Department's Domestic PV Systems Field Trial, which is already underway, should see PV systems installed on over 500 roofs by the end of this financial year.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated cost is of extending the enhanced capital allowances scheme for energy saving technologies to include *(a)* solar photovoltaics and *(b)* onshore and offshore wind; and if she will make a statement. [51507]

Mr. Wilson: Solar photovoltaics, onshore and offshore wind already benefit from the Renewables Obligation and exemption from the climate change levy. Except for onshore wind energy, which is already a competitive technology, they also benefit from substantial capital grants. We have no plans to extend enhanced capital allowances to these technologies.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated total value is of her Department's capital funding programmes to the UK solar PV industry in each year from 2001 to 2005 for *(a)* domestic, *(b)* commercial and *(c)* industrial applications; and if she will make a statement. [51511]

Mr. Wilson: The Domestic Field Trial is supporting the installation of PV systems on over 500 homes from 2001–03 with a budget of £5.4 million, and the Large-Scale Field Trial is supporting the installation of large PV systems on 18 non-residential buildings from 2002–04 with a budget of £4.2 million.

In addition, the First Phase of the Major PV Demonstration Programme, which the Secretary of State launched on 26 March, will support the installation of PV systems on at least 3,000 homes and 140 non-residential buildings over the years 2002–05, with a budget of £20 million. The budget will be split roughly 2:1 in favour of domestic applications, and the split between commercial, industrial and other large non-residential buildings will be determined by a selection panel on the basis of proposals received in the quarterly competitive call process.

Pay Statistics

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average gap between men's and women's pay in *(a)* England and *(b)* the Buckingham constituency is. [51395]

Alan Johnson: *(a)* According to the 2001 New Earnings Survey (the latest data available), conducted by the Office for National Statistics, average hourly pay for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in England, was £12.18 for men and £9.90 for women, a pay gap of £2.28.

(b) Estimates for the parliamentary constituency of Buckingham are not available. According to the 2001 New Earnings Survey, average hourly pay for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the county of Buckinghamshire, was £13.82 for men and £10.33 for women, a pay gap of £3.49.

Universities (Companies)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies were spun out by universities in *(a)* Buckinghamshire and *(b)* England in each year since 1997. [51425]

Ms Hewitt: The Higher Education Business Interaction Survey shows that there were 220 spinouts in total from universities in England between August 1994 and July 1999, and 139 between August 1999 and July 2000.

Individual institutions responded to the survey on a confidential basis, so I am not able to supply breakdowns by county.

National Business Debtline

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many calls the National Business Debtline has received *(a)* in total and *(b)* from businesses based in the Buckingham constituency in each year since its inception; and what the cost was in each year. [51388]

Nigel Griffiths: The table contains the information about the number of national callers and the number from Buckinghamshire.

	Number of calls received:	
Period in which the calls were made	*Nationally*	*From Buckinghamshire*
July to December 2000	2,497	8
January to December 2001	5,933	34 + [1]146 = 180
January to 11 April 2002	1,479	[1]195
Total	9,909	42 + [1]341 = 383

[1] These figures refer to south-east England as not only Buckinghamshire.

We fund this pilot with £80,000 per annum and the banks provide an additional £102,000 per annum.

Tax Incentives

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Treasury regarding tax incentives for industries in areas of deprivation. [51374]

Alan Johnson: DTI and Treasury Ministers have had a range of discussions about tax issues, including tax incentives relating to deprived areas. In the Budget on 17 April the Chancellor announced the implementation of the Community Investment Tax Credit. He also announced that the Government will abolish stamp duty for all non-residential transfers in the UK's most disadvantaged areas, subject to EU state aids approval. The Budget also confirmed that the Government have committed £20 million to the Community Development Venture Fund, and that the Government remain confident that private investors will contribute a further £20 million.

Micro-renewable Technologies

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what policy measures, in addition to her Department's capital funding, have been introduced since 1997 to support the development of micro-renewable technologies in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [51510]

Mr. Wilson: In addition to the general support for renewables provided by the Renewables Obligation and Climate Change Levy exemption, there have been a number of initiatives aimed specifically to encourage smaller projects.

In February, I launched the Community Renewables Initiative to encourage community-based renewable energy projects, many of which are likely to be small.

Agency Workers

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to issue the discussion paper on legal issues relating to employment status; for what reason it has been delayed; and if she will make a statement. [51566]

Alan Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Twickenham on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 443W. A discussion document is in preparation.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government's policy is towards the draft EU law on protection for agency workers; and if she will make a statement. [51565]

Alan Johnson: The European Commission published a proposal for a directive on temporary agency workers in March 2002. We are currently studying the proposal to establish whether it protects agency workers without damaging the important contribution agency workers and agencies make to the labour market and to maintaining high levels of employment.

Employment Relations Act

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government have taken under section 23 of the Employment Relations Act 1999; and if she will make a statement. [51567]

Alan Johnson: None. We are in the process of undertaking a review of employment status issues pursuant to Section 23. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 443W.

Rural/Urban Definitions

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what definitions of *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban are used by her Department. [51657]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* My Department currently uses the broad definitions contained in the Rural and Urban White Papers. However, the Government recognises that there is a need for a more co-ordinated and consistent approach to the categorisation and use of definitions of urban and rural areas. For that reason DEFRA, DTLR, the Countryside Agency and the Office for National Statistics are working together towards a better set of definitions.

Energy Markets

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 381W, on energy markets,

what action her Department has taken since May 2001 in regard to bringing the benefits of market liberalisation to rural consumers. [51950]

Mr. Wilson: The benefits of energy liberalisation have been extended to rural consumers. Research undertaken by OFGEM shows that 35 per cent. of gas customers and 32 per cent. of electricity customers in rural areas have switched supplier, compared with 38 per cent. of gas customers and 41 per cent. of electricity customers in urban areas. The differences in the rate of customer switching in rural areas are in part due to the inability of consumers in areas without mains gas to take up "dual fuel" deals.

To address this, the Government have established a working group to look at issues surrounding extension of the gas network, as part of their Fuel Poverty Strategy. The group reported in November 2001 and its report was published on the DTI website http://www2.dti.gov.uk/energy/gasnetworks/index.htm. The Government are considering how the report's recommendations can best be taken forward.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 380, on energy markets, what her Department's definition of the term 'vulnerable consumers' is. [51952]

Mr. Wilson: There is no definition of the term "vulnerable customers" in draft energy market liberalisation legislation under discussion in the European Council and Parliament. Member States will therefore be free to define the term in any national implementing legislation. The definition used in the UK for the purpose of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy is as follows: "vulnerable households are those at risk of ill-health from cold conditions—older householders, families with children and households who are disabled or suffering from a long-term illness".

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 380W, on energy markets, if it is the UK Government's policy not to take a position on individual European Parliament amendments that are not included in the European Commission's revised text. [51951]

Mr. Wilson: The UK Government do not take a position on individual European Parliament amendments not included in the Commission's revised text. Approximately 500 amendments to the internal market legislation currently under discussion were tabled by MEPs, around 150 of which were accepted in the European Parliament's Plenary vote. It is now up to the Commission to decide which amendments to accept and to present these to the council in a revised text. It would be pointless to take a position on every amendment as the majority of them will not appear in the revised Commission proposal.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 19 March concerning correspondence from an engineering firm in Walsall. [51803]

Mr. Wilson: I have answered today.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Public Appointments

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 717W, on public appointments, what information he receives on possible appointees to non-departmental public bodies prior to their appointment; and what method his Department uses to notify people of their appointment to a non-departmental public body. [44104]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The procedures for making appointments to non-departmental public bodies are governed by the rules set out in the Code of Practice published by the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA). This includes a requirement for each applicant to complete an application form. As well as information relevant to the specific appointment, application forms request information on ethnicity, gender and disability for monitoring purposes. The OCPA Code also requires Departments to ask all applicants to supply information on any political activity in which they have engaged in the five years prior to application.

Successful applicants receive a letter of appointment. Details of appointments to public bodies are published in press releases at the time of appointment and in the annual report of the non-departmental public body. Details of all appointments to Home Office non-departmental public bodies are published in the Home Office annual report, copies of which are placed in the Library.

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43681]

Angela Eagle: The Home Department is unable to provide the level of detailed information sought on contracts and contract costs. Records are not held centrally and to collate and maintain a central register of contracts awarded across the Home Office and its agencies would incur disproportionate costs.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if he will make a statement. [32316]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Civil Service Management Code prohibits Departments and agencies from providing staff with private medical insurance. Remuneration for the employees of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) is a matter for the

non-departmental public body (NDPB) concerned and its sponsoring Department, subject to any statutory provision, but information about these arrangements in Home Office sponsored NDPBs is not collated centrally.

Asylum Seekers

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often in the last three years, and for what purpose, his Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments). [48948]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 567W.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in his Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50413]

Angela Eagle: Costs for 2002–03 are not known as the pay increase for 2002–03 has not yet been agreed. The estimated cost of the pay increase for 2001–02 at the time of the settlement was as follows:

Core Home Office: £8.57 million.

Agencies

Prison Service: £32.1 million.

Forensic Science Service: £1.3 million.

United Kingdom Passport Service: £1.7 million.

Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)

Community Development Foundation: £0.003 million.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority: £0.12 million.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel: £0.036 million.

Office of the Immigration Service Commissioner: £0.035 million.

Police Complaints Authority: Not applicable[1]

Police Information Technology Organisation: £0.6 million.

Youth Justice Board: £0.09 million.

[1] The Police Complaints Authority's staff are on loan from numerous departments and remain on their parent department's payroll and pay settlement dates.

Prisons

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* independent custody visitors' groups and *(b)* lay observers' panels published annual reports in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [49980]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 514W.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to improve links between prisons and voluntary sector organisations. [49979]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service is committed to developing and strengthening its relationship with voluntary and community organisations at all levels. For this reason a national Voluntary Sector Co-ordinator (Jo Gordon) was appointed in January 2001. She organised a series of regional consultation events, bringing together staff and volunteers from voluntary and community groups with Prison Service staff. A strategy "Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector" based on ideas and information from the consultation process was published in December 2001. This sets out recommendations for the development and better management of relationships with voluntary and community groups. A Prison Service Order based on the strategy will be issued to establishments in May 2002.

Further work in hand includes:

a guide on volunteering in prisons (which will be a companion to the "Guide to Good Practice for Voluntary and Community Organisations Working with Prisons", which was produced jointly with the CLINKS organisation last year);

an induction pack for voluntary and community sector staff and volunteers new to working in prisons;

"Get Linked, A Guide to Community Links", produced in partnership with the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (Nacro), which will have a specific focus on building links with black and minority ethnic voluntary and community groups;

a national conference in June 2002 to bring together voluntary and community groups with prison staff and representatives from other criminal justice agencies to review the progress made so far and help plan future developments.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the key performance target is for the improvement of prisoners' basic literacy and numeracy skills in the financial year 2001–02. [49990]

Beverley Hughes: The target for 2001–02 is for prisoners to achieve 18,000 awards at level 2 for basic skills.

Secondments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many BP employees are on secondment to his Department; for what purposes; on what terms; and how many BP employees have been on secondment to his Department since January 2000. [45885]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* For the periods in question no staff were seconded from BP to the Home Department.

Public Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new steps his Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if he will publish the findings. [47413]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Home Department greatly values input from all our users especially with regard to the services we provide. Feedback is used to inform and influence proposals for change, develop services further, improve initiatives and identify best practice.

Regular checks are made to ensure that services the Home Office provides meet the expectations of their users and we are always looking at ways to improve customer care. The Criminal Records Bureau, for example, used a range of research techniques in 2001–02 such as seminars

and customer fora to get a clear picture of customer attitudes and requirements so that they can cater more precisely to those needs.

The United Kingdom Passport Service regularly issues questionnaires to its customers as a means of tracking customer satisfaction and ran both personal caller and customer awareness surveys last year. The Forensic Science Service has introduced a new approach to monitoring customer satisfaction and will continue to publish the outcome of their biennial customer satisfaction survey in their annual report due to be published in July 2002. The Immigration and Statistics Service, in conjunction with the National Asylum Support Service, consulted asylum seekers about their experiences of the voucher scheme. A report of the findings was published in 2001 and the fieldwork findings will be available on the Home Office website from 8 April 2002.

Increasing use is made of Home Office websites to request comments or feedback and 'Contact Us' facilities and feedback forms have been introduced.

Formal consultation exercises are another important way in which the Home Office seeks the views of its customers. Consultation documents are now made available in a variety of formats in order to make it easy for users to respond. Details of all Home Office consultations published in 2001–02 can be found on our website on http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/consultpapers.htm.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for completions of accredited offender behaviour programmes in prison will be met; [47224]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for completions of accredited offender behaviour programmes for sex offenders will be met; [47225]

(3) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the number of prisoners participating in treatment programmes will be met by March. [47221]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The relevant public service agreements (PSA) performance target is that the Prison Service should increase the number of completions of accredited offending behaviour programmes from 3,000 to 6,000 by the end of 2001–02, including an increase from 680 to 1,100 in those completing sex offender treatment programmes.

The Service also has a key performance target (KPT) of ensuring 5,000 entrants per year to drug treatment programmes by March 2002.

Final outturns will be known by the end of April 2002.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and if the target was met. [49631]

Angela Eagle: Details of performance and efficiency targets agreed between executive non-departmental public bodies and their sponsor departments, and performance against these targets are available in each individual body's annual report. All annual reports are presented to Parliament and copies placed in the Library. The majority of bodies have also posted recent annual reports on their websites.

Drugs

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding has been made available to the Metropolitan police force to combat the use and supply of illegal drugs in each of the last three years. [48680]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Within the police force grant, there is not a ring-fenced allocation for combating the misuse of drugs.

The Metropolitan Police Service has received the following drugs funding, which is in additional to their mainstream budget, specifically used to tackle the supply and misuse of illegal drugs: for arrest referral workers and for treatment for the financial years 2000–01 to 2001–02, £869,214 for workers and £708,480 for treatment in 2000–01, and £869,214 for workers and £708,480 for treatment in 2001–02.

In 2001–02, £7.5 million was made available to London boroughs from the Communities Against Drugs (CAD) fund, at the start of a new three-year funding programme, a share of which goes to the police. Prior to this, the Metropolitan police was awarded £3.5 million after a successful bid for funding for drugs-related schemes from Targeted Police Initiatives, which was a three-year programme that ended at the start of April 2002.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the use and supply of crack cocaine in the Greater London area. [48684]

Mr. Denham: The use of crack cocaine in London is of major concern to both the Government and the police. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Commissioner (Sir John Stevens) have discussed it at their periodic meeting. Additionally officials from this Department have met regularly with the Metropolitan police to discuss this and other issues, especially in connection with the Metropolitan police's current review of its operations and policy.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) and I have also met Commander Brown of the Metropolitan police who heads Operation Trident.

Relocation

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of his Department to Scotland. [47979]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* A number of Home Office executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) have offices in Scotland. These include the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, the Forensic Science Service and the United Kingdom Passport Service.

NDPBs and agencies are free to decide their location in the light of their business needs, but I am not aware of plans for any Home Office agency or non-departmental public body (NDPB) to relocate to Scotland.

Robbery Reduction Initiative

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the Communities Against Drugs Initiative will be used to finance the Robbery Reduction Initiative; and if he will make a statement. [46664]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Communities Against Drugs (CAD) funding is provided to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to tackle the impact that drugs has on particular communities. Partnerships will want to consider how CAD and the Robbery Initiative might support each other.

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by his Department. [48356]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The number and total cost of television licences for the Home Department are as follows:

Number of television licences—138

Total cost of television licences—£15,042.00.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the private finance initiative contract for Fazakerley (Altcourse) prison by comparison with a non-private finance initiative alternative; [49656]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the private finance initiative contract for Quantum for HM Prison Service by comparison with a non-private finance initiative alternative; [49655]

(3) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the private finance initiative contract for Lowdham Grange prison by comparison with a non-private finance initiative alternative; [49653]

(4) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the private finance initiative contract for prisons energy (Tranche 1) by comparison with a non-private finance initiative alternative; [49652]

(5) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the private finance initiative contract for *(a)* Marchington prison, *(b)* Onley prison, *(c)* Agecroft prison (Forest Bank) and *(d)* Pucklechurch prison by comparison with a non-private finance initiative alternative; [49648]

(6) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the private finance initiative contract for Bridgend (Parc) prison by comparison with a non-private finance initiative alternative. [49657]

Beverley Hughes: Public sector savings under the private finance initiative are calculated by comparing the net present value (NPV) of the project against a public sector comparator (PSC), as shown in the table.

The overall value of the Quantum contract, which took effect from July 2000, as estimated in the final business case, is approximately £200 million. However, this excludes the value of future business change developments. Against estimated internal prison costs, the estimated cost saving in cash terms is £190 million over the 12 year life of the contract. The net present value of this saving, discounted at 6 per cent. discount value, is £128 million.

£ million

Contract	*Public sector comparator*	*Net present value*	*Savings*
Altcourse (Fazakerley)	248	247	1
Ashfield (Pucklechurch)	141	122	19
Dovegate (Marchington)	292	241	51
Forest Bank (Agecroft)	234.5	204.5	30
Lowdham Grange	157	127	30
Parc (Bridgend)	319	266	53
Rye Hill (Onley)	209	154	55
Heat Energy Services[1]	29	25	4

[1] Tranche 1

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the 2002 Departmental report will be published. [49576]

Angela Eagle: As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Andrew Smith) said in his answer on 15 April, the 2002 Departmental Report for the Home Office will be published in spring 2002. The exact date will be announced shortly.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Bills introduced by his Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans he has for the future use of such clauses. [49622]

Angela Eagle: The following Bills introduced by the Home Office in the last five years contained sunset clauses:

(i) The Football (Disorder) Bill introduced in the Session 1999–2000.

(ii) The Terrorism Bill introduced in the Session 1999–2000.

(iii) The Criminal Justice and Police Bill introduced in the Session 2000–2001.

(iv) The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill introduced in the Session 2001–02.

(v) The Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill introduced in the Session 2001–02.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State (Mr. Blunkett) will consider whether a sunset clause is appropriate in the context of any future Bill.

Sex Offenders

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether prisoners who maintain their innocence and who refuse to attend a sex offenders treatment programme will be *(a)* denied parole and *(b)* have limited privileges. [49832]

Beverley Hughes: Refusal to participate in the sex offenders' treatment programme as a consequence of a prisoner maintaining his innocence is not of itself a bar to the release of prisoners on parole licence. An assessment of the prisoner's current level of risk is the pre-eminent factor in determining whether he/she may be granted parole. Offending behaviour programmes, such as the sex offender treatment programme, depend upon a prisoner being willing to discuss their offending. Therefore, such programmes are not open to prisoners who deny their guilt. Whilst the absence of reports on a prisoner's progress on such programmes makes it more difficult to make an assessment risk, it should still be possible to make one, taking into account, among other things, the prisoner's attitudes and behaviour during sentence.

The criteria for earning and retaining privileges will depend on a number of factors, including attitudes to and involvement in sentence planning and a willingness to make constructive use of their time in custody. Where a prisoner refuses, for any reason, to address their offending behaviour this may be relevant when assessing a prisoner's privilege level and may be sufficient to deny a prisoner enhanced status.

Prisoners

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to reduce the number of prisoners in prison; and what precautions are being taken to ensure that prisoners do not commit further crimes under the electronic tagging programme. [49318]

Beverley Hughes: The Government believe that prison must be used as effectively as possible and targeted where it is most necessary. It should be used for incapacitating dangerous, violent and other serious offenders but prison sentences should be as long as necessary for punishment and public protection, and no longer.

The reform of the probation service, with its central focus on reducing re-offending means that rigorously enforced community sentences are a real and tough alternative to imprisonment. As part of the work taking forward the recommendations of the Halliday report on the sentencing framework we are looking at new forms of community penalties. We aim to encourage greater use of community penalties for some non-violent offenders such as those convicted of theft and handling or fraud.

We are addressing the recent increase in female prison population by taking forward the Government's strategy for female prisoners. A cross-Government women's offenders reduction plan is currently being developed by a multi-agency team drawn from across the criminal justice system, which is based in the Home Office.

Home Detention Curfew and a rigorous assessment process plays an important role by enabling some prisoners to be released from prison, whilst still subject to restrictions placed on their liberty. This facilitates a smoother and more effective integration back into the community and helps offenders to secure employment as soon as possible.

Prior to release under the Home detention Curfew arrangements, the Probation service undertakes a home circumstances assessment of every prisoner's release address to confirm that the proposed accommodation is suitable for the monitoring equipment, that other persons residing at the address understand the impact of the curfew and have been given the opportunity to raise any issues which they wish to be considered, and that there are no issues relating to victims which would give cause for concern if the prisoner were to be curfewed to that address. Following release, each curfew is offered an interview to discuss the curfew requirements and to offer advice on any resettlement arrangements, including providing contact or access to local support groups and a Probation Service 'helpline' contact.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Prison Service's policy is on the evaluation and accreditation of psychological interventions for prisoners; and under what circumstances unevaluated projects are allowed to continue. [49989]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service's policy in relation to psychological interventions with prisoners is that these should be carried out in line with the standards for applied psychologists set by the British Psychological Society. Individual assessment and intervention work should be carried out under the supervision of a Chartered Psychologist.

Group based interventions aimed at reducing the risk of re-offending are subject to scrutiny by a panel of Prison Service, Probation Service and external practitioners and academics with expertise in relevant areas of work. Members are drawn from a range of disciplines. Group based interventions involve an assessment of clinical impact and are also audited to assess the degree of compliance with agreed national standards.

Group based interventions that have not been evaluated may be supported where they meet specific needs not addressed by currently available groups. However, the prison and probation services are committed to an evidence based practice approach, for both individual and group based interventions.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were made by juvenile prisoners to see the board of visitors in 2001, broken down by institution. [49974]

Beverley Hughes: This information is not held centrally.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the public service agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43246]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office's public service agreement (PSA) targets are listed. These were set in the 2000 Spending Review. There have been no changes since the publication of the 2001 Home Office Departmental Report except those resulting from the Machinery of Government changes shown.

PSA Target

1. Reduce the key recorded crime categories of:

   Vehicle crime by 30 per cent. by 2004;

   Domestic burglary by 25 per cent. with no local authority area having a rate more than three times the national average, by 2005; and

   Robbery in our principal cities by 14 per cent. by 2005.

2. Ensure by 2004 that the levels of fear of crime in the key categories of violent crime, burglary and car crime, reported in the British Crime Survey (BCS), are lower than the levels reported in the 2001 BCS.

3. Reduce by 2004 the economic cost of crime, as measured by an indicator to be developed by March 2001.

4. Disrupt 10 per cent. more organised criminal enterprises by 2004.

5. Improve the level of public confidence in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) by 2004, including improving that of ethnic minority communities.

6. Increase the number and proportion of recorded crimes for which an offender is brought to justice.

7. Improve by 5 percentage points the satisfaction of victims and witnesses with their treatment by the CJS by 2002 and thereafter at least maintain that level of performance.

8. Reduce by 2004, the time from arrest to sentence of other outcome by:

   Reducing the time from charge to disposal for all defendants, with a target to be specified by 31 March 2001;

   Dealing with 80 per cent. of youth court cases within their time targets; and halving from 142 to 71 days by 2002 the time taken from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders and maintaining that level thereafter.

9. Reduce the rate of reconviction:

   of all offenders punished by imprisonment or community supervision by 5 per cent. in 2004 compared with the predicted rate; and

   of all young offenders by 5 per cent. in 2004 compared with the predicted rate.

10. Maintain the current low rates of prisoner escapes including no Category A escapes.

11. Reduce the proportion of people under the age of 25 reporting the use of Class A drugs by 25 per cent. by 2005 (and by 50 per cent. by 2008).

12. Reduce the levels of repeat offending among drug-misusing offenders by 25 per cent. by 2005 (and by 50 per cent. by 2008).

13. Ensure that by 2004, 75 per cent. of substantive asylum applications are decided within two months.

14. Enforce the immigration laws more effectively by removing a greater proportion of failed asylum seekers.

15. Make substantial progress by 2004 towards one million more people being actively involved in their communities.

16. Promote race equality, particularly in the provision of public services such as education, health, law and order, housing and local government, and measure progress by the annual publication of Race Equality in Public Services, a set of race equality performance indicators across the public sector; and achieve representative work forces in the Home Office and its police, probation and prison services.

17. Ensure annual efficiency gains by police forces are worth in total at least 2 per cent. of overall police spending in that year.

18. Reduce the incidence of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20 per cent. averaged over the five-year period to March 2004 compared with the average recorded in the five-year period of March 1999.'

' Following Machinery of Government changes, this target has been transferred from the Home Office to the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

HEALTH

Mortality Rate

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths have occurred in the Midlothian constituency since 1990. [27189]

Mr. Foulkes: I have been asked to reply. The information requested is not available in relation to the Midlothian parliamentary constituency. However, the number of deaths in the Midlothian local authority area (Midlothian District Council before 1 April 1996 and Midlothian Council since then) is as follows:

	Males	*Females*	*Persons*
1990	408	416	824
1991	390	459	849
1992	402	378	780
1993	437	424	861
1994	370	407	777
1995	417	441	858
1996	406	448	854
1997	405	414	819
1998	456	417	873
1999	393	434	827
2000	423	422	845

If my hon. Friend requires further statistical information on this matter, he may wish to approach the General Register Office for Scotland.

Visual Impairment

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has sent to the recent submission by the Improving Lives Coalition on priorities in health and social care for blind and partially sighted people. [40893]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* A major conclusion of Improving Lives was that large numbers of people who are eligible for registration as blind or partially sighted are not registered. We recognise this problem and the Department has set up a group to investigate ways to improve the way we notify and register sight loss. This group includes representatives of several members of the Improving Lives Coalition.

We have also awarded the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) and the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (GDBA) jointly a project grant to develop visual care standards based on Improving Lives.

Capacity

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available to each local health authority to increase capacity for the treatment of patients. [40492]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* In 2002–03 £425 million has been earmarked to expand acute capacity, increase activity levels and reduce waiting. This is in addition to funding from general allocations which can be spent to deliver waiting times by agreement

between primary care trusts (PCTs), health authorities (HAs) and NHS trusts and their partners locally. The earmarked funding will be used to:

Expand local capacity by expanding diagnostic and treatment centres and/or buying into spare capacity in public or private services locally or nationally;

Commission extra activity

Pay for the consequential costs in community health and social care of this extra activity.

In addition, capital funding of £179 million in 2001–02 and £329 million in 2002–03 for increasing activity and providing diagnostic and treatment centres was issued as part of general capital allocations. PCTs, HAs and NHS trusts and their local partners agree how the general capital allocation is spent.

The heath authority total allocations and earmarked funding for capacity are given in the table.

2002–03 HA total allocations and earmarked funding for capacity

£000

Health authority	*Total allocation*	*Earmarked funding for capacity*
Bradford	414,737	4,306
Calderdale and Kirklees	480,687	4,986
County Durham	540,526	5,649
East Riding	474,977	4,816
Gateshead and South Tyneside	332,463	3,391
Leeds	6,28553	6,285
Newcastle and North Tyneside	436,790	4,393
North Cumbria	261,665	2,676
North Yorkshire	566,781	5,931
Northumberland	257,298	2,626
Sunderland	268,228	2,702
Tees	485,772	5,041
Wakefield	277,810	2,848
Barnsley	207,257	2,155
Doncaster	259,726	2,634
Leicestershire	682,748	7,262
Lincolnshire	519,957	5,378
North Derbyshire	300,013	3,056
North Nottinghamshire	313,543	3,226
Nottingham	519,138	5,408
Rotherham	210,533	2,147
Sheffield	477,104	4,777
South Derbyshire	448,542	4,724
South Humber	258,993	2,591
Bedfordshire	414,926	4,484
Cambridgeshire	525,529	5,529
Hertfordshire	802,649	8,241
Norfolk	611,615	6,346
North Essex	668,052	7,002
South Essex	554,308	5,876
Suffolk	519,352	5,352
Barking and Havering	333,897	3,421
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	725,055	7,604
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	635,109	6,180
Brent and Harrow	432,599	4,293
Camden and Islington	477,910	4,584
Croydon	274,247	2,881
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	676,038	6,890
East London and the City	702,986	7,391
Hillingdon	203,317	2,063
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	436,168	4,787
Kingston and Richmond	284,506	2,939
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	829,552	8,099
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	563,125	5,655
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	399,542	3,951
Berkshire	588,572	6,340
Buckinghamshire	493,959	5,264
East Kent	521,292	5,226
East Surrey	324,719	3,217
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	666,721	6,724
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	561,429	5,692
North and Mid Hampshire	381,685	3,969
Northamptonshire	429,544	4,450
Oxfordshire	445,458	4,713
Southampton and South West Hampshire	432,174	4,475
West Kent	744,108	7,606
West Surrey	485,877	4,835
West Sussex	618,829	6,302
Avon	774,501	7,987
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	416,197	4,213
Dorset	582,186	5,874
Gloucestershire	432,361	4,352
North and East Devon	393,334	4,019
Somerset	379,361	3,916
South and West Devon	499,768	5,045
Wiltshire	453,698	4,671
Birmingham	900,062	9,196
Coventry	267,745	2,773
Dudley	241,721	2,491
Herefordshire	130,657	1,347
North Staffordshire	403,322	4,154
Sandwell	268,794	2,757
Shropshire	326,945	3,416
Solihull	158,220	1,629
South Staffordshire	421,814	4,406
Walsall	217,042	2,256
Warwickshire	381,972	3,909
Wolverhampton	212,684	2,193
Worcestershire	393,056	4,073
Bury and Rochdale	332,127	3,413
East Lancashire	461,132	4,700
Liverpool	453,913	4,497
Manchester	461,845	4,593
Morecambe Bay	268,369	2,644
North Cheshire	261,550	2,614
North West Lancashire	424,129	4,276
Salford and Trafford	407,159	4,076
Sefton	254,961	2,481
South Cheshire	531,913	5,382
South Lancashire	247,205	2,509
St. Helen's and Knowsley	310,547	3,171
Stockport	231,170	2,390
West Pennine	392,430	4,075
Wigan and Bolton	494,170	5,193
Wirral	297,121	2,920
Total England	41,468,469	425,000

Ministerial Design Champion

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings the Ministerial Design Champion for his Department has attended in her capacity as Design Champion in the last month; and if he will make a statement. [41962]

Ms Blears: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (The Lord Hunt of Kings Heath) has recently replaced my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health (Yvette Cooper) as the Ministerial Design Champion for the Department of Health. He attended the last Ministerial Design Champion meeting on 17 January 2002 chaired by Lord Falconer and will be attending the next meeting on 22 May 2002.

In his capacity as Ministerial Design Champion, Lord Hunt will:

Deliver the opening speech at the Primary Healthcare Design conference 1 May 2002. This conference has been organised by CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) and The Kings Fund regarding the value of quality design in producing a healing environment, to an audience made up of key decision-makers from Primary Care Trusts.

Deliver the keynote address at the Health Facilities Management Association (HEFMA) annual conference 23 May 2002. This will provide the Minister with an opportunity to further raise the profile of design excellence to an audience of facilities decision-makers who are charged with delivering services at Trust level.

Work closely with the NHS and Architectural bodies, personally mentoring two projects being Walsall Design Exemplar and a South Manchester Primary Care Trust development.

Mixed Sex Wards

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mixed sex wards there are at Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford. [41920]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Patients at Broomfield Hospital, part of Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, are treated on wards that are divided into single-sex bays containing four or six beds. All wards have separate toilet and bathroom facilities for male and female patients.

As part of the plans for the development of Broomfield Hospital, the Trust is planning to have single gender wards.

The Trust is aware of the need to maintain the privacy and dignity of patients at all times and places great emphasis on the need to segregate male and female patients.

Learning Disability Strategy

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements he has made for the publication of the annual report to Parliament on the implementation of the Learning Disability Strategy, with specific reference to the use of the Learning Disability Task Force and the occurrence of Learning Disability Week annually in June. [41998]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* Section 62 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 requires my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament annually a report

"containing such information as he considers appropriate with respect to the development of health and social services for persons with learning disability".

I have agreed that the Learning Disability Task Force should report to me annually on its work overseeing the implementation of the proposals in the White Paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" published in March 2001.

I am currently considering how the timing and presentation of these two reports can best reflect recent developments in the provision of learning disability services.

Public-private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total external spending by his Department was on public-private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [43191]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 280W, which listed the total external spend on private finance initiative consultancy work from 1998 to date.

NHS Treatment (Travel Costs)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are in place to provide assistance with the costs of travel to hospital for NHS treatment to residents of the Isle of Wight in receipt of *(a)* income support and *(b)* jobseeker's allowance. [43242]

Ms Blears: The hospital travel costs scheme, part of the NHS low income scheme, provides financial assistance for patients in receipt of a qualifying benefit, for travel to hospital for NHS treatment under the care of a consultant. Income support and income-based jobseeker's allowance are qualifying benefits for the hospital travel costs scheme. The scheme provides full or partial reimbursement of travel costs throughout England.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the sites which will have the necessary training and equipment in place to fit digital hearing aids provided through the NHS contract from 2003–04. [43624]

Jacqui Smith: I announced the sites which will be joining the Modernising Hearing Aid Services project this financial year on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 465W. We will shortly be approaching all those trusts not currently involved in the project to invite them to put themselves forward to receive the training and equipment necessary to prepare them to join the project after April 2003. An announcement will be made in due course.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts *(a)* provide digital hearing aids and *(b)* will be fitting digital hearing aids by the end of 2002–03. [43623]

Jacqui Smith: The following 20 trusts are currently providing digital hearing aids as part of the Modernising Hearing Aid Services project.

Addenbrookes NHS Trust
James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust
Royal National Throat Nose and Ear Hospital
Whipps Cross University Hospital NHS Trust
Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust
Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust
Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust
Royal United Bath Hospital NHS Trust
United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust (Children)
Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust
East Berkshire Community Health NHS Trust
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust
Queens Medical Centre University NHS Trust Nottingham
The Kings Mill Centre for Healthcare Services NHS Trust
Sheffield Children's Hospital NHS Trust (Children)
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust
Royal Shrewsbury and Princess Royal Hospitals NHS Trust.

In addition an announcement was made on 10 April of those trusts who will be joining the project this financial year, 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 465W.

We know that a number of other trusts are obtaining digital hearing aids through the NHS contract and that others are providing digital aids outside of that contract. Full details are not available centrally.

North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire Health Authority

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expected overall cost is of locating the headquarters of the North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire Health Authority at York. [43976]

Jacqui Smith: The cost incurred in provisionally locating and establishing the Strategic Health Authority (StHA) HQ for North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire is for the rent of two offices in the York Science Park for February and March 2002. This will be approximately £3,500. This is the Project Office for the Strategic Health Authority pending a discussion about its permanent location.

On 20 March 2002, the StHA shadow Board discussed the option appraisal and work in progress to produce an outline business case for a permanent location. It was unanimously agreed that appropriate criteria had been used to inform the option appraisal on the location of the StHA and that the decision made by the Chairman and Chief Executive (Designate) that the York Science Park be the permanent location, was supported. Formal consideration of the outline business case was part of the first StHA Board meeting on 18 April 2002.

National Care Standards

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1037W, on national care standards, what estimate he has made of the costs *(a)* per establishment and *(b)* per room of the implementation of the regulatory impact assessment for adult placements; and if he will make a statement. [44674]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The environmental standards for adult placements reflect the domestic nature of these placements and represent a lighter touch approach to regulation for this sector. We expect the implementation cost to be minimal. The costs of implementing environmental standards for adult placements was covered in the overall totals set out within the Regulatory Impact Assessment for Care Homes placed in the Library on 21 January 2002.

Police Checks

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to resolve the difference between the National Minimum Standard 29.3 in respect of police checks and the regulations giving effect to the standard. [44770]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* Regulation 19 of the Care Homes Regulations sets out the requirement that a satisfactory Criminal Records Check must be received by a provider before he may employ someone to work in the home. Standard 29.3 can be interpreted to mean that a care worker could be offered a job subject to receipt of a check. It is not intended to imply that people can be employed prior to receipt of that check which is prohibited by regulation.

Government Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which his Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45398]

Ms Blears: Information on a large number of administrative manuals and internal guidance already exists in the public domain on the Department of Health internet site at www.doh.gov.uk and in particular in the:

Publications on the internet site (POINT) at www.doh.gov.uk/publications/pointh.html, and

Circulars on the internet site (COIN) at http://www.doh.gov.uk/publications/coinh.html

Work is in hand to identify significant gaps and meet the code provisions in full in preparation for the issue by November 2002 of a publication scheme, as required under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Failing Hospitals

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the appointment of new managers to failing hospitals will be decided; what system of assessment was used to rate those hospitals with a no star rating; and if he will make a statement. [46029]

Ms Blears: Twelve national health service trusts were categorised as zero-star rated. The system of rating used to assess their performance in 2000–01 was published in September 2001. The 12 trusts are required to provide action plans setting out how they are going to achieve the level of performance improvement required. Each of

the action plans were assessed by the Department at the end of 2001 together with the level of performance improvement achieved by each of the trusts since the ratings were published. Where appropriate the Department additionally used the progress reports provided by the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI).

Following the assessment it was decided that five of the trusts should be made subject to franchise arrangements. The performance of the remaining seven trusts is being closely monitored to ensure that their action plans are successfully delivered. Support will continue to be provided, where required, by the Modernisation Agency.

The process to appoint new managers under franchising arrangements is underway. Candidates have been invited to apply if they are experienced national health service managers with a good track record for delivery. They are being shortlisted for specific national health service trusts, taking into account their expressed preferences and individual skills. Shortlisted candidates are being given a month to draw up a franchise plan.

A register of interest from non-national health service bodies will be in place by the summer so that future franchises can draw on a wider pool of expertise and experience.

Adult Protection

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what allocation of *(a)* staff and *(b)* cash resources has been given to each police force in England for the referral of cases of adult abuse under the No Secrets guidance; and if he will make a statement. [45636]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The local implementation of the 'No Secrets' guidance is unlikely to have significant resource consequences for local police forces and therefore no additional resources have been allocated.

User Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new steps his Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if he will publish the findings. [47305]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* A programme of National Health Service trust-based patient surveys began in January this year, with all acute hospital trusts carrying-out a specially designed survey which seeks the views of a randomly selected group of patients—about 500 in each trust. This will become an annual survey. The main areas covered include; admissions, nature of the hospital ward, staff attitudes, care & treatment (pain management etc), leaving hospital and how the patient feels after their experience.

The acute survey results will be used to:

(i) inform the national NHS performance ratings, ensuring that patient experience is a key element in determining the ratings given to trusts

(ii) feedback directly to trusts, where service improvement programmes will pick up on the findings of the survey and will then be used to deliver year on year quality improvements. Here, it is envisaged that, the new 'patient prospectus' (to be distributed to local communities this autumn onwards), will be an important vehicle to convey the survey findings to staff and the public. Then, through the liaison of the Trust board and (subject to legislation) the new 'Patient Forum', an action plan will be established which takes forward the issues identified, and outlines how real improvements to the quality of the patient experience will be delivered within the trust. At the national level, a survey of coronary heart disease (CHD) patients reported during year 2000, (fieldwork having taken place during 1999). The survey looked at the quality of NHS care for both inpatients and day patients treated for CHD. The results were published on the Department's website and fed back to participating trusts, thus providing a national overview of patients' opinions of their treatment. A further national survey—looking at the experience of cancer services patients, was carried out in 2001 and will report later this year to individual trusts, the 'cancer networks' and via the website. A general practitioner patient survey is also taking place this year (began January '02). As with the acute IP survey above, this will inform both the national performance ratings in the summer, and improve the quality of primary care/GP services, via feedback to all existing primary care organisations, so that appropriate actions can be taken. Next year (reporting 2003) a more specialised survey will be devised to better relate to the comprehensive range of primary care trust-based services.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and if the target was met. [49635]

Ms Blears: The information sought is available in the annual reports and accounts of these bodies, which are available in the Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of whether the target to reduce by 20 per cent. by 2001–02 the number of absences by staff caused by violence will be met. [47362]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department conducted a survey of sickness absence, accidents and violence in national health service trusts in England in 1998–99. The survey found that there were approximately 65,000 violent incidents against NHS trust staff recorded each year. A further survey of recorded violent incidents in 2000–01 has been conducted, and the figures are currently being analysed by the Department. The figures will be published as soon as the Department is satisfied the figures are sufficiently robust and reflect NHS trust mergers and other organisational changes in the NHS. The 2000–01 figures will form the baseline for measuring progress against the Government's national improvement targets.

Information on levels of sickness absence resulting from violence at work is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by individual national health service employers.

Overtime

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his Department. [49128]

Mr. Hutton: The policy of the Department is to recompense staff who work more than their contracted hours either by payment of overtime or by giving time off in lieu of the hours worked. Overtime is not paid to Senior Civil Servants and other senior managers.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49539]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the north west and west central community units for the elderly for the Leeds Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49507]

(3) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the rationalisation of in-patient services for the South Manchester University Hospital NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49531]

(4) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for single site development for the South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49537]

(5) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Cumberland Infirmary, Carlisle for the North Cumbria Acute Hospital NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49505]

(6) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Bromley NHS Trust—New Hospital for the Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49529]

(7) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Bishop Auckland redevelopment for the South Durham Health Care NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49541]

(8) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the new hospital for the North Durham Health Care NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49533]

(9) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the acute general hospital development for Dartford and Gravesham hospital by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49504]

(10) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Mancunian Community Trust—Primary Care for the Mancunian NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49528]

(11) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Barnet hospitals for the Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49540]

(12) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Calderdale Redevelopment for the Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49532]

(13) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Worcestershire new hospital for the Worcester Acute Hospitals NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49538]

(14) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Wycombe and Amersham developments for the South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49506]

(15) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich for the Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49530]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to my answers of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 833-34W and of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 411-13W in which are listed all the major private finance initiative contracts that have reached financial close since May 1997, with figures for the projected savings on each.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45606]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* To collect this information for all contracts let by NHS trusts other than for the major PFI schemes would involve disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 19 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1245W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for new facilities for the Newham NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49535]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the front entrance to Mayday Healthcare by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49515]

(3) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the ACAD Equipment for the North West London NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49524]

(4) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the reprovision of mental health for Oxleas NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49534]

Mr. Hutton: The business cases justifying the individual schemes gave the estimates of the net savings in present value terms (with all future costs and benefits discounted to their present values), compared with publicly funding the scheme, shown in the table.

Net present costs of PSC v. PFI option

Trust	*PFI £000*	*Public £000*	*£000*	*% difference*
Newham Healthcare NHS Trust[1]	—	—	—	—
Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust	2,495	2,564	69	2.7
Oxleas Healthcare NHS Trust	227,325	234,848	7,523	3.2
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	5,385	5,483	98	1.8

[1] The project at Newham Healthcare NHS Trust has not yet received final approval and therefore no final assessment has been made of the comparative costs of the project.

Rehabilitation Beds

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics he collates on *(a)* the availability of specialist rehabilitation beds in NHS hospitals, *(b)* their occupancy and *(c)* the explanations for voids. [48816]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* Specialist rehabilitation beds are included in wards categorised as 'Other general and acute' and are not counted separately in the annual collection of KH03—'Bed availability and occupancy'.

Information on general rehabilitation beds was collected on the winter bed census. There were 7,269 open and staffed beds as at 29 November 2001. Occupancy was not included as part of this census.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many contracts his Department has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether he can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50844]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Department does not centrally hold a record of individual contracts.

In the past the Department sought a professional indemnity of not less than £5 million, as the standard sum. Since risks vary between contracts, it is no longer deemed appropriate to resort to a single standard level of indemnity and current Department consultancy contracts include the following paragraphs as standard:

"17.2 The Contractor shall effect and maintain with a reputable insurance company a policy or policies of insurance providing an adequate level of cover in respect of all risks which may be incurred by the Contractor, arising out of the Contractor's performance of the Contract, in respect of death or personal injury, or loss of or damage to property. Such policies shall include cover in respect of any financial loss arising from any advice given or omitted to be given by the Contractor.

17.5 The terms of any insurance or the amount of cover shall not relieve the Contractor of any liabilities under the Contract. It shall be the responsibility of the Contractor to determine the amount of insurance cover that will be adequate to enable the Contractor to satisfy any liability referred to in Condition 17.2."

The Department has not specifically discussed the issue of professional indemnity in consultancy contracts with any other Department. In this and all matters pertaining to commercial contracts, the Department does give all due regard to best practice advice disseminated by the Office of Government Commerce.

Ambulance Services (South-east)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost in the past five years of consultants fees incurred in relation to reviews of the configuration of ambulance services in Surrey, Kent and Sussex; and if he will make a statement. [51988]

Ms Blears: No additional workforce costs were incurred as most of the work in connection with the review of ambulance services in the south-east has been carried out by existing civil servants at the Department and staff at health authorities and trusts. Management consultants have been employed but this was for the region wide review. For that reason costs specifically relating to Surrey, Kent and Sussex have not been recorded.

Looked-after Children

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were placed in *(a)* care, *(b)* foster care and *(c)* adopted in each of the last five years. [51079]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of children looked after at 31 March 1997–31 March 2001 and the number of children adopted from care during the years ending 31 March 1997–31 March 2001

England

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Total number of children looked after at 31 March	51,200	53,300	55,500	58,100	58,900
Of which:					
Number in foster placements	33,500	35,000	36,200	37,900	38,400

Number of children looked after at 31 March 1997–31 March 2001 and the number of children adopted from care during the years ending 31 March 1997–31 March 2001

England

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Number of children adopted from care during the year ending 31 March	1,900	2,100	2,200	2,700	3,100

Notes:
Children looked after in this table exclude agreed series of short term placements.
All figures in this table have been rounded to the nearest 100.
Source:
DH Annual Statistical returns (CLA Episode)

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the question of 6 March, ref. 41920, from the hon. Member for West Chelmsford on mixed sex wards at Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford. [51227]

Jacqui Smith: I replied to the hon. Member today.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam regarding overseas nurse recruitment of 28 February. [51081]

Mr. Hutton: I replied to the hon. Member on 16 April 2002, *Official Report,* columns 1024–25W.

Departmental Expenditure (Scotland)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, in real terms, for each year since 1979 *(a)* the total sums of money spent directly by his Department in Scotland and *(b)* the total sums of money allocated by his Department for spending in Scotland through (i) the Scottish Office, (ii) the Scotland Office and (iii) the Scottish Executive. [16184]

Mr. Hutton: Pursuant to the reply given to the hon. Member by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State (Mr. Milburn) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 275W, the information requested is not readily available. Public expenditure information by territory and function is available in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) 2001–02 (Cm 5101) for the years 1995–96 to 1999–2000, and earlier years are available in previous PESA publications. Copies of these are available in the Library.

Audit Commission

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what appointments he has made to the Audit Commission in each of the past five years. [51923]

Ms Blears: Three health commissioners have been appointed during the last five years:

Roger Hoyle—January 2002

David Moss—April 2001

Dr. Judith Curson—October 1998 (appointed second term June 2001).

Health Reforms

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what legislative changes will be required to implement the health reforms envisaged in his statement on 18 April. [51913]

Mr. Hutton: The statement and publication on 18 April set out further policy reforms as part of the Government's continuing strategy of reform backed by investment to deliver the NHS Plan published in July 2000. "Delivering the NHS Plan" makes clear that new legislation will be needed to introduce a system of cross-charging in relation to delayed discharges (paragraph 8.10); to establish the new Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection (paragraph 10.8); and to establish the new Commission for Social Care Inspection (paragraph 10.11). The details of the legislative changes required to implement these and the reform package as a whole are now being considered.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times Ministers in his Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47104]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 11 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 552W.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46801]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department's staffing cost information for Press and Publicity Division for 1996–97 does not separately identify the cost of press office. The total cost of Press and Publicity Division for 1996–97 was £2.3 million. The cost of the News Branch for 2000–01 was £1.2 million.

Ambulance Call-outs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many ambulance call-outs were made between 20 December 2001 and 3 January 2002 in Essex; what average length of time it took for ambulances to reach *(a)* the patient and *(b)* the hospital to which the patient needed to be taken; and what the average figure was in England; [46758]

(2) how many 999 calls were made to the Essex ambulance service between 20 December 2001 and 3 January for which it was decided an ambulance was not necessary; and what proportion of calls over this period such calls represent. [46757]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information is not collected centrally in the format requested.

Information about ambulance response times is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin 'Ambulance Services, England 2000–01'. A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Press Officers and Special Advisers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1062–63W, on press officers, why he is not able to provide cost details for press officers in 1996–97; and if his figures for press officer numbers refer to full-time working equivalents. [47528]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department's staffing cost information for the Press and Publicity Division for 1996–97 does not separately identify the cost of press office or individual press officers. This level of detail has only been available since 1997–98. The total cost of the Press and Publicity Division for 1996–97 was £2.3 million.

Press officer numbers refer to full-time working equivalents, except for 1999–2000 when two members of staff were part-time.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* press officers and *(b)* special advisers were employed by his Department in each of the years 1990–91 to 1995–96. [47529]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

	Number
(a) Press officers	
1990–91	11
1991–92	12
1992–93	10
1993–94	12
1994–95	12
1995–96	9
(b) Special advisers	
1990–91	2
1991–92	2
1992–93	2
1993–94	1
1994–95	1
1995–96	1

Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by his Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48351]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department is linked to the Annunciator system, provided by cable link to Richmond House, by the Central Office of Information. The cost of this system is £26,161 per annum, including value added tax. The purpose is to provide Ministers, Communications and Policy staff in Richmond House access to debates in the Houses of Commons and Lords, and Select Committee hearings.

NHS Trusts (Police Officers)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospital trusts have specially assigned police officers. [47851]

Mr. Hutton: Security arrangements at hospitals are a matter for the individual hospital trust to address. Many hospitals employ specially trained in-house staff for security services; others use external security companies.

Strong working relationships between the police and the national health service are essential if staff, patients and visitors are to be able to work and receive care in the best environment. While we do not hold details of every trust's arrangements centrally, we are aware that many trusts have made a dedicated room available within the accident and emergency department of the hospital for police use. Some trusts have a police station situated within the hospital grounds. All hospitals have developed close links with the local police force and hold security liaison meetings which include a police representative on the group. We are also aware that the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Trust has an arrangement with the local police to fund a full-time police presence in the hospital with porters providing routine security services. South Devon Healthcare Trust and Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust have similar arrangements in place. We understand that a number of other trusts are considering adopting comparable approaches.

All trusts have arrangements with their local police authority to provide specially assigned police officers in the event of a major incident involving firearms, or in a hostage situation.

Non-clinical Data

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve the quality of non-clinical data. [47870]

Ms Blears: National health service organisations collect a wide range of data that are used locally within and between health care organisations to support a variety of purposes. Local arrangements therefore exist within health communities to performance manage the quality of data collected that reflect local circumstances.

All NHS organisations are responsible for the quality of their own data. A fundamental principle of data quality is that data should be right first time, at the point at which they are recorded. In relation to hospital data, this principle was supported by the recent Audit Commission report, "Data Remember", which stated that

"the key to better quality of information is held by Trusts themselves".

All NHS trusts are expected to have a named senior manager responsible for data quality within their organisations by 30 June 2002. All chief executives will shortly be reminded of their responsibilities for ensuring that their organisation produces good quality data.

While the ultimate responsibility for data quality lies with NHS organisations themselves, there are a number of national initiatives which aim to support them in improving the quality of their non-clinical data. These include national performance monitoring of data quality, providing support and guidance material on improving

and managing data quality, accreditation and audit of data quality and through the implementation of national information strategies.

Maintenance Backlog

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the current maintenance backlog of the NHS is. [47823]

Mr. Hutton: The most recent available information for the total maintenance backlog cost, inclusive of physical condition, fire safety and health and safety, associated with NHS trusts in England is at 2000–01. This currently indicates the total maintenance backlog cost to be £3.16 billion.

Toothbrushes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which company supplied the toothbrushes handed out as part of the Brushing for Life campaign. [47026]

Ms Blears: As part of the Brushing for Life scheme, packs were distributed containing a toothbrush, a tube of toothpaste and a leaflet. The toothbrushes in the packs were supplied by GlaxoSmithKline plc.

Ambulance Turnaround Times

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 940W, on ambulance turnaround times, if he will state the turnaround times for ambulance crews at each hospital in the Greater London area with an A&E department. [48288]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Critical and Intensive Care Beds

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* adult critical care and *(b)* intensive care beds there were in each of the past five years. [47864]

Ms Blears: The total number of critical care beds and those being used for intensive care purposes on the census day is given in the following table. The first census was carried out in March 1999 and data are not available previous to this date.

Number of critical care beds on census day

Census date	*Total critical care beds*	*of which intensive care*
31 March 1999	2,240	1,520
30 September 1999	2,241	1,501
15 January 2000	2,362	1,555
14 July 2000	2,343	1,496
15 January 2001	2,885	1,677
16 July 2001	2,940	1,670
15 January 2002	3,030	1,711

Source:
Department of Health form KH03a

TV and Telephone Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the applicants for the contract to provide television and telephone services to NHS patients. [47003]

Ms Blears: The list shows those companies that submitted tender documentation to request a licence to provide bedhead entertainment and telephone services to the NHS.

First round (3 August 2000) tender applications received from:

Hospital Telephone Services
Patientline
Wandsworth Electrical
Sodexho
Static Systems
Unicorn Hospital Communications Ltd.
BT Health
Compaq Computers
ITR Telecom
Syntec Telecom

Second Round (23 February 2001) tender applications received from:

Philips Business Communications
Kerfone Communications Limited
BT Health
Premier Managed Payphones
Patientpal (MIM Meditech Hospital Systems).

Emergency Re-admissions

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the levels of emergency re-admissions were in each health authority for the third quarter of 2001–02. [46997]

Jacqui Smith: Quarterly information on re-admissions is only collected for patients aged 75 and over. This information by health authority, has been placed in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to provide a substantive reply to the letter of 2 August 2001 from the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire. [48248]

Ms Blears: The Department has no record of receiving this correspondence. The Department's Ministerial Correspondence Unit is seeking a copy of this correspondence.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of *(a)* 21 January, *(b)* 21 February, *(c)* 19 March and *(d)* 18 April relating to her constituent, Mr. R. Merkitt of Wormley. [51802]

Mr. Hutton: A reply was sent on 23 April.

Essex Heart Centre

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received over the proposal to establish the Essex Heart Centre at Basildon instead of Broomfield, Chelmsford; and if he will make a statement. [48571]

Jacqui Smith: Essex Health Authority is about to start the public consultation exercise on this proposal. All relevant and interested parties will have the opportunity

to make their concerns known during this period and as such it would not be appropriate for Ministers to comment further at this stage.

GP Vacancies

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP vacancies there were in Bedfordshire *(a)* in each of the last three years and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [47629]

Jacqui Smith: The Department first carried out a survey into general practitioners recruitment, retention and vacancies in 2000.

In the 2000 survey Bedfordshire health authority reported that they had 25 GP vacancies outstanding at some time in the 12 month period 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000.

In the 2001 survey they reported that they had 20 GP vacancies outstanding at some time in the 12 month period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001.

Results from the 2002 survey should be available later in the year. We have no data prior to 2000.

Medicines Control Agency

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times officials from the Medicines Control Agency have held meetings with officials of the United States Food and Drug Administration since 1 April 2001; when and where each of these meetings took place; and what the subject was of each of these meetings. [48610]

Ms Blears: There have been 21 meetings between officials of the Medicines Control Agency and officials of the United States Food and Drug Administration since 1 April 2001. The details of the meetings are shown in the table.

Date	*Venue*	*Topic*
21 to 22 May 2001 4 to 6 February 2002	Tokyo Brussels	Possible pharmacovigilance topics for the International Conference on Harmonisation (ICH) process
April 2001 June 2001 July 2001 September 2001 November 2001 January 2002 March 2002	Videoconference/teleconference held between London and Rockville Pike (FDA HQ)	To discuss current safety issues with the FDA and other EU member-states
27 August 2001 28 August 2001	FDA, Rockville Pike	FDA use of General Practice Research Database (GPRD)
22 to 24 May 2001	International Laboratory Forum of Counterfeit Medicines (ILFCM), Washington, USA	Collaboration and knowledge sharing of illegal and counterfeit medicines
22 to 24 May 2001	Permanent Forum on International Pharmaceutical Crime (PFIPC), Washington, USA	Pharmaceutical crime including counterfeits and fraudulent diversion
8 June 2001	Videoconference held between London and Rockville Pike (FDA HQ)	Equivalence between UK and USA systems for assessing compliance by inspection
28 July to 23 August 2001	FDA, Cincinnati, USA	Series of meetings on collaborative procedures for the analysis of illegal steroid creams
17 September 2001	Videoconference held between London and Rockville Pike (FDA HQ)	Proposed Mutual Recognition Agreement on Inspection
29 October to 1 November 2001	International Laboratory Forum of Counterfeit Medicines (ILFCM), Canberra, Australia	Collaboration and knowledge sharing of illegal and counterfeit medicines
15 to 16 November 2001	London	FDA observation of MCA medicines inspection
26 to 30 November 2001	London, Hitchin and York	FDA observation of MCA inspectorate quality system
12 December 2001	Videoconference held between London and Rockville Pike (FDA HQ)	General progress on the Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA)
March 2002	Houston, USA	Criminal investigations on the supply of prescription-only medicines and an unlicensed product

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [49600]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not available. Neither the Department nor the individual non-departmental public bodies concerned monitor people who have left those organisations.

Mental Health

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change in provision since 1997, there has been of *(a)* acute beds, *(b)* residential places staffed 24 hours a day and *(c)* low support residential places in mental health in London. [48864]

Mr. Hutton: The change in provision since 1997 for acute beds, residential places staffed 24 hours a day and low support residential places in London is given in the table.

Average daily number of available beds, acute sector, total residential care beds, mental illness residential care beds for the London regional office area, 2000–01 to 1996–97

	2000–01	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*1996–97*
Acute beds	16,736	16,419	17,022	17,090	17,663

Average daily number of available beds, acute sector, total residential care beds, mental illness residential care beds for the London regional office area, 2000–01 to 1996–97

	2000–01	1999–2000	1998–99	1997–98	1996–97
Acute mental illness beds	4,884	—	—	—	4,544
Total residential care beds (includes mental illness)	683	691	1,256	1,234	1,117
Mental illness residential care beds	299	317	309	280	257

Source:
KH03—Bed availability and occupancy

Residential care places in London area not managed by the NHS, 1997 to 2001

	Number of residential care places
1997	30,062
1998	30,201
1999	29,525
2000	30,140
2001	29,342

Thiomersal

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards the replacement of thiomersal as a preservative in vaccines. [48832]

Ms Blears: The European Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products (CPMP) has developed regulatory guidance entitled "Points to Consider on the Reduction, Elimination or Substitution of Thiomersal in Vaccines". This regulatory guidance has come into operation since May 2001. It sets out recommendations and strategy for reducing, eliminating and substituting thiomersal as a preservative in vaccines. As indicated in this regulatory guidance, in an initial stage, a manufacturer may choose to reduce the amount of thiomersal while developing a thiomersal-free formulation with or without a substitute preservative. Since reducing or eliminating thiomersal could have an impact on microbiological quality, antigenicity, immunogenicity, reactogenicity and stability of vaccines, substantial developmental and validation work is necessary before such modifications can be implemented.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the services of his Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50312]

Ms Blears: Between September 1999 and February 2001, the Department had largely undertaken Better Quality Services reviews of its support services and the functions and activities of its agencies. The Department was working with Cabinet Office to develop a rigorous approach for the review of policy.

Since March 2001 specific Better Quality Services activity has been incorporated into a fundamental review of the Department's services and activities, including policy areas. This fundamental review was carried out in the spirit of the Better Quality Services Initiative in line with Government policy. It has generated a programme of change that focuses on the Department's delivery contract and which aims to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 924W, on the running costs of his Ministers' private offices, for what reason those costs rose between 1997–98 and 2001–01. [50340]

Ms Blears: Costs of Ministers' private offices have risen since 1997–98 in part because an additional Minister was appointed in 1999–2000. The level of support provided to Ministers has also been improved over the period.

Complaints

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to promote wider use of conciliation in handling complaints against the NHS. [49941]

Ms Blears: Conciliation is a positive mechanism for resolving complaints at an early stage. The NHS complaints procedure evaluation report recommended that wider use of conciliation should be encouraged and we are currently considering how best to achieve this as part of our broader reforms to the NHS complaints procedure.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints were registered against his Department and its predecessor Departments in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in those periods. [51586]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The information relating to complaints registered against the Department can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information on complaints made to the Parliamentary Ombudsman is contained in the Ombudsman's annual reports, copies of which are held in the Library, and from 1997–98 on the Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/document/part01/index.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the latest figures are for the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area for the *(a)* number of people waiting for hospital treatment and *(b)* number of people waiting less than (i) 18, (ii) 15, (iii) 12 and (iv) six months for hospital treatment. [48802]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table.

Patients waiting for elective admission, Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, February 2002. Ordinary and day case admissions combined

	By month waiting
Total waiting	9,646
Less than 6 months	7,126
Less than 12 months	9,360
Less than 15 months	9,641
Less than 18 months	9,646

Source:
Department of Health Monthly Monitoring

Pathology Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated total NHS expenditure was on pathology services in 2000–01; how many pathology services there are in England; how many public health laboratory services there are; and what estimate he has made of the number of private sector pathology laboratories. [49041]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Information on pathology expenditure is not collected centrally; funding for pathology is included in the general allocation to the National Health Service.

The Department does not hold a central register of pathology laboratories. However, we estimate that there are around 300 NHS Pathology services in England based in acute Trusts. These include up to 1700 separate laboratories providing diagnostic services for haematology, microbiology, biochemistry, histopathology/cytopathology, immunology and genetics. We also estimate that there are approximately 250 pathology laboratories in the independent sector.

The Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) comprises 46 laboratories in eight regional groups, the Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) (incorporating seven reference laboratories and a scientific support services unit), and the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC), both at Colindale, North West London. In addition, there are five PHLS collaborating centres serving the London population, and two other special laboratories.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in his Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions he has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within his Department. [50483]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The NHS Plan published in July 2000 refers to the possible introduction of smart cards to meet two key business requirements, i.e., to enable patients and healthcare professionals to access medical records, and to store a limited amount of emergency medical data. A number of studies have been conducted within the Department which looked at different options, including smart cards, and biometrics, to meet these business requirements. Our current view is that there are many issues that need to be resolved before decisions can be made about implementing a large-scale scheme involving smart card technology. These include the question of security and confidentiality. There are also technical, legal, cultural, funding and other issues which need to be addressed. The government's approach, therefore, is to test these concepts in pilot projects before considering further a wider use of patient-held smart cards.

The Department is currently funding a programme of pilot projects over a three year period to introduce occupational health smart cards for hospital doctors, initially doctors in training, in England. The company running the projects is TSSI (Thorn Secure Science Ltd.). This is not a patient-held smart card scheme, but we hope to learn lessons about the technology and other issues from this pilot programme.

Ministers and officials at the Department have both formal and informal discussions with private companies on a range of issues, including the possible use of smart card technology in healthcare. The Department is also represented on the Office of the e-Envoy's Smart Card Policy Working Group which includes private companies and other interest groups in its membership.

NHS Finance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the ring-fenced allocations and special purpose grants made by him in financial years *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03, together with the amount of each allocation; what arrangements are in place to ensure that allocations are spent for the purpose intended; whether unspent resources are clawed back; and if he will make a statement. [50065]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Table 1 lists the ring-fenced allocations and grants which the Department made available to councils in 2000–01, 2001–02 and 2002–03. Audit arrangements are in place to check that allocations are used for the purpose intended. Unspent grant in excess of any end year flexibility allowed by the grant conditions is clawed back unless Ministers decide to waive recovery in accordance with the grant conditions. Unused supplementary credit approvals (SCAs) lapse unless they are surrendered by councils. SCAs cannot be clawed back by the Department.

Table 2 shows the ring-fenced allocation which is made to health authorities. There are local monitoring arrangements in place to ensure allocations are spent in full. Expenditure is separately identified within the annual accounts.

Table 1: Grant

£000

	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
AIDS Support Grant	16,000	16,500	16,500
Drugs and Alcohol Specific Grant	6,800	8,850	—
Mental Health Grant	129,500	148,443	154,443
Training Support Programme	42,500	47,500	57,500

Table 1: Grant

£000

	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Children's Services Grant	120,000	291,750	461,500
Secure Accommodation Grant	6,228	6,228	6,228
Partnership Grant[1]	216,000	—	—
Prevention Grant[1]	30,000	—	—
Promoting Independence Grant[1]	—	296,000	155,000
Carers' Grant	50,000	70,000	85,000
Care Direct Grant	500	2,000	10,000
Deferred Payments Scheme	—	15,000	30,000
Improving Information Management Grant	—	3,000	25,000
Young People's Substance Misuse Planning Grant	—	4,500	4,500
Building Care Capacity Grant	—	100,000	200,000
Teenage Pregnancy Local Implementation Grant	—	—	16,000
Performance Fund	—	—	50,000
Residential Allowance Grant	—	—	93,000
Preserved Rights Grant	—	—	614,000
Invest to Save Grant	4,254	1,330	—
Supplementary credit approvals: Mental Health	15,600	15,600	15,600
Supplementary credit approvals: AIDS	3,100	3,100	3,100

[1] The Partnership and Prevention Grants merged in 2001–02 to become the Promoting Independence Grant

Table 2: Allocation

£000

	Out of hours development fund
2000–01	43,420
2001–02	44,506
2002–03	45,617

Alcohol

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in the development of a national alcohol strategy. [48813]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The NHS Plan stated that the Government would be implementing the National Strategy to Tackle Alcohol Misuse by 2004 and we are currently on course to achieve this target.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 24 April 2002

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the functions of his Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [43000]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on Tuesday 23 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 201W.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Linda Perham: To ask the Prime Minister if he will instruct the Performance and Innovation Unit to investigate the need for legislation on corporate social responsibility. [50081]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is responsible for corporate social responsibility. She will be issuing a report in mid-May 2002 'Business in Society' which will report on developments in corporate and social responsibility in the UK.

The Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) have already considered the international aspects of corporate social responsibility in the "Rights of Exchange" report of September 2000. This is available on the PIU website (www.piu.gov.uk).

As stated in my answer to the hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Derek Twigg) on 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 93W, I have also asked the PIU to undertake a project to review the legal and regulatory framework for charities and the wider voluntary and community sector and bring forward proposals for reform. This includes some consideration of issues of corporate social responsibility.

DEFENCE

Queen Mother Funeral

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost to public funds of the funeral of HM the Queen Mother; and which Departments contributed. [50685]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not readily available. I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action has been taken regarding those responsible for the release of the names of soldiers involved in the events of 30 January 1972 in Londonderry. [52042]

Mr. Ingram: The Bloody Sunday inquiry is independent of Government and any action it has taken is a matter for the inquiry itself. However, we understand that procedures have been reviewed and significant improvements made.

So far as the two inadvertent disclosures by the team of lawyers representing the majority of soldiers are concerned, an official was reprimanded and a barrister apologised to the Tribunal.

The breach of security that occurred at the Treasury Solicitor's Department is the subject of a formal internal investigation, which is still being actively pursued.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether additional costs have been incurred in providing security to the former soldiers whose names were improperly released into the public domain by the Saville Inquiry. [52043]

Mr. Ingram: The provision of security advice and additional protective measures where appropriate would of course incur costs. I am withholding details of these costs in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much public funding has been provided to the legal representatives of his Department, HM armed forces and other individuals appearing at the Saville Inquiry, broken down by each *(a)* barrister, *(b)* firm of solicitors and *(c)* other body involved. [48695]

Mr. Ingram: The payments made to the legal representatives appearing at the Saville Inquiry on behalf of the Ministry of Defence or HM armed forces are set out in the table. The figures include fees, expenses and VAT (where that is paid). The first date shows when the first payment was made, which may have been some months after the recipient was first instructed by the Ministry of Defence. The second date shows the payments made as at the end of February 2002. There are four teams representing the soldiers (necessary due to the existence of conflicts of interest between various individuals) and one representing the MOD.

	Payments made (£)	Period covered From	To
Senior Counsel representing MOD			
Ian Burnett	173,508.67	August 1998	January 2002
Hon. Philip Havers	7,138.13	May 2000	January 2001
Senior Counsel representing HM armed forces			
Peter Clarke	425,874.22	January 2001	February 2002
Gerard Elias	747,171.82	July 2000	February 2002
Edwin Glasgow	2,155,288.49	December 1998	February 2002
Jeremy Gompertz	611.00	September 1999	September 1999
Sir Allan Green	693,733.48	March 1999	February 2002
Rosamund Horwood-Smart	18,352.03	January 2002	January 2002
Sir Sydney Kentridge	52,875.00	October 1999	October 1999
Edmund Lawson	693,127.75	August 1999	December 2001
David Lloyd Jones[1]	639,571.81	December 1998	February 2002
Anna Worrall	100,456.55	January 2000	July 2000
Junior Counsel representing MOD			
David Barr	9,014.94	January 1999	July 1999
William Hoskins	43,849.60	August 1999	January 2002
Junior Counsel representing HM armed forces			
Gaby Bonham Carter	24,608.91	October 2000	April 2001
Michael Bools	649,447.65	December 1998	February 2002
David Bradly	542,648.90	March 1999	February 2002
Jonathan Crow	793.13	January 2002	January 2002
Huw Davies	83,998.13	April 2001	February 2002
Nicholas Griffin	653,366.13	February 1999	February 2002
Sam Grodzinski	1,877.07	March 2000	March 200
Michael Hick	253,895.01	February 1999	April 2001
Jonathan Hough	4,487.99	June 2001	June 2001
Alexander Hugh Milne	16,212.32	January 2002	January 2002
Andrew Hurst	231,185.13	April 1999	April 2001
Ian Leist	323,165.03	November 2000	February 2002
Alan May	299,009.28	March 1999	June 2001
Kristian Mills	35,382.15	October 2000	December 2001
Nicholas Moss	343,904.66	January 2000	February 2002
Stephen Requena	19,837.21	January 2002	January 2002
Thomas Quinton	47,421.89	June 2001	February 2002
Solicitors representing MOD			
Treasury solicitor	24,301.66	July 1998	February 2002
Solicitors representing HM armed forces			
Devonshires	1,352,264.34	July 1998	January 2002
Jacqueline Duff	89,635.60	March 1999	February 2002
Kingsley Napley	887,685.89	January 1999	February 2002
Payne Hicks Beach[2]	1,859,985.30	October 1998	February 2002
Treasury solicitor	1,696,330.79	April 1998	February 2002

[1] Became a QC April 1999
[2] Includes air fares and car hire costs incurred by some counsel

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times Ministers in his Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47116]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 552W, by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

Live Ammunition

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the overseas training areas in which the Ministry of Defence uses live ammunition; and if he will make a statement; [49994]

(2) if he will list the countries in which British forces have used live ammunition in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002; and if he will make a statement. [49995]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The overseas training areas used currently by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force are as follows.

Training area	*Country*
Royal Navy	
Brohavalet	Norway
Belle Isle	France
All French sea ranges in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean	—
Gibraltar exercise areas in the Mediterranean	—
Cape Teulada	Sardinia
Bellowes Rock	South Africa
Daymaniyat	Oman
Pula Aur	Singapore
Beacroft	Australia
Barking Sands	USA
Point Mugu	USA
San Clemente	USA
Virginia Capes exercise areas (VACAPES)	USA
Atlantic Fleet weapon training facility (AFWTF)	USA
7 Hills	Belize
Second Creek	Falklands Islands
Royal Air Force	
Garvie Island	UK
China Lake	USA
Point Mugu	USA
Nellis	USA
Barry Goldwater	USA
Udairi	Kuwait
Raz	Oman

In terms of those facilities used by the Army, I refer the hon. Member to the letter I wrote to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) on 7 August last year—D/Min(AF)/AI PQ0186M/01/Y refers. A copy is in the Library of the House.In addition to those countries whose training areas we use currently, British forces have also deployed, either on operations, on exercise, or as garrison troops to the following countries:

Afghanistan
Australia
Bahrain
Brunei
Cyprus
Congo
East Timor
Greece
Iraq
Jamaica
Kuwait
Mozambique
New Zealand
Nepal
Pakistan
Rwanda
Sierra Leone
United Kingdom.

This does not include information relating to UK Special Forces deployments as it is the long-standing policy of successive Governments not to comment on them.

To establish whether or not live ammunition was used during each individual deployment would incur disproportionate cost.

Army Training (Kenya)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will *(a)* list the dates of British Army training exercises in Kenya during the past 12 months and *(b)* make a statement on the training undertaken during each of these deployments. [49308]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Details of British Army training exercises that have taken place in Kenya during the past 12 months are as follows:

Exercise name	*Dates*	*Training undertaken*
MONOPRIX 01	10 April 2001 16 May 2001	Infantry Company Group training exercise incorporating dry and live firing in both arid and jungle locations. Live firing occurred at Mpala Farm and Archer's Post—both of which are live firing ranges.
SHARP POINT 01	10 April 2001 16 May 2001	Medical Squadron exercise providing primary health and veterinary care to the Kenyan community.
PINEAPPLE 01	10 April 2001 16 May 2001	Engineer Squadron Explosive Ordnance Clearance operation of the training areas used by British Forces for Live Firing in Kenya.
GRAND PRIX 3/01	25 October 2001 6 December 2001	Infantry Battlegroup training exercise incorporating dry and live firing in both arid and jungle locations. Live firing occurred at Mpala Farm and Archer's Post—both of which are live firing ranges.
CRABAPPLE 01	25 October 2001 6 December 2001	Troop level Royal Engineer construction exercise.
GRAND PRIX 1/02	5 January 2002 23 February 2002	As GRAND PRIX 3/01
OAKAPPLE 02	5 January 2002 7 April 2002	Squadron level Royal Engineer construction exercise.
GRAND PRIX 2/02	26 February 2002 7 April 2002	As GRAND PRIX 3/01

Exercise name	Dates	Training undertaken
MONOPRIX 02	7 April 2002 16 May 2002	As MONOPRIX 01
SHARP POINT 02	7 April 2002 16 May 2002	As SHARP POINT 01
PINEAPPLE 02	7 April 2002 16 May 2002	As PINEAPPLE 01

Roll On/Roll Off Vessels

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects to sign the contract with AWSR Shipping Ltd. for the provision of roll on/roll off ferries under the PFI; [50884]

(2) what assumption was made by his Department regarding *(a)* the provision of financial guarantees and *(b)* the ability of the preferred bidder to sign contracts by a specified date for the roll on/roll off ferries; [50886]

(3) what representations were made to his Department by *(a)* the Scottish Office, *(b)* the Scottish Executive, *(c)* the Northern Ireland Office and *(d)* One NE prior to the awarding of the roll on/roll off contracts; [50894]

(4) what the evaluation criteria were in the selection of the preferred bidder for the roll on/roll offs; [50890]

(5) what are the reasons for the delay in completion of the contract with AWSR for the roll on/roll off ferries. [50885]

Dr. Moonie: Bids were assessed against the criteria of best value for money, having regard to price, delivery and quality. Tenderers were required to produce financial evidence of guarantees or other financing arrangements that underwrote their ability to sign a contract in a timely manner. Government Departments and regional and industrial bodies with a legitimate interest in the strategic sealift service competition were consulted at all stages. The complexity of the transaction has extended the negotiations but all major questions have been resolved and we foresee no significant obstacle to early signature.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects to transfer to AWSR Ltd. responsibilities for the two roll-on, roll-offs being built by Harland and Wolff; [50892]

(2) what period of notice will be given to the supplier of the roll-on roll-offs for the use of each of them; [50893]

(3) whether the Government's assumption from AWSR Ltd. of responsibility for purchase of the two roll-on roll-offs being built by Harland and Wolff counts towards the PSBR. [50891]

Dr. Moonie: On completion of the two ships being built by Harland and Wolff, due this financial year, AWSR will reimburse the Ministry of Defence and assume ownership. The overall effect on the Government's finances is therefore neutral. The period of notice for the six ships forming the strategic sealift service will be:

Ships	Notice
1	5 days
3	10 days
1	20 days
1	30 days

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Department's contract for Ro-Ro ferries has been signed; and if he will make a statement. [51134]

Dr. Moonie: We foresee no significant obstacles to early signature. Negotiation of the terms of a 20-year service has inevitably been complex and changes in the commercial shipping environment since the events of 11 September 2001 have had to be factored in. We have, however, at the same time, been able to take advantage of policies developed in recent years as set out in "British Shipping Charting a New Course" and elsewhere.

Private Gray

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what duties Private Gray was deployed in on *(a)* 16 September 2001 and *(b)* 17 September 2001; who his immediate superior officer was on that night; and if he will make a statement; [51157]

(2) what happened to the weapon and ammunition of Private Gray following his death on 17 September 2001 at Deep Cut Camp; and if he will make a statement; [51165]

(3) when Private Gray commenced duty at Deep Cut Army Camp on 16 September 2001; what his schedule of duty was *(a)* that and *(b)* the next day; and if he will make a statement; [51153]

(4) what time was Private Gray's body removed from the site of Deep Cut Camp on 17 September 2001; by whom it was removed; to where it was removed; and if he will make a statement; [51161]

(5) what record there is of a civilian staying the night at the officers' mess of Deep Cut Camp over the night of 16 and 17 of September 2001; if he will identify this person; who authorised his entry into the camp and his overnight stay in the officers' mess; and if he will make a statement; [51169]

(6) what ammunition was found to be missing from Private Gray following his death on 17 September 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51151]

(7) what record there is of Private Gray's routine on the evening of the 16 September 2001; when the last time was he logged out on guard duty; when the last time was he logged back in from guard duty having completed a patrol; and if he will make a statement; [51159]

(8) what time the body of Private Gray was discovered in Deep Cut Camp; where it was discovered; by whom; and if he will make a statement; [51163]

(9) how many rounds of ammunition Private Gray was issued with before going on duty; how many rounds were found in his weapon or on his person following his death on 17 September 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51150]

(10) if he will make a statement on the incident late on the evening of 16 September 2001 close to the officers mess at Deep Cut Camp involving Private Geoff Gray; and what other personnel were involved; [51158]

(11) what the location was of the incident that led to the death of Private Geoff Gray in September 2001 within the Deep Cut Army Camp; where the death took place; and if he will make a statement; [51154]

(12) what the calibre was of the bullets that killed Private Geoff Gray; what search was made to recover the bullets; who conducted the search; if the bullets were recovered; and if he will make a statement; [51170]

(13) what procedures were followed at the start and finish of a round of guard duty at Deep Cut Army Camp on the evening of 16 and the morning of 17 and 18 September 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51152]

(14) what logs were kept of the round of guard duty of Private Gray on the evening of the 16 and the morning of the 17 September 2001 at Deep Cut Camp; who was responsible for the accuracy of the logs; and if he will make a statement; [51160]

(15) how many *(a)* entry and *(b)* exit wounds were found on Private Gray's body; where they were; and if he will make a statement; [51156]

(16) at what time shots were first heard on the night of 16 and 17 of September 2001; by whom and where; if reports of these shots were logged; and if he will make a statement. [51164]

Dr. Moonie: These questions collectively concern the circumstances surrounding the death of Private Geoff Gray at the Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut, on 17 September 2001. Some of the information requested has already been placed in the public domain in the form of witness evidence given at the coroner's inquest into the death of Private Gray, which was held on 19 March 2002. However, jurisdiction for the investigation into this incident was retained by the Surrey Police who will be briefing the family of Private Gray shortly on the circumstances surrounding his death. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment further at this stage. The evidence will also be considered by an internal Army Board of Inquiry, which will convene on 25 April 2002. The inquiry is likely to take some time. The next of kin will, as a matter of courtesy, be afforded a copy of the final report in due course.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there was an MOD inquiry into the death of Private Geoff Gray in September 2001 at Deep Cut Army Camp; and if he will make a statement. [51155]

Dr. Moonie: The Army Board of Inquiry into the death of Private Geoff Gray will convene on 25 April 2002. The purpose of a Board of Inquiry is to establish the facts and ascertain whether any shortcomings in service equipment or procedures caused or contributed to the incident leading to a death and, if necessary, make recommendations to prevent a recurrence. Although this is normally an internal investigation and not open to members of the public or the media, the next of kin are afforded a copy of the completed Board of Inquiry report as a matter of courtesy (subject to any minimum security/disclosure requirements). The inquiry is likely to take some time and I cannot, at this stage, say when the board will make its final report.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* the cause of death, *(b)* the circumstances and *(c)* the coroner's verdict on the death of Private Geoff Gray in September 2001 at the Deep Cut Army Camp; and if he will make a statement. [51149]

Dr. Moonie: Private Geoff Gray, Royal Logistic Corps, died from gunshot wounds to the head while on guard duty at the Princess Royal Barracks, Deep Cut, on 17 September 2001. The coroner's inquest was held on 19 March 2002 and recorded an open verdict. Jurisdiction for the investigation into this incident remains with the Surrey police who will be briefing the family of Private Gray shortly on the circumstances surrounding his death. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Sea Harriers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 12 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 823W, on Sea Harriers, if he will estimate the value of savings that will be made as a result of the withdrawal of Sea Harrier force in each year until 2012. [51764]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 823–24W.

5 Squadron

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings will be made from the standing down of 5 Squadron. [49762]

Mr. Ingram: The down declaration of 5 Squadron in October 2004 was assumed in the 1999 Eurofighter Force Planning Assumptions and was part of a series of measures related to the introduction of Eurofighter. The Squadron's down declaration was designed to release manpower and other resources to allow the build up of Eurofighter squadrons to begin. As such, 'savings' arising from the down declaration of 5 Squadron will be offset elsewhere in the Defence programme. The decision to down declare 5 Squadron early, by January 2003, was taken to produce a more effective and efficient Tornado F3 capability pending the arrival into RAF service of the Eurofighter. Its aircraft and most of the Squadron's personnel are being redistributed among the other Tornado F3 squadrons. However, savings of approximately £2 million over two years are expected.

Unexploded Ordnance (Kenya)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last five years

personnel specialised in the clearance of unexploded ordnance have been deployed to Kenya in the aftermath of British Army training exercises there. [48932]

Mr. Ingram: A squadron from 33 Engineer Regiment has deployed to Kenya five times in the last five years. This annual exercise, in support of the Kenyan Authorities, to clear unexploded ordnance from areas used by the British Army in Kenya is under way now. In addition, every infantry exercise—wherever it takes place—deploys with personnel trained in the clearance of unexploded ordnance.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* people and *(b)* animals have been killed as a result of unexploded ordnance left following British Army training exercises in (i) Kenya and (ii) other foreign countries in the last five years. [48933]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence's records indicate that no people have been killed as a result of ordnance left behind following British Army training exercises overseas. While any deaths of animals may be reported locally, the MOD does not hold records of such incidents centrally and they could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* types and *(b)* amounts of ordnance have been used during each British Army training deployment to Kenya during the past 12 months. [49304]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence does not yet have a complete record of all the ammunition used during the past 12 months. I will write to the hon. Member when these details are available and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the safety arrangements are for British Army training exercises in Kenya, with regard to protecting civilians from unexploded ordnance; [49309]

(2) what arrangements are in place to clear up ordnance left unexploded following British Army training exercises in Kenya. [49305]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made on 18 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 400–02.

Army Training

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries in which the British Army train on land which is also used for grazing. [49259]

Mr. Ingram: The British Army trains in many countries including the USA, Canada, Kenya, Botswana, Malaysia, Oman, Australia and New Zealand and across much of Europe. It is quite possible that many of the areas on which we train are also used for grazing, however this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the terms of the agreement between the UK and Kenyan Governments under which British Army troops are regularly deployed to Kenya for training purposes. [49307]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* British Army deployments to Kenya are carried out under the terms of the memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of the United Kingdom and Kenya, which was renewed on 19 December 2001. The terms are confidential between ourselves and the Kenyans, and I am therefore withholding the information requested under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Air-to-surface Weapon

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement in progress in introducing a new intermediate-range air-to-surface weapon system for RAF strike aircraft. [50005]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The capability to attack surface targets at intermediate range (35 to 100 nautical miles from the delivery platform) from RAF strike aircraft has been given the title SPEAR (Selective Precision Effects At Range). Studies into how the SPEAR capability might be best achieved are still ongoing. However, work to date has indicated that one single system may not be the most cost-effective solution, as the required effects of SPEAR will vary according to the various scenarios and target types against which it is used. The capability may, therefore, need to be realised through improvements to weapons to enter service in the short to medium term, as well as the introduction of a new system (or systems). Time scales for the delivery of the capability will depend upon which solution is chosen.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place the order for two British aircraft carriers. [51133]

Dr. Moonie: We currently plan to award a contract for the build of two new Future Carriers for the Royal Navy in 2004.

Missile Development

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's involvement is in research and development of a successor system to the Harpoon missile. [50784]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* There are currently no plans to replace the Harpoon missile, which it is planned will remain in service with air and surface units for some considerable time. The Ministry of Defence is not therefore undertaking research and development for a successor system.

A project to enhance the Anti Surface Warfare offensive capability of the Royal Navy's surface ships is currently in the concept stage; as part of this a minor study has been undertaken to assess the performance of improvements to the existing Harpoon missile, which could form a potential solution should the requirement be confirmed.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the future air-to-surface guided weapon; and which Royal Navy helicopters will be equipped with this weapon when it becomes operational. [50782]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Future Air-to-Surface Guided Weapon (FASGW) programme is early in its concept stage. The programme aims to provide the core offensive anti-surface warfare capability currently delivered by the Sea Skua missile carried by Royal Navy Lynx helicopters. On current planning assumptions, when FASGW enters service it will be carried by the Surface Combatant Maritime Rotorcraft.

HMS York (Sea RAM Trial)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the trials of Sea RAM with HMS York; and what plans he has to procure the weapon system. [50783]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Sea RAM trial on HMS York was completed in September 2001. Although the equipment was returned earlier than anticipated, the majority of the trial objectives were achieved. The data gathered will be used to inform equipment capability decisions and to feed into other research and studies.

We have no immediate plans to procure the system, but it will be considered along with other options for a potential enhancement to our close-in defensive capability.

Type 675 Jammer

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to procure a successor system to the type 675 jammer, to be fitted to type 45 and other future warships. [50788]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The type 675 jammer was taken out of service some years ago and we have no plans at present to fit a successor system to our future warships, though we continue to research jamming technologies.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Pensions Appeal Tribunals (Posthumous Appeals) Amendment Order 2001; and if he will make a statement. [51393]

Dr. Moonie: Posthumous appeals allow the representative of a deceased ex-serviceman or woman to continue an appeal against a decision to reject their claim to a war disablement pension lodged before their death or to appeal against a decision to reject such a claim which is received after their death.

The Pensions Appeal Tribunals (Posthumous Appeals) Amendment Order 2001 was a consequence of extending time limits on war pension appeals from 9 April 2001. The 2001 amendment to the Pensions Appeal Tribunals (Posthumous Appeals) Order 1980 ensures, for parity, that similar time limits are applied to posthumous appeals.

Cost effectiveness was not a consideration.

Depleted Uranium

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the UK and its allies in Northern Iraq have used depleted uranium weapons. [51638]

Dr. Moonie: United Kingdom forces did not use depleted uranium (DU) munitions in Northern Iraq during the Gulf War. They were deployed as part of a humanitarian relief operation and were therefore not equipped with Challenger battle tanks. The United Kingdom's allies are also not believed to have used DU in Northern Iraq during the war.

Allied forces are not using DU munitions in the policing of the Northern No Fly Zone.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of British Armed Forces' Personnel who have been exposed to depleted uranium. [50540]

Dr. Moonie: The Royal Society reports on "The Health Hazards of Depleted Uranium Munitions" consider three levels of exposure to depleted uranium (DU):

Level I—exposures to personnel in a vehicle that is struck by a DU penetrator, or to personnel entering a struck vehicle immediately, typically to assist injured comrades.

Level II—exposures following combat, typically to personnel working in or on contaminated vehicles to carry out repairs.

Level III—all other exposures, for example, being downwind of an impact or fire involving DU, or brief entry into contaminated vehicle.

No British troops who served in the Gulf or Balkans would have featured in the Level I scenario, or the worst case estimate for the Level II scenario, that is, personnel exposed to DU for about 100 hours.

Some duties undertaken by British troops in the Gulf could potentially have put them in scenarios representative of the Royal Society's Level II average estimate of 10 hours exposure to DU. However, the Royal Society's prediction of excess deaths from lung cancer and leukaemia, resulting from such Level II exposures, is very low (0.25 and 0.0007 per 10,000 respectively by the age of 75). This would not be detectable above the general risk of dying from cancer over a normal lifetime.

It is possible that some veterans might have experienced Level III exposures during the Gulf and Balkans conflicts and aftermaths.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Social Exclusion (Wales)

7. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about social exclusion. [49349]

Mrs. Roche: My right hon. Friend and I have not had any discussions with the First Secretary recently regarding social exclusion.

The Social Exclusion Unit, which covers England only, maintains regular official level contact with each of the devolved Administrations.

The Welsh Assembly's work in this area complements national Government policies aimed at tackling poverty and deprivation across the UK.

Housing Benefit (Lone Parents)

8. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what assessment he has made of the Better Regulation Task Force's report, "Housing Benefit: a Case Study of Lone Parents". [49350]

Mr. Leslie: The Better Regulation Task Force is an independent body advising Government on regulation issues, supported by a secretariat in the Cabinet Office. Ministers responded positively and in full to their helpful report on housing benefit and lone parents.

Child Poverty

9. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what assessment the Social Exclusion Unit has made of the number of children living in poverty in Great Britain. [49351]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Our assessment shows that between 1979 and 1997 the number of children living in poverty trebled, a trend that was totally unacceptable.

That trend has now been reversed. Whatever measure you use, the number of people and the number of children living in poverty is now coming down. We are now well on the way to meeting our targets of reducing child poverty by a quarter by 2004 and eradicating child poverty within a generation.

Biosecurity

10. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the co-ordination of the response of Government Departments to potential external threats to biosecurity. [49352]

Mr. Leslie: The response to threats of biological attack on the United Kingdom involves a number of Government Departments, including the Department of Health, the Home Office and the Security Services. The Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat works closely with all Departments to ensure the Government response is properly co-ordinated.

Emergency Planning Review

11. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State when he expects the Government to report on the findings of the emergency planning review and seek to implement its recommendations. [49353]

Mr. Leslie: As I told the House on 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1230W, the results of the emergency planning review consultation have been placed in the Library. Preparatory work is now under way with a view to introducing new legislation on dealing with civil contingencies when parliamentary time allows.

Castle Awards

12. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State how many firms have applied for a Castle Award to signify an equal pay policy. [49355]

Mrs. Roche: The Castle Awards were launched on 8 March. During the first month of its launch no formal applications were made but we have received 420 requests for Castle Award applications and there have been 1,011 hits on the Castle Award web pages.

Government Grants

13. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what steps the social exclusion unit is taking to ensure people in poverty in more affluent districts have equal access to Government grants for which local authorities can bid. [49356]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Government's approach is to tackle poverty and social exclusion wherever they are found—through delivering high quality public services to everyone.

We have set targets for minimum levels of performance to focus effort on making improvements where outcomes are worst. Examples include a target for 25 per cent. of pupils in every school to achieve five A*-C GCSEs by 2006; and a target for a 25 per cent. reduction in burglary rates by 2005, with no area having a rate three times the national average.

Business Regulation

14. **Barbara Follett:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what steps his Department is taking to reduce the regulatory burden on business. [49357]

Mr. Leslie: The Government are committed to better regulation. This means legislating only where necessary, doing so in a light touch way, and reducing regulatory burdens wherever possible.

The Government published their regulatory reform action plan in February. It contains 167 measures that will benefit business.

Electronic Services

15. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what has been the percentage increase in take-up of online transactions with Government Departments in the last 12 months. [49358]

Mr. Leslie: Latest ONS figures show that in October 2001, 3.84 million citizens had used the internet to use or access Government services.

Over half of all central Government services that can be delivered electronically are now e-enabled and around a quarter of those are for services other than providing information. Take-up has been significant. For example, more than 75,000 individuals submitted last year's self-assessment returns over the internet; over 1 million checks of potential employees for child care positions have been carried out via the internet; and NHS Direct receives approximately 1 million hits a week.

Welfare to Work (Transport)

16. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the social exclusion unit's study into the role of transport in welfare-to-work policies. [49359]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1068W.

Civil Service Secondments (Disclosure)

17. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what guidance he has given to Ministers on the public disclosure of business secondees to the civil service. [49360]

Mr. Leslie: I have not issued any guidance to Ministers. However, Sir Richard Wilson, in agreement with permanent secretaries, decided that guidance should be issued to all Departments on the disclosure of business secondments to the civil service. As a result, the Cabinet Office Interchange Unit has issued guidance to all Departments stating that they should meet all requests for disclosure of information, except in circumstances where there is a "public interest" objection to the disclosure, or where it would not be in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act, particularly Schedule 2.

Public Service Managers

18. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what steps he is taking to improve the performance of managers of public services. [49361]

Mr. Leslie: New performance management systems are being introduced into the civil service which are competency based, focused on improving performance and rewarding achievement.

The Office of Public Services Reform is examining existing skills and incentives in the public sector and has projects under way focusing on improving skills such as project management.

Special Advisers

19. **Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what plans he has to implement the Government's commitment to the regulation by Parliament of the number and role of special advisers. [49362]

20. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 879, on the civil service, what plans he has for a cap in the number of special advisers. [49363]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friend to the answer provided earlier today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael).

Regional Economic Policy

21. **Adam Price:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on his involvement in the Government's review of regional economic policy. [49364]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Government set out their approach to regional economic policy in the joint HMT/DTI document "Productivity in the UK 3—The Regional Dimension", published in November 2001. In addition, the Government's economic policies are continually reviewed through pre-Budget reports, Budgets and spending reviews.

Civil Service Act

22. **Mr. Lyons:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what progress has been made on a new Civil Service Act. [49365]

Mr. Leslie: The Government are committed to introducing civil service legislation and to maintaining an impartial civil service. Any legislative programme will be announced in the normal way.

Domestic Violence

23. **Jim Knight:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the Cabinet Office's recent forum on the economic cost of domestic violence. [49366]

Mrs. Roche: We suspect that the economic cost of domestic violence to our public services and to our communities is vast. We want to understand the true scale of these costs nationally and recently I hosted a roundtable to begin research on this issue.

At this roundtable, I brought together a wide range of interested parties. This included experts from the field of domestic violence, representatives from across our public services including health, social services, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service as well as the TUC and the Director General of the CBI.

We are now in the process of commissioning this research. It is envisaged that we will undertake a comprehensive economic audit of the costs incurred as a result of domestic violence by public services, agencies and private business.

Equal Opportunities Commission

24. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what plans there are to increase the budget of the Equal Opportunities Commission. [49367]

Mrs. Roche: The EOC's budget of £7.005 million for 2002–03 was transferred from the DFES to the Cabinet Office.

Any increase will be subject to discussions with the Treasury in the context of the Spending Review—the outcome of which is not yet known.

Public Bodies (Regional Representation)

25. **Syd Rapson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State how he intends to ensure representation of all regions on the boards of national public bodies. [49368]

Mr. Leslie: The key principle in making appointments to all public bodies remains appointment on merit. The opportunity to serve on a public body should be available to all, regardless of disability, age, ethnicity, gender, geographic or social background. And that is why the Government wants to make sure that, as part of our emphasis on increasing diversity, applicants for all appointments are encouraged from all parts of the United

Kingdom. In line with this, the Cabinet Office is running a series of regional seminars for women interested in serving on a public body.

Sustainable Development

26. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what recent meetings he has had in connection with the world summit on sustainable development. [49369]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Over the last two months I have met the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the King and Prime Minister of Bahrain, the Amir of Qatar, the President of Brazil, the Vice President of the United States of America, and the Deputy Prime Ministers of Singapore and Canada. I have also had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others to help prepare the UK's position for WSSD.

Better Regulation Task Force

27. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the work of the better regulation Task Force. [49370]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Task Force is carrying out reviews of employment law; local delivery of central policy; higher education; and science and technology. Its new Chairman, David Arculus, is consulting stakeholders about the Task Force's next work programme and will make an announcement in the summer.

Equal Opportunities

28. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what progress has been made on the Cabinet Office consultation document, "Towards Equality and Diversity". [49371]

Mrs. Roche: The consultation document "Towards Equality and Diversity" sets out the Government's proposals to implement the EC employment and race directives. The 15-week consultation period, which closed at the end of March, resulted in a high response rate from a range of stakeholders including small businesses, large employers, unions, interest groups and individuals.

Ministers are currently considering the responses. The results of the consultation, and fuller proposals, including draft legislation to outlaw discrimination at work on grounds of sexual orientation and religion, will be published in the autumn.

Ministerial Code of Conduct

29. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what recent assessment he has made of the guidance given under the Ministerial Code of Conduct relating to the use of facilities provided by overseas Governments. [49372]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Ministers' visits overseas will continue to be handled in accordance with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers.

Rural Communities

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the co-ordination of policy for rural communities. [49273]

Alun Michael: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for the co-ordination of policy for rural communities, assisted by myself and by the Department. My right hon. Friend chairs the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Rural Renewal, which addresses issues relevant to rural people that cut across departmental boundaries, and I am also a member of that Committee. The Countryside Agency is the Government's statutory adviser on rural and countryside issues, and in particular was asked to report publicly on the "rural-proofing" of the full range of Government policies; their first annual report was published on 11 April and a copy is available in the Library of the House. The Government's rural policies were set out in the White Paper "Our countryside: the future", published in November 2000; an update on progress was included in "England's Rural Future", which I published in December 2001.

Government and Crown Interests (Insurance)

Alistair Burt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Cabinet Office last reviewed the insurance arrangements for Government and Crown interests. [49354]

Mr. Leslie: Policy on insurance for central Government bodies is kept under review by HM Treasury. The most recent change, relating to insurance for wider market activities, was made in 2000.

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the certificates showing that the timber used in the refurbishment of 22 Whitehall came from certified sustainably-managed sources. [50006]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 19 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1251W.

My Department is currently, with Balfour Beatty, undertaking a full investigation and will report back to the House.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Seed Imports

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what commitments the Government have made on spot checks for the adventitious presence of GM varieties in seed imports; and if these commitments have been fulfilled. [288]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* In May 2000, the Government announced a package of measures relating to seed purity. One of these measures was the checking of seed imports. Between that date and 31 March 2001, the Central Science Laboratory carried out 38 audits

of seed companies. From 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 it carried out 45 such audits. These audits have monitored the precautions that seed companies have taken as regards the adventitious presence of GM events in seeds.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason she has not answered the Question from the hon. Member for Buckingham tabled on 8 November 2001 regarding the cost to the public purse arising from the name change of her Department (ref. 14449). [32043]

Mr. Morley: The delay in responding to the PQ is regretted. It was the consequence of a very heavy workload and limited staff resources at that time in the particular DEFRA unit responsible for providing answers to questions in this area of activity.

Moorland Ponies

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department and its predecessor have introduced to *(a)* prohibit overbreeding and *(b)* improve the welfare of moorland ponies. [48744]

Mr. Morley: The State Veterinary Service has worked with and advised the various local regulatory authorities which are responsible. The Authorities are mainly commoners' associations, acting under local powers. The current review of the law on common land could have implications in relation to the control and care of moorland ponies.

Energy Crops

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures the Government are introducing to encourage the production of energy crops. [50453]

Mr. Morley: The Government have welcomed the publication of the energy review by the performance and innovation unit, which draws attention to the key role of renewable energy sources, including energy crops, in moving to a low carbon economy. The Government plan a public consultation on the key recommendations of the report leading to a White Paper in the autumn. This Department has allocated support of £29 million to solid biomass crops through the energy crops scheme, part of the England Rural Development Programme. The Renewables Obligation permits the co-firing of energy crops with fossil fuels. Working with other Departments we are putting in place further schemes with funding of £70 million which will develop markets for biomass, including purpose grown energy crops and material from forests, in heat, combined heat and power and electricity generation. We are also working closely with the Countryside Agency which has launched the Community Renewables Initiative to help local communities develop renewable energy projects. In the Budget my right hon. Friend the Chancellor confirmed the new duty rate for biodiesel set at 20p per litre below the rate for ultra low sulphur diesel. The Government are considering carefully the recommendation of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food that duty on biofuels should be reduced to the rates applied to other clean fuels.

Fish Stocks

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government have done since 1997 to preserve and manage fish stocks in UK and European waters. [51235]

Mr. Morley: The Government have been at the forefront in working with the European Commission and the other member states, as well as Norway, to develop stock recovery plans for the North sea, west of Scotland and Irish sea cod and for northern hake. And we have consistently argued, in EU and international negotiations on fisheries management, for outcomes which respect scientific advice, follow the precautionary principle and aim to ensure a sustainable future for the fishing industry.

Forests

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the use of forests as sink holes for carbon dioxide; and what measures have been taken since 1997 to increase the size of forests. [51238]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 275W. The measures I outlined in that answer have resulted in over 70,000 hectares of new woodland being planted in the UK in the four years to March 2001.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further measures she plans to implement to combat bovine tuberculosis in England and Wales. [51378]

Mr. Morley: Resources are currently being targeted at the backlog of tuberculosis tests in cattle, following suspension of routine testing during the foot and mouth outbreak. Those herds which have been identified as posing the greatest risk are being prioritised on the basis of a veterinary risk assessment.

Land Acquisitions (Stamp Duty)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to HM Treasury in support of the abolition of stamp duty on land acquisitions. [51459]

Mr. Morley: Discussions on tax issues take place between Ministers on a routine basis. Final decisions on all taxation matters rest with the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Farm Allowances

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with HM Treasury about allowing farmers to benefit from *(a)* 100 per cent. capital allowances for plant and machinery and *(b)* 25 per cent. allowance for buildings. [51458]

Mr. Morley: Tax issues feature regularly in discussions between Ministers. As with all tax matters, decisions on the level of capital allowances rest with the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Agriculture Council

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the matters relating to *(a)* agriculture, *(b)* fisheries and *(c)* other subjects that are to be discussed at the forthcoming meeting of the Agriculture Council on 22 April. [51456]

Mr. Morley: The following items were on the Agriculture Council agenda for the meeting on 22 April:

Equal opportunities in rural areas

European Union Veterinary Fund

BSE

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the animal-health requirements applicable to non-commercial movement of pet animals

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on additives for use in animal nutrition

Young farmers: issues and prospects (AOB item requested by the Italian delegation)

Argentina: Trade measures against Greek canned peaches (AOB item requested by the Greek delegation)

List of "A" items

Negotiation of guaranteed prices applicable in the 2001–02 to 2005–06 delivery periods to cane sugar originating in the ACP States referred to in Protocol 3 of Annex V to the ACP-EC Partnership Agreement and in India

Adoption of a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on undesirable substances in animal feed

Adoption of the Council Decision on the signing, on behalf of the European Community, and provisional application of the Agreement in the form of an Exchange of Letters concerning the extension of the Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and financial contribution provided for in the Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Government of the Revolutionary People's Republic of Guinea on fishing off the Guinean coast for the period 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2002

Adoption of the Council Decision on the conclusion of the Agreement in the form of an Exchange of Letters concerning the provisional application of the Protocol defining for the period 18 January 2002 to 17 January 2005 the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for by the Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Republic of Seychelles on fishing off the coast of Seychelles

Adoption of a Council Decision authorising the Kingdom of Spain to extend until 7 March 2003 the Agreement on mutual fishery relations with the Republic of South Africa

Adoption of a Council Decision authorising the Portuguese Republic to extend until 9 April 2003 the Agreement on mutual fishery relations with the Republic of South Africa

Adoption of the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 685–2001 in order to provide for the distribution among member states of authorisations received pursuant to the Agreement between the European Community and Romania establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport

Relations with Algeria

Negotiation of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the EC and its Member States, of the one part, and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, of the other part

Approval of the outcome of the negotiations and decision to sign

Relations with Lebanon

Negotiations for a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the EC and its member states and Lebanon, an Interim Agreement on trade and trade-related matters between the EC and Lebanon, and an Agreement in the form of an exchange of letters concerning cooperation in the fight against terrorism between the EU and Lebanon

Approval of the outcome of the negotiations and decision on signing

Relations with the Associated CCEE

Participation in the Fiscalis programme

Decision concerning Lithuania

Relations with the Associated CCEE

Participation in the Fiscalis programme

Decision concerning Hungary

Relations with the Associated CCEE

Participation in Community programmes

Decision concerning Lithuania

European Economic Area

Draft Decision of the EEA Joint Committee amending Annex XX (Environment) to the EEA Agreement

European Economic Area

Draft Decision of the EEA Joint Committee amending Annex XX (Environment) to the

EEA Agreement

European Economic Area

Proposal for a Decision of the EEA Joint Committee amending Protocol 31 to the EEA Agreement, on cooperation in specific fields outside the four freedoms

European Economic Area

Draft Decision of the EEA Joint Committee amending Annex XVIII (Health and safety at work, labour law and equal treatment for men and women) to the EEA Agreement

Anti-dumping

Proposal for a Council Regulation terminating the anti-dumping procedure concerning imports of preoxodisulphates originating in the People's Republic of China

Anti-dumping

Proposal for a Council Regulation confirming the definitive anti-dumping duty imposed on imports of cotton-type bed linen originating in India by Regulation (EC) No 2398–97, as amended and suspended by Regulation (EC) No 1644/2001

Draft Council Common Position extending Common Position 96/635/CFSP on Burma/Myanmar

Appointment of a grade A1 official at the General Secretariat of the Council.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the forthcoming Agriculture European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 26 April; and what information is being provided by her Department to enable effective pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [51727]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The Scottish Executive Minister for Environment and Rural Development attended the EU Agriculture Council meeting on 22 April. There is no meeting of the Council planned for 26 April. It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. The Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Flood Defences

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total expenditure on sea wall defences in England and Wales was in each year from 1990 to 2001. [50983]

Mr. Morley: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many miles of sea wall were repaired in the county of Essex in each year from 1990 to 2001. [50984]

Mr. Morley: Information is only readily available for works undertaken by the Environment Agency; local authorities and other owners of defences may also have undertaken works. I understand that the agency undertook repairs on 22 kilometres of sea walls in Essex in each of the years in question and also undertook capital improvements as follows:

Kilometres

	Frontage improved
1990–91	0.3
1991–92	6.5
1992–93	0.8
1993–94	11.0
1994–95	11.0
1995–96	12.5
1996–97	11.5
1997–98	1.5
1998–99	2.3
1999–2000	3.5

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what studies are being made by *(a)* the Environment Agency, and *(b)* other organisations commissioned by her, in respect of estimating the likely increases in the height of tidal crests above the continental shelf of western Europe and the seas surrounding the United Kingdom; and what consequential adjustments will be made in the time-height ratios used as a basis for improving flood defences around the United Kingdom. [52060]

Mr. Morley: The Department and the Environment Agency (EA) manage a joint programme of research and development on flood management. Recent studies have been carried out by the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory and HR Wallingford, both leading institutions in coastal and tidal research. In this context their conclusions are that the current recommendations of the Department which suggest an allowance of between 4 and 6 mm per year of relative sea level rise (depending on location) are a prudent response to current predictions of climate change.

Ongoing work is considering new climate change scenarios and preliminary indications are that this will broadly confirm the earlier conclusions.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many prosecutions for importing illegal meat have been carried out under hygiene regulations in each of the last five years. [45384]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* There have been no prosecutions for illegal meat imports under the hygiene regulations. There have so far been two bushmeat prosecutions in the UK. The first of these, in early 2001, found the defendant not guilty of CITES offences but guilty of failing to comply with the animal health controls on entry to the EU. The second prosecution in June 2001, found two defendants guilty of CITES offences and they both received four-month prison sentences.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's calculations are of the tonnage of illegal meat imported to the UK in each of the last three years. [50450]

Mr. Morley: Records for the last three years are not held centrally. We are notified of seizures of illegal imports by the Port Health Authorities, LACORS (was LACOTS) and Customs. Since April 2001, we have been notified of seizures amounting to around 51 tonnes of animal products and some plants, of which approximately 34 tonnes relates to consignments which contained more than one type of produce. A more detailed breakdown of these mixed consignments is not held centrally. The weight of meat only consignments seized in this period is about 894 kilos.

As announced in our Action Plan of 28 March, we are undertaking a risk assessment to determine the possibility of meat, infected with an exotic disease, entering the country undetected and then threatening the health of our livestock.

Foot and Mouth

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received concerning the necessity of United Kingdom pig producers insuring against consequential losses caused by foot and mouth and swine fever. [51759]

Mr. Morley: The pig sector is represented on the animal disease insurance working group which my officials are leading. The group has met on 6 March and 9 April and is meeting again on 8 May.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answers of 16 April about slaughter on contiguous premises refs 47603 and 47604, if she will provide the tables of figures on which the graphs were based. [51755]

Mr. Morley: Pursuant to my answer of 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 887W, following is the table of figures on which the graphs showing time taken to slaughter on contiguous premises were based.

Contiguous premises—time taken to slaughter

Owner report date	*Total IPs*	*Slaughtered within 48 hours*	*72 hours*	*96 hours*	*Greater than 96 hours*	*of which greater than 120*
2001						
19 February to 25 February	4	0	0	1	3	3
26 February to 4 March	17	0	1	1	15	9
5 March to 11 March	15	0	0	0	15	15
12 March to 18 march	63	0	3	5	55	48
19 March to 25 March	188	2	8	7	171	150
26 March to 1 April	430	7	30	46	347	258
2 April to 8 April	436	9	42	64	321	220
9 April to 15 April	369	9	44	89	227	104
16 April to 22 April	159	5	42	47	65	24
23 April to 29 April	89	5	27	29	28	13
30 April to 6 May	64	4	20	16	24	5
7 May to 13 May	99	6	23	29	41	18
14 May to 20 May	64	2	15	17	30	2
21 May to 27 May	74	4	30	22	18	5
28 May to 3 June	109	4	37	43	25	7
4 June to 10 June	91	1	33	35	22	4
11 June to 17 June	86	6	41	26	13	1
18 June to 24 June	56	6	21	19	10	4
25 June to 1 July	62	4	35	14	9	7
2 July to 8 July	67	7	33	20	7	6
9 July to 15 July	61	5	33	12	11	3
16 July to 22 July	44	7	25	4	8	5
23 July to 29 July	31	9	16	4	2	1
30 July to 5 August	48	3	23	14	8	3
6 August to 12 August	54	10	26	11	7	3
13 August to 19 August	38	7	24	6	1	0
20 August to 26 August	30	3	17	10	0	0
27 August to 2 September	46	0	20	16	10	6
3 September to 9 September	35	5	16	9	5	3
10 September to 16 September	13	2	8	2	1	0
17 September to 23 September	17	2	15	0	0	0
24 September to 30 September	7	3	2	2	0	0
Grand total	2,966	137	710	620	1,499	927

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answers of 17 April about slaughter on infected premises, refs 47602 and 47605, if she will provide the tables of figures on which the graphs were based. [51756]

Mr. Morley: Pursuant to his reply, 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, c. 931W, set out as follows in the table of figures on which the graphs showing time taken to slaughter on infected premises were based.

Infected premises—time taken to slaughter

Owner report date	*Total IPs*	*24 hours*	*48 hours*	*72 hours*	*>72 hours*	*of which >96*
19 February to 25 February 2001	10	0	3	4	3	1
26 February to 4 March 2001	49	1	13	10	25	18
5 March to 11 March 2001	84	11	20	17	36	20
12 March to 18 March 2001	146	16	50	42	38	19
19 March to 25 March 2001	236	28	78	82	48	15
26 March to 1 April 2001	226	57	109	47	13	6
2 April to 8 April 2001	170	64	93	10	3	1
9 April to 15 April 2001	110	49	51	7	3	1
16 April to 22 April 2001	73	37	32	3	1	1
23 April to 29 April 2001	37	18	14	5	0	0
30 April to 6 May 2001	28	14	13	0	1	1
7 May to 13 May 2001	19	14	4	1	0	0
14 May to 20 May 2001	16	8	8	0	0	0
21 May to 27 May 2001	20	8	11	1	0	0
28 May to 3 June 2001	25	17	7	0	1	1
4 June to 10 June 2001	13	8	5	0	0	0
11 June to 17 June 2001	20	16	3	1	0	0
18 June to 24 June 2001	13	7	3	1	2	2
25 June to 1 July 2001	13	9	4	0	0	0
2 July to 8 July 2001	16	10	6	0	0	0
9 July to 15 July 2001	11	9	1	0	1	1
16 July to 22 July 2001	13	12	0	0	1	0
23 July to 29 July 2001	15	12	2	0	1	1
30 July to 5 August 2001	20	9	7	3	1	1
6 August to 12 August 2001	9	7	2	0	0	0
13 August to 19 August 2001	11	9	2	0	0	0

Infected premises—time taken to slaughter

Owner report date	*Total IPs*	*24 hours*	*48 hours*	*72 hours*	*>72 hours*	*of which >96*
20 August to 26 August 2001	10	7	3	0	0	0
27 August to 2 September 2001	10	4	4	2	0	0
3 September to 9 September 2001	10	6	3	1	0	0
10 September to 16 September 2001	5	3	2	0	0	0
17 September to 23 September 2001	3	2	1	0	0	0
24 September to 1 October 2001	3	2	1	0	0	0
Grand total	1,444	474	555	237	178	89

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Social Housing

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what proportion of social housing in west Wiltshire has been allocated to people from outside the district in each year since 1995; [51499]

(2) what proportion of social housing was allocated to people from outside the district or unitary authority area in each of the English district and unitary authorities in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [51500]

Ms Keeble: A summary of the latest available information, for 2000–01 has been placed in the Libraries of the House, along with equivalent information in respect of West Wiltshire DC since 1995–96.

Housing Study Transfers

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much residual debt by local authorities has been written off to enable housing study transfers to take place. [51461]

Ms Keeble: Payments totalling £277 million have been made to date to write off the residual housing debt of local authorities transferring their housing stock to registered social landlords.

Terning Wheel Site

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what grounds he is seeking leave to appeal against the High Court's decision in the case of the planning application of the Terning Wheel site, near Gatwick. [52121]

Ms Keeble: This matter relates to the case of Hammond and Beasley *v.* SSTLR. Judgment was given on 21 February to quash the Secretary of State's decision letter of 14 August 2001 to refuse planning permission for the use of sites at Cophall Farm and the Terning Wheel as off-airport parking.

The Secretary of State has been granted permission to appeal on the following grounds:

whether the Secretary of State has failed to have proper regard to all material considerations;

whether he has given adequate reasons for his decision; and

whether he gave proper consideration as to whether the grant of planning permission would set a precedent for future similar applications.

Supplementary Credit Approvals

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list, by year, the additional supplementary credit approvals given to local authorities for exceptional needs since 1997. [51655]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The amounts of additional supplementary credit approval (SCA) given to local authorities for the relevant years are listed in the table.

£000

	SCA
1997–98	20,000
1998–99	1,300
1999–2000	700
2000–01	20,500
2001–02	[1]20,000

[1] Represents current estimate.

Council Tax

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the factors underlying the changes in the level of council tax in recent years. [49817]

Dr. Whitehead: We have not made a comprehensive assessment of factors underlying the changes in the level of council tax in recent years.

The limited analysis that we have carried out of the increases for 2002–03 suggests that there is a link between council tax rises and electoral cycles. This appears to be especially true for county councils, where elections were held last year and this year's average increase is higher than for other types of authority that provide similar services.

Comprehensive Performance Assessments

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legislative changes will be required as part of the introduction of comprehensive performance assessments. [52063]

Mr. Byers: No legislative changes are required to permit the introduction of comprehensive performance assessment. This assessment process brings together information assembled from inspection reports, plan assessments and other central Government scrutiny processes empowered under existing legislation. I will however be seeking powers in the proposed Local Government Bill to facilitate attaching the freedoms, flexibilities and other consequences described in the Local

Government White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", to the judgments made by the Audit Commission.

PowerShift Programme

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to offer direct grants under the PowerShift Programme. [51975]

Mr. Jamieson: At the moment, the prospective purchaser of a cleaner fuel vehicle applies to the Energy Saving Trust for a PowerShift grant before buying the vehicle or having their existing vehicle converted. This ensures that the conversion is on the PowerShift Register of clean, safe conversions, and safeguards against fraud. When the grant is confirmed, the applicant buys or converts the vehicle. The garage or converter provides a certificate, and the applicant claims the grant.

The trust have also introduced a new block grant scheme, under which the vehicle manufacturers can deduct the appropriate PowerShift grant from the list price or rental cost of the vehicle. This alternative means that the purchaser is not involved in applying for PowerShift grants.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with car manufacturers on reducing carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles. [51612]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government fully support the voluntary agreements between the European Commission and European, Japanese and Korean car manufacturers to reduce the average carbon dioxide emissions from new passenger cars by 25 per cent. on 1995 levels by 2008–09. The UK played a leading role in the development of these agreements and continues to discuss progress regularly with manufacturers.

Transport (Herefordshire)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes the Budget of 17 April will make to the transport system in Herefordshire. [51654]

Mr. Jamieson: The Chancellor's Budget statement included a number of fiscal and other measures relating to road vehicles and fuels. An assessment of the impact of these on the transport system in Herefordshire has not been carried out.

Multi-modal Studies

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what budget he holds to implement the recommendations of the Midman Multi-Modal Study. [51470]

Mr. Jamieson: The Ten Year Plan provides the funding for transport investment up to 2010, including schemes which are approved following a Multi-modal Study.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much his Department and its predecessors have spent on *(a)* multi-modal studies and related research and consultancy fees and *(b)* infrastructure charging studies and related research and consultancy fees since May 1997. [52089]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Expenditure on *(a)* Multi-modal Studies and related research and consultancy fees is £21,581,883 and on *(b)* infrastructure charging and related research and consultancy fees is £7,665,000.

School Transport

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made as to the reasons for parents *(a)* choosing to take their children to school by car and *(b)* sending them on public transport. [51248]

Mr. Byers: Research commissioned by my Department and other organisations has shown that the main reasons for driving children to/from school are security and safety, time, children's preference, linked school and work journeys, habit and cost.

Trans-European Transport Network

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the projects in the UK that have received funding from the EU trans-European transport network budget in each of the last five years, giving *(a)* the amount of funding given, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* its expected start and completion dates and *(d)* the total cost of the project. [51198]

Mr. Byers: Tables providing the information requested for UK projects that have received transport trans-European network funding over the past five years have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The start and completion dates and total project costs given are those last provided to the Department by the project sponsors. All financial information is provided in euros and it is not possible to give equivalent sterling figures because of exchange rate fluctuations over the five year period.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date his Department informed Network Rail that it was willing to provide £300 million of support to enable it to bid for Railtrack's assets. [49869]

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, (1) pursuant to his oral statement of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 582–83, what the date is beyond which £300 million grant will not be available if early exit from administration is not achieved; [48214]

(2) if he will break down the £300 million self-financing savings resulting from an early exit from administration for Railtrack plc; [47987]

(3) if he will set out the basis for calculating the £300 million savings achievable as a result of an early exit from administration; [48226]

(4) pursuant to his oral statement of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 581, what the last date is for Railtrack's exit from administration which meets the criteria for early exit in administration eligibility for a grant of £300 million. [48213]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department informed Network Rail, during the week before Network Rail made its bid to Railtrack Group plc on 25 March, that it was potentially willing to offer a £300 million grant on the basis of Network Rail's proposal.

The grant offer is conditional upon Network Rail securing an earlier exit from administration than would otherwise have been the case and reflects the benefits available from this earlier exit.

Financial support of a type similar to that negotiated by Network Rail could be available to other bidders. The Government and the SRA are willing to discuss proposals advanced by any serious bidder for Railtrack plc. The guidelines issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 669–71W, make clear that any proposal should address the basis, extent and nature of support that will be required from Government. Any support would be subject to negotiation and agreement. No other detailed proposals have been received.

The grant offer reflects the potential savings that can be delivered through an earlier exit from administration. This includes an earlier delivery of efficiency improvements; earlier improvements in network performance; avoiding any delay to the major projects identified in the SRA's Strategic Plan and an earlier end to the Government advisory costs associated with the administration.

In addition, the Network Rail bid itself offers an early implementation of a company limited by guarantee structure. This structure offers a greater alignment of the operation of the network with the wider public interest, a potentially more efficient financing structure through debt finance company and a company that re-invests surpluses back into the railway network rather than distributing them as shareholder dividends.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will place in the Library written communications received by the Government from the European Commission related to the decision to allow state aid support to Railtrack in administration; [50767]

(2) if the Government submitted a restructuring plan to the European Commission for Railtrack in accordance with paragraph 31, section 3.2.2 of the Community guidelines on state aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty (1999/c 288/02); [50771]

(3) if his Department received a copy of a letter sent by the European Commission to the UK permanent representative to the EU setting out the terms on which permission for state aid had been granted for Railtrack in administration; [50765]

(4) when the Government will submit a report under the requirements of paragraph 46 of the Community guidelines on state aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty (1999/c 288/02); [50772]

(5) if his Department received a copy of the decision made by the European Commission over the application made for state aid support to Railtrack in administration. [50766]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Secretary of State has received a copy of the decision of the European Commission setting out the terms on which state aid had been granted for Railtrack in administration for the period to 30 September 2002.

The decision of the Commission contains material that is commercially confidential. In accordance with the procedures of the Commission, the Secretary of State has made a reasoned request for the exclusion of material that should not be disclosed to third parties from the text that is published by the Commission. The Secretary of State will arrange for a copy of the decision to approve state aid granted to Railtrack plc (in administration) to be placed in the Library of both Houses of Parliament as soon as it has been published by the Commission.

The decision of the Commission requires the Department to submit a restructuring or liquidation plan or proof that the Government guaranteed loans to Railtrack have been reimbursed and the Government guarantee has been terminated by 19 August 2002. The Government will take appropriate action to satisfy this requirement in due course.

Rail Investment

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how those private investment companies making the investments will be compensated before the completed infrastructure is put back into the network nationally under special purpose vehicles. [R] [49029]

Mr. Jamieson: This would depend on the details of the contract entered into.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information is available to *(a)* train operators, *(b)* rolling stockleasing companies and *(c)* investors in infrastructure concerning individual rail projects under the 10-year transport plan to encourage private investment. [R] [49027]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10-Year Plan for Transport and the SRA Strategic Plan provide a broad statement on the opportunities and support available from the Government and the SRA to encourage further private sector investment in the industry. The SRA is developing a framework for Special Purpose Vehicles that will help to provide certainty and clarity in the delivery of significant infrastructure investments. The SRA will not go to the market in relation to individual projects until a proper tender is ready, and that comes downstream in the process, not at the front.

In addition, investment will be delivered through the franchising process, with information made available to potential bidders in accordance with the nature and timescale of individual franchises.

Rail Safety

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions at what intervals train crew and other safety critical railway

workers have to attend a safety briefing; and what records railway companies are required to keep about such briefings. [52068]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not readily available. Railway companies are required to set out their arrangements for communicating information in a detailed safety case, which must be formally accepted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). HSE seeks compliance with health and safety duties through inspection and enforcement activities of HM Railway Inspectorate.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what policies and targets to reduce the number of fatal accidents and major injuries to railway workers the Health and Safety Executive has set. [52066]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) does not itself set specific safety targets but it encourages the rail industry to do so. However, HSE is pursuing a number of initiatives aimed at reducing railway staff injuries, including initiatives aimed at reducing the exposure of trackside workers to the risk of being struck by a train. The Health and Safety Commission will shortly publish a strategy for improving health and safety on the railways. This identifies a number of key areas for improvement on which the HSE will focus in its contacts with employers, including trackside worker safety. HSE encourages the setting of health and safety targets in the railway industry. The Railway Group Safety Plan for 2001–02 sets out a number of detailed targets, including targets for reducing risks to railway staff working on Railtrack's infrastructure.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 571W, on rail safety, which organisation is responsible for auditing whether railway employers keep adequate records of assessments for safety critical work; and on how many occasions in the last five years someone without a personal track safety certificate has been found to be working on safety critical work. [52041]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) seeks to secure compliance with health and safety duties, including those in the Railways (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994, through the inspection and enforcement activities of HM Railway Inspectorate.

The HSE does not hold this information. Railtrack conducts random checks of personal track safety certificates. These show that about 2 per cent. of certificates are expired or are otherwise invalid.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1169W, on railway worker fatalities, what records Railway Safety Ltd. holds on the number of accidents affecting *(a)* employees and *(b)* contractors; and whether it intends to collect this information separately for employees and contractors in future. [52040]

Mr. Jamieson: Railway Safety holds records for all fatalities on railway infrastructure. The Safety Management Information System (SMIS) is a national database available to all Railway Group members, which provides detail on the number of accidents affecting employees, contractors, passengers and members of the public. This information is also provided in the Railway Group safety performance report, which is produced by Railway Safety on a quarterly basis and is available on their website at www. railwaysafety.org.uk. The statistics relating to accidents affecting employees and contractors are collected separately and will continue to be in the future.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what categories of railway workers have to possess *(a)* a safety critical work identification card, and *(b)* a personal track safety card; *(c)* how frequently railway workers have to re-apply for these cards; *(d)* what skills, experience and training they have to possess to qualify for these cards; *(e)* which organisations are permitted to issue them; and *(f)* how many railway workers possess each type of card. [52067]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has advised the following:

(a) and *(b)* All railway staff undertaking safety critical work (as defined by the Railway (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994) are required to carry a means of identification. This includes drivers, guards, signallers and trackside workers.

(c) Railway workers have to re-apply for cards every two years.

(d) and *(e)* Cards are issued by National Competency Control Agency (NCCA), following confirmation from training providers that the applicant has successfully completed the appropriate training course. No other skills or qualifications are needed to qualify for personal track safety (PTS) certification.

(f) Railtrack have reported to HSE that, as of 18 February 2002, there were 118,975 PTS card holders.

Rail Freight

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many freight trains of each freight operating company *(a)* arrived late by (i) more than five minutes and (ii) more than 10 minutes and *(b)* were cancelled (1) in each month from January 2000 to April 2002 and (2) in each year for which data are available since 1990. [50911]

Mr. Jamieson: Punctuality of freight services is a contractual matter between Railtrack and the individual freight operators.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how *(a)* delays and *(b)* cancellations of freight train services are measured; and if he will make a statement. [50910]

Mr. Jamieson: Delays and cancellations of both passenger and freight trains are measured by Railtrack through their industry-approved train operating systems.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who the winner was of the Strategic Rail Authority's freight innovation competition; by when the winning scheme was required to be operational; what progress has been made to date with the winning scheme; and if he will make a statement. [50907]

Mr. Jamieson: There were three winning schemes in the Authority's Rail Logistics Competition: Blue Circle Industries, Exel, and Minimodal™. The three projects were awarded prizes on the basis of agreed outputs, the

type and timing of which differed for all three. The schemes are all being delivered to the agreed times and specifications.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the total fees to be paid to the Strategic Rail Authority in respect of the work they are undertaking evaluating proposals from Central Railway. [51821]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority are not receiving any payment relating to this review.

Railways

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the basis is for his conclusion on the savings from advancing the end of railway administration in terms of the *(a)* months advanced, *(b)* cost per month of administration and *(c)* cost of savings forgone through administration; [47119]

(2) what savings on the railways he estimates are not achievable as a result of railway administration. [47120]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given today to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Christopher Chope) [Ref 48214].

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many passenger miles on the rail network are hauled by *(a)* diesel trains and *(b)* electric trains. [49710]

Mr. Byers: This information is not held centrally.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many rail breaks per million there were for Railtrack in each of the last six years; and how many of these resulted from gauge corner cracking. [50658]

Mr. Byers: I understand from the Office of the Rail Regulator that the total numbers of reported broken rails in the last six years were:

	Number
1996–97	709
1997–98	755
1998–99	952
1999–2000	919
2000–01	706
2001–02	'550

' Estimate according to data to end of period 12.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the prospects for electrification of the Waterloo to Exeter railway via Salisbury; and if he will make a statement. [50852]

Mr. Jamieson: None. In cases where clear practical advantages or environmental benefits exist, and value for money can be demonstrated, electrification may be considered.

North-south Rail Link

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what discussions he has had with *(a)* representatives of the Strategic Rail Authority, *(b)* the Scottish Executive Minister for Transport and *(c)* others, regarding the SRA's decision not to run the 190 mph north-south rail link to Scotland; [51275]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of the SRA's decision not to run the 190 mph north-south rail link to Scotland on *(a)* the plans to increase the capacity of Scotland's railways, *(b)* the target Glasgow to London journey time of less than four hours and *(c)* the Government's 10-year transport plan. [51277]

Mr. Jamieson: No such decisions has been taken by the Strategic Rail Authority.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 952–53W, on London Underground, who will make the decision on further revision to safety cases; and who determined the requirement for previous safety cases. [51453]

Mr. Jamieson: As the duty holder under the Railway (Safety Case) Regulations 2000 (as amended), London Underground is responsible for revising its railway safety case. Where a revision would make an accepted safety case "materially different", the duty holder is required to submit the proposed revision to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for assessment and consideration for acceptance. Guidance is set out in HSE's publication "Railway (Safety Case) Regulations 2000 including 2001 Amendments—Guidance on Regulations".

Decisions on previous safety cases were a matter for London Underground and the HSE.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers he has to require London Underground *(a)* in the public sector and *(b)* under the control of the Mayor and Transport for London to deliver the promised improvements to (i) rolling stock, (ii) signalling equipment, (iii) track and (iv) stations of the Metropolitan line within budget and on time. [51263]

Mr. Jamieson: Under the proposals for the modernisation of London Underground three contracts for maintenance and investment work would be awarded to private sector infrastructure companies. The contracts set clear requirements for improvements to be achieved by specific dates, with significant financial penalties for any delay. In order to meet their contractual obligations the infrastructure companies would have to deliver improvements to rolling stock, signalling, track and stations on all lines, including the Metropolitan line. The infrastructure companies would also take the risk of any cost overruns that result from their own inefficient or uneconomic behaviour.

The contractual obligations would be set out in legally binding contracts between London Underground and the infrastructure companies.

Provided a final decision is taken to proceed with the modernisation plans, it is the Secretary of State's intention to transfer London Underground to Transport for London once contracts are in place.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers he has to require London Underground *(a)* in the public sector and *(b)* under the control of the Mayor and Transport for London to keep particular stations open and particular services running. [51262]

Mr. Jamieson: In relation to *(a)* London Underground is currently a nationalised industry, in the public sector. When it transfers to the control of Transport for London it will remain in the public sector. The Secretary of State's current powers in relation to London Underground are largely set out in the London Regional Transport Act 1984. These include a power (section 32) to give directions of a general nature, but not to require particular services to be run.

In relation to *(b)*, the Mayor has a general duty (section 141 of the Greater London Authority Act 2000) to promote and encourage safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport facilities and services to, from and within Greater London, and is required to publish a transport strategy setting out his proposals. The Secretary of State has powers (section 143) to issue directions to revise that transport strategy if it is inconsistent with national transport policy and that inconsistency is detrimental to any area outside Greater London.

Currently the Secretary of State's consent is needed under the Railways Act 1993's Alternative Closure Procedure for the withdrawal of all underground services from a station. After the underground has come under the control of Transport for London the Mayor's consent will replace the Secretary of State's, but, in respect of services outside Greater London, will be subject to appeal to the Secretary of State (section 203–204 of the GLA Act and Schedule 5 of the Railways Act 1993).

Maritime Safety

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessments his Department have made of safety provisions in the merchant shipping industry relating to fire hazards. [51958]

Mr. Jamieson: The identification and assessment of fire hazards is an integral part of the formal safety assessment procedure, which is currently under way for a variety of ship types. The formal safety assessment approach plays increasing importance in the making of rules and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has formulated "Guidelines for Formal safety assessment for use in the IMO Rule Making Process". A risk assessment study related to domestic passenger ships is currently nearing completion.

More generally, revised regulations for fire protection and extinction (SOLAS chapter II-2) will enter into force internationally on 1 July 2002.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the shipping accidents in UK waters in the last 10 years that have resulted in the exposure to the environment of dangerous or hazardous goods. [51247]

Mr. Byers: Complete data are currently available up to the end of 2000. The following table shows reported incidents of pollution of more than two tonnes of material as a result of accidents to commercially operating vessels within the UK's 12 mile territorial limit.

Date	*Accident type*	*Vessel name(s)*	*Vessel category*	*Goods*
14 April 1992	Contact	Sea Service	Offshore supply	Fuel oil
30 August 1992	Grounding	Thalmeyster Mogutov	Fishing vessel	Diesel oil
5 January 1993	Machinery	Braer	Tanker	Crude and fuel and gas oil
2 March 1993	Flooding	Charlynne II	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
28 April 1993	Grounding	Freja Svea	Tanker	Fuel and residual crude oil
30 August 1993	Grounding	Kandalaksha	Merchant vessel	Diesel and gas oil
2 November 1993	Capsize	Gilsea	Fishing vessel	Fuel and hydraulic oil
9 November 1993	Grounding	Lunohods 1	Fishing vessel	Diesel and gas oil
17 November 1993	Grounding	Borodinskoye Polye	Fishing vessel	Oil
1 February 1994	Flooding	Paragon	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
16 February 1994	Grounding	Cam Vedette	Fast rescue craft	Oil
29 July 1994	Flooding	Gladnes	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
8 September 1994	Grounding	Blackheath	Tanker	Oil
30 September 1994	Grounding	Watchful	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
31 October 1994	Grounding	Pionersk	Fishing vessel	Gas and lubricating and fuel oil
24 November 1994	Flooding	Chrisande	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
24 January 1995	Grounding	Mystique	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
24 january 1995	Flooding	Emulous II	Fishing vessel	Oil
28 January 1995	Grounding	Regent Bird	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
8 March 1995	Contact	United Trader	Merchant vessel	Oil
6 April 1995	Grounding	Flying Childers	Merchant vessel	Fuel oil
28 June 1995	Grounding	Adenia 11	Fishing vessel	Gas oil
31 July 1995	Flooding	Elesis	Fishing vessel	Oil
19 October 1995	Grounding	Solan	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
20 October 1995	Grounding	Golf Star	Bulk carrier	Fuel oil
3 November 1995	Flooding	Defiant	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
21 December 1995	Hull failure	Alandria Wave	Tanker	Lubricating and crude oil
1 January 1996	Fire and grounding	Inconnu	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
15 February 1996	Grounding	Sea Empress	Tanker	Crude and fuel oil
7 March 1996	Collision	Geopotes 14/Naomi E	Dredger/tug	Lubricating oil
29 October 1996	Contact	Asian Reefer	Cargo	Fuel oil
11 November 1996	Capsize	Bever	Tug	Fuel oil

Date	Accident type	Vessel name(s)	Vessel category	Goods
3 January 1997	Fires and explosions	Tove Knutsen	Tanker	Oil
26 January 1997	Flooding	Margaret Ann	Fishing vessel	Oil
28 February 1997	Flooding	Cordale	Barge	Gas oil
26 March 1997	Grounding	Cita	Cargo	Fuel oil
30 August 1997	Grounding	Aquarius	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
2 October 1997	Grounding	Damari	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
24 October 1997	Grounding	Madalia	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
26 October 1997	Grounding	Alison Kay	Fishing vessel	Oil
19 November 197	Grounding	Green Lily	Merchant vessel	Fuel and gas oil
29 November 1997	Grounding	Kelly Marina	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
16 February 1998	Flooding	Ternacia	Fishing vessel	Fuel, lubricating and engine oil
13 October 1998	Grounding	Arco Arun	Merchant vessel	Fuel oil
13 October 1998	Capsize	Catrina	Fishing vessel	Fuel oil
23 March 1999	Collision	Samson/Nohic	Barge/fishing vessel	Gas oil
28 May 1999	Contact	Rix Merlin	Tanker	Gas oil
7 November 1999	Contact	Dole America	Cargo	Lubrication and gas oil
1 March 2000	Machinery	Boy Leslie	Fishing vessel	Diesel oil
29 November 2000	Grounding	Dolphin	Other commercial	Diesel oil
13 December 2000	Grounding	Lagik	Cargo	Diesel oil
20 December 2000	Machinery	Randgrid	Tanker	Crude oil

Deep-sea Port Traffic

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of deep-sea port traffic, expressed in containers per annum, had the UK as a final destination in the last 12 months. [51185]

Mr. Byers: The information is not available in the form requested.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Data Protection

Mr. Brady: To ask the President of the Council, pursuant to his oral reply on 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 441, what has been the outcome of his inquiries relating to the effect of the Data Protection Act 1998 on hospital chaplaincies. [51229]

Mr. Robin Cook: Under the Data Protection Act 1998 details of a person's religious beliefs are classed as sensitive personal data. Where a patient is incapable of providing consent, perhaps through serious or terminal illness, it is possible for hospital staff to disclose religious affiliation, as this may in the circumstances be in the best interests of the patient. Where the patient is capable of giving consent, it is open to the hospital authorities to seek their agreement to disclose their religious beliefs to the hospital chaplain. The Department of Health is currently considering the need to issue guidance on this matter.

Pension Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Pension Sharing (Excepted Schemes) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement. [51394]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Pension Sharing (Excepted Schemes) Order 2001 exempts from the pension sharing legislation the holders of the three Great Offices of State. This is in accordance with the provisions of section 27(3) of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999. The order does not impose costs on third parties so no assessment of the cost-effectiveness seems appropriate.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Bustani

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is in relation to the demand of the USA for the removal of Mr. Bustani from his position as Head of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. [52156]

Mr. Bradshaw: The United Kingdom's policy has been determined by the overriding need to ensure the long-term viability and effectiveness of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). It was clear that the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) had lost the confidence of a significant number of the organisation's executive council. For this reason we concluded that the interests of the OPCW and the CWC would be best served if the Director-General were to be replaced by someone who could enjoy the full confidence of all states parties to the convention. The United Kingdom delegation to the Special Conference of States Parties, which convened on 21 April, was guided by this position. The matter came to a vote at the Special Conference on 22 April. The outcome was 48 votes in support of the termination of the Director-General's appointment, with seven votes against and 43 abstentions. The Director-General's appointment was therefore terminated with immediate effect.

Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial meeting in Valencia on 22 and 23 April. [52881]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I represented the UK at the fifth Ministerial Conference of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership process in Valencia. The meeting took place against a backdrop of high tension in the region. In these

circumstances the presence of representatives of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and most neighbouring states was in itself a significant achievement. Ministers discussed the middle east peace process, noting their deep concern at the current situation, the serious threat it posed to regional security and the risk of a grave humanitarian crisis. My right hon. Friend held bilateral discussions with the Foreign Ministers of Israel and Egypt and with Nabil Sha'ath of the Palestinian Authority.

The conference adopted, by consensus, an action plan including a number of initiatives to give renewed impetus to the Euro-Med process. The Government particularly welcome the action plan to promote an effective dialogue on culture and civilisation.

My right hon. Friend and I took the opportunity of the Valencia Ministerial to have bilateral meetings. My right hon. Friend discussed the situation in the Great Lakes region with his French and Belgian counterparts. I discussed the state of play in the Cyprus negotiations with Foreign Minister Cassoulides.

We also had bilateral meetings with our Spanish counterparts in which we took forward our discussions on Gibraltar. I also discussed Gibraltar with my Spanish counterpart in Madrid on 18 April.

Our objectives remain to preserve Gibraltar's way of life, establish greater self-government, deliver lasting practical benefits and a stronger economy, and secure a lasting agreement on sovereignty so that Gibraltarians can enjoy security for their way of life. Negotiations continue. Our aim remains, if possible, to reach agreement by the summer.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* victims and *(b)* relations of victims of asbestos-related diseases have (i) successfully sued their former employers and (ii) were refused compensation in the last 10 years. [34808]

Mr. Wilson: This information is not held by Government Departments.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and if the target was met. [49646]

Ms Hewitt: Details of the performance against key targets by the Department's executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are published in the annual reports and annual accounts of individual NDPBs. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

EU Energy Tax

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had at EU level on the proposed EU energy tax; and if she will make a statement. [50444]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General on 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 94W.

Research Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 86W, on the Research Council, what the Government's policy was on the Commission's proposed action plan for biotechnology and life sciences in Europe. [50994]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's position on the European Commission's Communication "Life Sciences and Biotechnology—A strategy for Europe" (COM(2002)27 final) was explained in Explanatory Memorandum 6415–02, which was placed in the Libraries of the House on 20 March 2002.

Business Volunteer Mentoring Association

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many businesses *(a)* from the Buckingham constituency and *(b)* in total have received mentoring support from the Business Volunteer Mentoring Association in each year since its inception; [51387]

(2) how many volunteers *(a)* in total and *(b)* from the Buckingham constituency have signed up to the Business Volunteer Mentoring Association in each year since its inception; and how much funding her Department has provided to the association. [51386]

Nigel Griffiths: Since its inception in January 2000, the numbers of volunteers signed up to the Business Volunteer Mentoring Association were approximately 750 in 2000 and a further 250 in 2001 with approximately 2,350 and 3,550 clients receiving mentoring support in those years respectively. Approaching £2 million has currently been provided in support of the association. Information on a constituency basis is not available, however in 2000 and 2001, 11 and three volunteers respectively signed up from the Buckinghamshire area. Client information on an area basis can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Government buildings owned by her Department have solar panels installed. [51196]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has investigated installing solar panels on its HQ building at 1 Victoria Street but this did not prove to be cost-effective. Another of its buildings in Wandsworth may be better suited to solar panels and this will be thoroughly examined when the roof to this building is renewed in the next year or two.

The Insolvency Service will be installing 20kWp of PV laminates in the atrium at its HQ building in Bloomsbury, part funded (45 per cent.) by a grant from the Large Scale Building Integrated Photo-Voltaic Field Trial. Installation is expected to be completed before the end of this calendar year. Companies House are also investigating using solar thermal systems to meet their hot water requirements.

The Department also supports renewable electricity through sourcing 33 per cent. of supplies to its London HQ estate from green generation.

Coal Health Compensation Scheme

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many full and final offers were made as part of the Coal Health Compensation Scheme for respiratory disease for each region and nation in the UK for the first three months of 2002. [51539]

Mr. Wilson: The numbers of full and final offers, including denials and negative offers, for respiratory disease broken down by region for the first three months of 2002 are as follows:

Full and final offers	*January*	*February*	*March*
Wales			
South Wales	679	656	996
Other	13	24	27
Total	692	680	1,023
Scotland	164	190	218
England			
Nottinghamshire	206	241	300
Yorkshire	839	1,028	1,087
North East	252	471	476
North West	149	186	204
Midlands	233	285	384
South	68	108	95
Other	7	8	16
Total	2,610	3,197	3,803

Mobile Licences

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for entering into a vendor financing deal with third generation mobile licence holders; and if she will make a statement. [51768]

Mr. Alexander: Vendor financing is a commercial matter for the companies themselves, not Government.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the names of the successful bidders and amounts bid in the auction of third generation mobile licences were; and if she will make a statement. [51766]

Mr. Alexander: The successful bidders in the 3G Auction and the amounts bid in the final round were announced by press notice on 27 April 2000 as:

£

Bidder	*Amount bid*
TIW UMTS (UK) Limited[1]	4,384,700,000
Vodafone Limited	5,964,000,000
BT(3G) Limited	4,030,100,000
One2One Personal Communications Limited	4,003,600,000
Orange 3G Limited	4,095,000,000

[1] Now named Hutchison 3G (UK) Limited

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money was raised by the auction of third generation mobile licences; and if she will make a statement. [51765]

Mr. Alexander: The total raised by the auction of third generation mobile licences amounted to £22,477,400,000.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what form payment for the third generation mobile licences will take; what instalments are still to be paid; what the schedules for those instalments are; and if she will make a statement. [51767]

Mr. Alexander: Payment for each of the licence fees set by the 3G Auction of April 2000 were made in full before the issue of the operational licences.

Alternative Fuels

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions her Department has had in the last 12 months with industry relating to the further development of the supply infrastructure for LPG. [51968]

(2) what recent discussions her Department has had with the transport industry relating to the conversion of vehicles to alternative fuels. [51967]

Mr. Wilson: New sites are opening at a rate of more than one per day, with 1,106 sites as at 26 March 2002. The Boost initiative is specifically aimed at increasing product demand in areas where infrastructure needs to be developed further.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she is having with oil companies over targets set for energy production involving renewable energy; and which oil companies have been involved in the discussions. [51957]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I meet a number of companies with interests in renewable energy, including companies from the oil and gas sector, in the course of our duties.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans her Department has to review the effects of the Renewables Obligation on the renewable energy industry. [51969]

Mr. Wilson: Ofgem have undertaken to monitor the implementation of the Renewables Obligation, and will produce an annual, publicly available, report on compliance. The first such report will cover the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003.

The Department will also be carefully monitoring developments and we plan to conduct a substantive review of progress made in 2006–07. That report will also be publicly available.

Deregulation

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* regulations and *(b)* requirements to make returns have been removed from business since 1997. [51480]

Ms Hewitt: Records relating to repealed regulations and requirements to make returns that have been removed from business are not held centrally.

Our continued aim is to identify and bring forward proposals to reduce the regulatory burden on business. The Regulatory Reform Action Plan sets out our key current initiatives. It represents a good beginning, but the Government will continue working to reduce the overall impact of regulations on business.

Manufacturing Exports

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures have been taken since 1997 to assist manufacturers in exporting. [51481]

Ms Hewitt: Trade Partners UK, a joint DTI and FCO operation, was created in 2000 to strengthen the provision of support to exporters, including manufacturers. It provides a range of information, advice and support to potential and existing exporters.

In November 2001 we launched "Trade Partners UK—Your Passport to Export Success", a new assessment and skills-based package for new and inexperienced exporters to provide them with the training, planning and ongoing support they need to succeed overseas.

Correspondence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason she has not sent a substantive answer to the letter of 18 February from the hon. Member for Yeovil, regarding the activities of the Radiocommunications Agency; and if she will make a statement. [51178]

Mr. Alexander: I sent a substantive reply to the hon. Member on 18 April.

British Coal Workers

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many equal value claims from former female British Coal canteen workers and cleaners have been met; at what total cost; and what the *(a)* highest, *(b)* lowest and *(c)* average individual settlement is. [51805]

Mr. Wilson: To date we have made 1,370 payments the total cost of which is around £11 million. The highest settlement is £40,000 and the minimum settlement is £3,000, with the average settlement being around £10,000.

Complaints

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints were registered against her Department and its predecessor departments in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in those periods. [51225]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Information concerning the number of complaints received by the Department is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Department and its Agencies have published complaints procedures that are available to the public either from headquarters offices or from the respective websites. The Departments' complaints procedure can be found at http://www2.dti.gov.uk/complaints/default.htm

In respect of the number of complaints taken up and upheld by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (Parliamentary Ombudsman) I refer the hon. Member to the information contained in the Parliamentary Ombudsman's annual reports covering the periods specified. Copies of the annual reports specified are available in the Library of the House and for annual reports from 1997–98 on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at: www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/document/part01/index.htm.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will, subject to the agreement of Capita and following the deletion of commercially confidential information, place a copy of the contract for the delivery of individual learning accounts in the Library. [37273]

John Healey *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* I have placed a copy of the contract between the Department and Capita Business Services Ltd. in the Library. Commercially confidential information has been removed from the version available to Members.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills at what target groups the ILA scheme was aimed; and what steps were taken by her Department to ensure the scheme assisted those target groups. [49882]

John Healey *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Anyone aged 19 or over was able to open an individual learning account. Within the universal offer ILAs were targeted toward four key groups—young people aged 19–30 with few or no skills or qualifications, women returning to the labour market, the self-employed and non-teaching school staff. An advertising campaign between October and December 2000 concentrated on two of these groups—young people aged 19–30 with few or no qualifications and women returning to the labour market. The campaign used local and commercial radio and was supported by national and regional newspapers.

In addition, further steps were taken to ensure the programme reached those in the target groups. The Department targeted self-employed/owner mangers through the small firm learning account (SFLA) pilot project. Over 200 small businesses actively participated in the pilot and 1,242 employees opened an ILA. From January 2001, the Department funded five ILA community projects in Liverpool, Sheffield, Kent and London and 3,279 accounts were opened. These projects placed particular emphasis on targeting hard to reach groups and the pilots were successful in engaging black and ethnic minority groups and people with no existing qualifications. The Department also worked with the TUC to engage groups of learners that were traditionally hard to reach through the Union Learning Fund and Learning Representatives. 79 per cent. of TUC ILA users were from priority groups, least likely to participate in learning.

School Broadband Networking

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money has been allocated for the broadband networking of schools; which schools are involved; and what individual allocation has been made for each of those schools. [49850]

Mr. Timms: Funding for broadband connections to schools is administered through the Standards Fund. For 2001–02, this was set at £42 million and for 2002–03 it will be £70 million.

Money from the fund is allocated to LEAs based on a formula. This formula takes account of the number of schools in the LEA and includes a sparsity weighting to recognise increased costs for rural areas. The funding is then pooled for spending by the Regional Broadband Consortia—the bodies tasked with planning and implementing broadband connections across England.

The target for August 2002 is to have 20 per cent. of schools in England connected to broadband, including all secondary schools, at a minimum of 2 megabits per second. Targets for August 2003 are being agreed and we hope to announce these soon. The types of school to be connected include: primary, secondary, nursery, and special schools.

Information and Communication Technologies (Training)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what efforts the Department has made at EU level to raise the level of investment in new information and communication technologies training. [51233]

John Healey: The Department for Education and Skills has overall responsibility, working in conjunction with the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, for the implementation of the SOCRATES, LEONARDO da VINCI and YOUTH programmes, which focus respectively on EU cooperation in the areas of education, vocational training and youth. The UK ensured that, in the negotiation of the current generation of these programmes which began in 2000, increased importance was given to the acquisition of information and communication technology (ICT) skills, which is an important element in each of them.

Prior to the 2001 election, the then Department for Education and Employment was also responsible for the European Social Fund. Activities supported by ESF include training to improve information and communication technology skills.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures the Department has taken since 1997 to increase the availability of training for workers in the use of new information and communication technologies. [51231]

John Healey: The Department has introduced an extensive range of measures that provide opportunities for training in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT).

These include:

The development of the learndirect service—providing over 400,000 learning opportunities in ICT during 2001–02

Over 2,600 UK online centres providing community access to ICT, to help people take the first step to learning about computers and the internet

Individual learning accounts—it is estimated that ILAs provided support for around 1.2 million ICT courses

Key skills training—which ensures that all publicly funded vocational courses, such as modern apprenticeships, include a mandatory ICT element.

These examples are in addition to the large number of ICT courses provided by further education colleges and adult education centres funded through the learning and skills councils, and a wide range of opportunities for job seekers to gain and improve their ICT skills through New Deal.

The Department has also introduced reforms to the national curriculum in England—all pupils, from age 5–16, are taught ICT, either as a separate subject or through other subjects—ensuring that the work force of the future is properly equipped for the demands of the 21st century.

Playing Fields

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what procedures she has in place to monitor the extent to which the proceeds of sale from the disposal of school playing fields are being used for sport and education. [51917]

John Healey *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires local authorities to obtain the consent of the Secretary of State before disposing of school playing fields.

Applications to dispose of school playing fields are assessed against the following criteria:

(a) schools' needs: that playing field provision and curriculum requirements at the school making the disposal, and at other schools in the local area, will be met;

(b) community needs: that community use of a school's playing fields is taken into account, with alternative facilities made available if necessary;

(c) finance: that any sale proceeds are reinvested to provide new or improved sports facilities at schools, or are used to help to raise standards by providing better educational facilities.

Only those applications that meet the criteria, including the finance criterion, are approved. Since July 2001, all applications have been scrutinised by the independent School Playing Fields Advisory Panel to make sure that they comply with the published criteria. The panel comprises representatives from the National Playing Fields Association, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the education organisation Learning through Landscapes, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Local Government Association.

Millennium Volunteers Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which Millennium Volunteers projects are based in *(a)* Buckingham constituency and *(b)* Buckinghamshire; and what is (i) the nature of the

project, (ii) the date of establishment, (iii) the funding received and (iv) the level of participation in each case. [51390]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: *(a)* There are no Millennium Volunteers projects based in the town of Buckingham.

(b) There are two Millennium Volunteers projects based in the county of Buckinghamshire—Aylesbury Youth Action and Milton Keynes borough council.

Aylesbury Youth Action

(i) This project is based within the Queens Park Arts Centre in Aylesbury. The project works with disabled young people, preparing a talking newspaper, and helping the elderly with shopping, gardening, etc.

(ii) The project began on 1 December 1999, and the current contract runs until 30 November 2002.

(iii) As of March 2002, 181 young people have signed up with MV at this project.

Wycombe Youth Action

(i) This project is based in High Wycombe, and is in the process of forming an internet cafe. This will provide a meeting place, attracting young people by offering a secure environment where they can talk to their peers and the MV workers. The project works mainly with the local schools and colleges. The project targets the minority communities among the affluent majority, including young Asian women, young single mothers, and young unemployed men.

(ii) The project began on 1 October 2000, and the current contract runs until 30 September 2003.

(iii) As of March 2002, 264 young people have signed up with MV at this project.

(iv) The total agreed funding for the two projects is £406,750.

City Academy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 136W, on the City Academy, Newcastle, if she will state the dates of the discussions with potential sponsors of City Academy; and if she will list the potential sponsors. [52117]

Mr. Timms: I would refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 10 April. I am not in a position to comment on discussions which may have taken place between local authorities and potential City Academy sponsors, and would reiterate that my Department has received no formal approach regarding a City Academy in the city of Newcastle area.

Vocational Qualifications (Financial Support)

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action her Department is taking to provide financial support to low paid families whose children take vocational qualifications when they leave school. [51302]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are two principal sources of support for young people taking vocational qualifications in schools or colleges, both administered by DfES. Further Education Learner Support Funds help students aged 16–19 who are from low income families or who face a particular financial difficulty. Payments are made to eligible students in school 6th forms and FE colleges for course related costs, including transport, child care, residential and hardship funding. In 2002–03, the Department increased overall discretionary support funding for young people in FE to £54 million, an increase of £10 million since 2000–01. It is not possible to say how much of this funding was received by young people studying for vocational qualifications.

In addition to the Learner Support Fund, the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is also available to young people in full-time further education in 56 pilot areas in England. In 2001–02, around £100 million will have been spent in the 56 pilot areas, with anticipated spend for 2002–03 of £156 million. Again, it is not possible to say how much of this funding was received by young people taking vocational courses.

For young people in work-based training, which does not attract a wage, we provide support through the Minimum Training Allowance (MTA). The MTA is currently worth at least £40 per week, although the local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) who administer MTA are able to pay higher local rates. In addition to weekly payments, local LSCs are also able to assist young people on MTA in difficult financial circumstances by giving additional help towards costs such as transport and the purchase of learning equipment etc.

In all these cases, payment is made directly to the young person, with the exception of some of the EMA pilots where the option of payment to a parent or guardian is being trialed.

Support for families is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Inland Revenue. Child benefit and any child allowances paid with other benefits and tax credits are paid to families with children under 16, or to families with children over 16 but under 19 who are continuing in full-time non-advanced further education. The new child tax credit, to be introduced in April 2003, continues that practice.

Voluntary Sector (Funding)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1185–86W, on Government funding of the voluntary sector, if she will list the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Basic Skills Agency distributes funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51408]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The information requested is as follows. This includes relevant grant schemes and policy and research programmes which involve the distribution of funds to the voluntary sector.

(a) Funding programmes under which payments were made to voluntary organisations by the Department for Education and Skills, financial year 2000–01.

Active Engagement Policy

Anne Frank Education Pack

Baseline Survey of Parents Demand for Childcare—Extra Analysis

British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS): 1999–2002

Career Service Initial Training

Child Safety Week

Community Champions Fund

Community Links

Connexions

Development of Citizenship Education Resources

Disability: attitudes and experiences.

Drug Education Forum—Core and other funding

Early Years and Childcare Small Grants programme

Education and Prevention Team—Core funding

Educational Grants Advisory Service (EGAS)

European Social Fund

Excellence and Access Project (Personal Finance in Schools)

Family Support Policy

Fourth and Fifth Annual Surveys of Parents of Three and Four-year-olds

Grant under Section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968

Improving the take-up of free school meals (FSM)

Improving the Training Market

Independent/State School Partnerships Grant Scheme

Learning Partnerships

Millennium Volunteers

Music for Youth

National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) 2001

National Children's Bureau—Core funding

National Health Education Group—Core funding

National Mentoring Network

National Reading Campaign

National Voluntary Youth Organisations Grant Scheme

Neighbourhood Support Fund

On Track

Outward secondments (financial value of)

Personal Adviser Training

Partners for Study Support

Playing for Success

Quality Standards Project

Repeat of "Parents' Demand for Childcare" survey

School Governor Training and Development

School Sport Coordinators

School Business Links

Special Educational Needs Small Programmes Fund

Sex Education Forum—core and other funding

Social Inclusion Pupil Support Grant (SIPS)

Study of Movement from Playgroups to Reception Classes

Summer Activities For 16-Year-Olds Pilot

Sure Start

Volunteer Reading Help

Youth Cohort Study (YCS)—Interview and postal survey of 17 and 19-year-olds.

(b) Funding programmes under which payments were made to voluntary organisations by the Basic Skills Agency, financial year 2000–01.

Financial literacy and basic skills

Community Based Education for Speakers of Other Languages (CBESOL)

Family Programmes

National Voluntary Organisations Partnership Programme.

Asylum Seekers (Education)

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with Ministers in the Home Office on the proposals to remove refugee children from the application of sections 13 and 14 of the Education Act 1996; and if she will make a statement. [52102]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The proposal to remove children from the application of sections 13 and 14 of the Education Act 1996 applies only to the children of asylum seekers who will be educated in-house in accommodation centres. All other children, including refugees, will continue to be educated in schools maintained by local education authorities. This proposal has been prepared in close consultation with the Home Office.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether accommodation centres which provide education for asylum seekers will have a statutory obligation to have an anti-bullying policy. [51662]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* There will not be a statutory obligation for accommodation centres which provide education for asylum seekers to have an anti-bullying policy. Matters such as anti-bullying and the discipline of the children attending the education provision in the accommodation centres may be provided in the agreement between the Home Secretary and the contractor. However, the education that will be provided for these children will mirror what they would get in schools.

School Discipline

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to increase the powers of teachers to deal with discipline in schools. [50923]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Following a public consultation, in March this year the Secretary of State announced plans to extend the availability of Parenting Orders to cover cases of non-criminal misbehaviour by pupils resulting in exclusions from school. We understand that the Home Office will issue a Criminal Justice White Paper in the late spring 2002 which will refer to the plans to extend Parenting Orders, probably by means of a Criminal Justice Bill in due course. Parenting Orders normally require parents to attend counselling or guidance sessions to help them cope better with their child's challenging behaviour and take more responsibility for that behaviour.

The Department has already made clear that when necessary Headteachers can permanently exclude pupils responsible for serious disruption, violence or a threat of violence. We recently consulted on a revision to part of Circular 10–99 'Social Inclusion: Pupil Support'. This stated that the Secretary of State would not normally

expect to see pupils excluded permanently for persistent defiant behaviour—which includes bullying, violence or sexual misconduct—reinstated at appeal.

Dyslexia

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the future use of dyslexia teachers in schools; and if she will review the funding of dyslexia teaching. [50921]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: It is important that teachers are properly prepared for the range of special educational needs (SEN) they will encounter in schools. As part of their initial training, all student teachers must show that they understand their responsibilities under the SEN Code of Practice, and know how to seek advice. These skills are reinforced and developed during induction, when teachers have to demonstrate that they can plan effectively to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.

Opportunities for continuing professional development for teachers in post are supported under the training component of the SEN category of the Department's Standards Fund, which provides grant aid to local education authorities and schools. £91 million of supported expenditure is available for SEN in 2002–03. Training in dyslexia is specifically mentioned in the guidance for the category and this can range from awareness raising sessions to more in-depth specialist training. Grant support has also been made available to voluntary organisations and higher education training providers to create new training opportunities.

Responsibility for ensuring that appropriate provision exists for children with SEN rests with the school and LEA. More than £23 billion is available annually for the education of pupils, including children with SEN. Over £1 billion of this is used by LEAs to provide additional support for children with SEN, including transport. When allocating budgets to schools in 2001–02, LEAs also identified over £1.9 billion as allocated to SEN. However, it is for individual schools to decide how they spend this funding taking account of their statutory duties towards children with SEN.

Maintained Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many maintained schools have outside toilet facilities. [52086]

John Healey *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The Department does not collect information on the number of toilet facilities in schools.

In 1998–99, the Department had a £35 million programme for the construction of internal toilet facilities so that it would be unnecessary for any children to have to use lavatories accessible only from outside. 450 projects were supported through the programme which should have addressed the issue, although it was down to individual Local Education Authorities to identify needs and apply for a grant. Also, many schools would have retained toilets adjacent to playing fields, and in some cases to serve temporary classrooms.

School Terms

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the powers of contractors are to fix school terms and holidays under the provisions of the Contracting Out (Local Education Authority Functions) (England) Order 2002. [52554]

Mr. Timms: Further to my comments during the Standing Committee's consideration of the draft Contracting Out (Local Education Authority Functions) (England) Order 2002 (official report of the Eighth Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, 5 March 2002, column 23) it would be possible under the Order for a contractor to determine the dates when school terms and holidays are to begin and to end. I should clarify that the contractor could, depending on the terms of the contract with an LEA, determine to move from a three term year to a different arrangement, where such decisions lie with the LEA. In the case of foundation, foundation special and voluntary-aided schools, responsibility lies with the governing body. We believe that LEAs will want to ensure that clear arrangements about such decisions are contained in any relevant contract. We would expect there to be wide consultation and, if any change is to be made, that ample notice would be given so that parents, teachers and others can plan accordingly.

Apprentices

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support has been given since 1997 to assist businesses in taking on apprentices. [51483]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government has contributed substantial financial support for Modern Apprenticeships (MAs), which provide craft, technological and business skills. Between 1997 and 2002 over £3.7 billion has been allocated to Government-supported work-based learning, of which it is estimated that in excess of £1 billion has been used to support MAs since 1997. As a result of this investment, the number of young people on MAs has risen from 75,000 in 1997 to over 220,000 today. We are investing an additional £180 million over three years 2001–04 to support and further develop MAs, a clear sign of the importance we attach to their role in raising skills levels in the workplace, and in offering young people high quality vocational and work-related options for post-16 learning. The Government and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) recently agreed a target of over a quarter of young people between the age of 16 and 21 entering MAs by 2004.

In addition to direct funding of MAs, we assist businesses in other ways. For example, the LSC has a major role in raising skills levels and is active in improving employers' awareness of MAs. National Training Organisations (NTOs) have played an important role in developing apprenticeship frameworks to meet employer needs in their sector and promoting entry by young people; new Sector Skills Councils, supported by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) and the LSC, will provide an even stronger focus for employers to lead the development of apprenticeships linked to skills and productivity priorities and sector needs. Careers services and Connexions Partnerships work with young

people to raise awareness of the apprenticeship route. The DTI small business service is also looking at ways to assist small businesses who want to employ MAs.

Creationism

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 155W, if she will publish the guidelines she issues to support teachers regarding the teaching of creationism within the science curriculum; and if she will make a statement. [51925]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are no published guidelines for the teaching of creationism within the science curriculum.

Accommodation Centres (Teachers)

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of qualified teachers who will be required to teach in accommodation centres *(a)* during the pilots, *(b)* in five years' time and *(c)* in 10 years' time. [52109]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The teacher supply implications of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department's initiative will be negligible at the trial stage. Any longer-term supply needs will depend on the results of the trial and will be considered at the appropriate time.

Special Educational Needs (St. Helens)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment her Department has made of the reasons underlying the percentage of pupils in St. Helens with statements of special educational needs. [50009]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The decision about how to provide for a child who has special educational needs (SEN) must be taken locally in the light of all the circumstances. Under the Education Act 1996, each local education authority (LEA) is under a duty to identify and make suitable provision for children's SEN and where necessary to make a statement. A statutory assessment can also be requested by parents who have the right to be involved with all the relevant professionals in decisions about meeting their child's needs.

In 2000 (latest figures available) the overall level of children with statements in St. Helens LEA was 4.6 per cent. compared to the national rate of 3 per cent. The authority has set targets to reduce the number of statements it maintains and figures for January 2002 will be available later this year.

Teacher Numbers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people applied for post graduate certificates in education courses in *(a)* mathematics, *(b)* English, *(c)* science subjects and *(d)* language subjects in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2002 in (1) St. Helens, (2) Liverpool, (3) Merseyside, (4) Manchester, (5) the North-West, (6) the South-East and (7) England. [50008]

Mr. Timms: Application figures for regions, either for domicile information of applicants or for numbers of applications made to resident institutions, are not collected centrally.

Final application figures to PGCE courses for entry years 1999–2000 to 2001–02 are shown in the table. The figures are for England and Wales.

End of year application figures to PGCE courses in England and Wales

	Entry Year		
Subject	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Mathematics	1,690	1,776	2,031
English (excluding drama)	2,610	2,752	3,398
Science	3,450	3,728	4,093
Modern Languages	2,307	2,763	2,761

Notes:
1. The figures are for applications as recorded on the GTTR applications database.
2. Modern languages include Welsh.

Source:
Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR)

Final figures for England only are available only for 2001–02 entry: 1,917 for mathematics, 3,208 for English (excluding drama), 3,822 for science and 2,562 for modern languages.

Source:
Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR)

Applications for entry for 2002–03 are still being accepted. As of 22 March 2002, the number of applications made in England was: 842 for mathematics, 2,327 for English (excluding drama), 1,781 for science and 1,224 for modern languages.

Source:
Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR)

Engineering

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of female engineering graduates with *(a)* first degrees and *(b)* higher degrees gained employment directly related to their field of study upon graduation in (i) 2001, (ii) 1996, (iii) 1991 and (iv) 1986. [43584]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* The latest available information is shown in the table. Figures for graduates in 2001 will be available in June 2002.

First destinations of female graduates[1] from engineering and technology courses

Year of graduation and level of course	*Total graduates with known destination*	*Of which, percentage employed in engineering[2] occupations*
1986		
Universities[3]:		
Higher degrees	169	12
First degrees	593	39
Polytechnics[3]:		
First degrees	264	30
1991		
Universities[3]:		
Higher degrees	229	16
First degrees	929	27
Polytechnics[3]:		
First degrees	300	23

First destinations of female graduates[1] from engineering and technology courses

Year of graduation and level of course	*Total graduates with known destination*	*Of which, percentage employed in engineering[2] occupations*
1996		
All HE institutions[3]:		
Higher degrees	568	28
First degrees	2,466	24
2000		
All HE institutions[3]:		
Higher degrees	514	31
First degrees	2,007	21

[1] Home and overseas students. Full-time and sandwich courses only.
[2] Based on the employment position of the graduate six months after graduation. In 1994–95 the occupational classifications were revised, so in 1986 and 1991 the figures cover those employed in engineering and allied industries, building, civil engineering and architecture, and in 1996 and 2000 they cover those employed in occupations classed as engineering and technology.
[3] Prior to 1994–95, separate surveys were conducted and published by the USR (covering higher degree and first degree graduates from institutions in the UK funded by the Universities Funding Council), and the DfES (covering first degree graduates from the former polytechnics in England and Wales); as from 1994–95, HESA collected and published data for all graduates in all HE institutions in the UK.

Source:

First Destination surveys conducted by the Universities Statistical Record (USR), the DfES, and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Dates (Guidance)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has given local education authorities about the use of the terms CE and BCE instead of AD and BC; and if she will make a statement. [51593]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The national curriculum for history clearly states that "pupils should be taught to use dates and vocabulary relating to the passing of time, including ancient, modern, BC, AD, century and decade", and I would expect all local education authorities to be familiar with this statutory requirement. The terms CE (Common Era) and BCE (Before Common Era) are not used in the national curriculum, but schools are free to use them in addition to, but not as a replacement for, the traditional Christian dating system of BC and AD. There are no plans to change the existing statutory requirements.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the increased costs for *(a)* schools and *(b)* local education authorities as a consequence of increased employers' national insurance contributions proposed in the 2002 Budget. [51946]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The estimated costs of the proposed increase in national insurance contributions will be in the region of £180 million in 2003–04 for staff employed by English local education authorities of which about £150 million will be attributable to teachers and other staff employed at schools. This cost will be considered alongside other priorities and pressures in the 2002 Spending Review.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the 2002 Departmental Report will be published. [49593]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The 2002 Departmental Report will be published this spring.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in her Department. [41003]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department is committed to review its pay system by April 2003 and will prepare an action plan to close any equal pay gaps. This is in line with the Government's commitment for all Departments and agencies.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in her Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40432]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code, Paragraph 8.2.1 requires Departments and agencies to ensure that staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances, taking into account any management benefit or the needs of staff with disabilities.

Departmental guidance reinforces the need for staff to use the most efficient and economic means of travel commensurate with meeting their operational needs. Staff are encouraged to use public transport rather than cars in accordance with the Government's policy on "Green Transport".

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and if the target was met. [49645]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Chapter 2 of Treasury's Guidance "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: Annual Reports and Accounts Guidance" requires executive NDPBs to provide, as part of their annual reports, information about the performance and efficiency targets agreed with their sponsor Departments and performance against those targets. The information is to be given for the current year and the four previous years. All of the Department for Education and Skills executive NDPBs, which are: Adult Learning Inspectorate; British Educational Communications and Technology Agency; Construction Industry Training Board; Engineering Construction Industry Training Board; Higher Education Funding Council for England; Investors in People UK; Learning

and Skills Council; National College for School Leadership; Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; Student Loans Company; and Teacher Training Agency, annual reports are available in the House Library. As the Construction Industry Training Board and Engineering Construction Industry Training Board are self funding we do not set them efficiency targets, however, the boards set themselves efficiency targets, the details and progress towards which are available in their annual reports. Our tribunal NDPBs are also self funding, so we set neither Special Educational Needs Tribunal nor Registered Inspectors Appeals Tribunal efficiency targets. The SENT annual reports are available in the House Library and RIAT has no permanent staff and has only met once since it was registered in 1992 so setting efficiency targets and producing annual reports seems inappropriate.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42566]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills has taken steps to integrate age into all their equal opportunities policies and is committed to eliminating unfair discrimination on the basis of age. Action on diversity has and will continue to tackle any negative attitudes towards older staff particularly through the training and development of managers and through the monitoring of recruitment, selection and appraisal statistics.

We have now implemented recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit Report "Winning the Generation Game". As part of the Department's flexible age retirement arrangements we allow all staff, outside the senior civil service, the option to choose when they retire from 60–65 subject to normal fitness and efficiency rules. In addition, all our vacancy opportunities, internal and external secondments and rewards are open to people of all ages and we actively monitor them to ensure there is no adverse impact.

WALES

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many quangos have been established in Wales in each year since 1997; and what the cost of each of them was in 2001–02. [48622]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since 1 July 1999, I have established no non-departmental public bodies. Prior to that date, my predecessor established the Welsh Committee for Professional Development of Pharmacy. He also wound up a number of quangos.

Sponsorship of the Welsh Committee for Professional Development of Pharmacy has subsequently transferred to the National Assembly for Wales. Its costs in 2001–02 are therefore a matter for the Assembly.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Correspondence

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Conwy of 14 February (ref 37628). [51396]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I apologise to the hon. Member for not replying to her question of the 14 February; I regret that this was due to an administrative oversight. However, I do refer her to the answers I have given on several occasions, and most recently to the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) on 12 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 647W. QinetiQ Ltd. is continuing to work on the technical enhancements for the 1901 Census online. These enhancements are intended to make the site sufficiently robust to permit general internet access, and are being done with a sense of urgency. The most important consideration is to ensure that the service is re-launched successfully. In the first instance, the service will be reintroduced at the designated service centres throughout the country as part of a rigorous testing process. It will then be re-launched on the internet as soon as practicable thereafter, subject to satisfactory completion of this process.

Theft

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new measures her Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47243]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to him on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 907W. As detailed in that response the Lord Chancellor's Department has a wide range of security measures in place to protect its property from theft or damage.

However during this period the Department has continued to take forward its programme of work to achieve compliance with BS7799, the British Standard for Information Security Management. This programme of work will provide quality assurance of the Department's existing security practices and introduce improvements where these are found to be necessary. Current initiatives include extensive use of risk assessment, a programme of security education and awareness for staff and reviews of physical security arrangements.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Crime (Belfast)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many mobile phone related crimes were reported in Belfast from March 2001 to March 2002. [49901]

Jane Kennedy: Unfortunately data for mobile phone related crimes are not available at the moment. PSNI collection of crime data is undergoing development work which will allow such offences to be identified in future.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents of *(a)* theft, *(b)* robbery and *(c)* shoplifting in Belfast city centre were reported over the period March 2001 to March 2002. [49899]

Jane Kennedy: Unfortunately statistics for the period January to March 2002 are not yet available. The figures for the incidents of *(a)* theft, *(b)* robbery and *(c)* shoplifting reported in Belfast city centre for the period April 2001 to December 2001 are as follows:

April 2001 to December 2001

Offence type	*Number of incidents reported*
Theft	2,676
Robbery	158
Shoplifting	834

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recent action in Belfast to implement strategies in place in UK city centres on combating crime, with special reference to theft in Belfast city centre. [49898]

Jane Kennedy: The police service of Northern Ireland have a number of on-going and new crime prevention initiatives specifically aimed at reducing thefts in Belfast city centre which reflect best practice procedures in comparable UK cities. Most of these initiatives involve close partnerships with Belfast city centre management along with other agencies. They include:

Radio link

100 retailers in the city centre area have direct radio links to the police and there are plans to introduce similar systems in other parts of the city. This scheme is supplemented by retail theft training which provides staff with a training package on, among other things, theft reduction strategies and powers of arrest.

Mobile phone theft

There is an on-going initiative to educate the public to mark their mobile phones with postcode and house number.

Thumbs-up

This is a new initiative to be launched in May with the aim of reducing credit card/cheque fraud.

Local police continue to provide crime prevention surveys and advice. A recent prevention campaign targeted computer theft through leaflet distribution and press releases. Vehicle theft is being addressed through targeted campaigns such as the 'Look, Lock and Leave' initiative where advice signs will be erected in every car park in the city centre.

Mobile Phone Offences

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of those arrested for offences related to mobile phones from March 2001 to March 2002 were aged *(a)* under 18, *(b)* between 18 to 25 and *(c)* over 25 years. [49900]

Jane Kennedy: Unfortunately arrest figures for offences related to mobile phones are not available at the moment. PSNI collection of crime data is undergoing development work which will allow such offences to be identified in future.

Northern Ireland Prison Service

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what support he has given to the establishment of a Prison Service Trust to assist the families of those who have served with the Northern Ireland Prison Service. [45968]

Jane Kennedy: I recognise the contribution that those in the Northern Ireland Prison Service have made during difficult times and I welcome the establishment of a Prison Service Trust.

I believe that the groups which have the greatest needs are dependent family members of murdered officers and officers who have died in service and officers who have retired due to ill health.

I have agreed to provide funding of £600,000 over a three-year period to assist in the work of the trust. Additionally I am providing the trust with accommodation, services and office equipment.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

European City of Culture

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will announce the composition of the panel to choose the European City of Culture 2008. [51252]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* It is expected that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce the panel chair shortly, followed by the panel members in May.

Community Fund

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much and what proportion of available moneys the Community Fund has allocated to black and ethnic minority organisations; what evidence he has collated on measures that the Community Fund has taken to promote *(a)* sustainability and *(b)* capacity building in the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector. [51783]

Mr. Caborn: Since its establishment in 1995, 11 per cent. of the Community Fund's grants have gone to the black and minority ethnic (BME) voluntary sector. During the financial year 2000–01, Community Fund made 1,183 grants to projects benefiting BME groups. This represents 12.1 per cent. of their total allocation. Of these, 47 grants, worth £8.6 million were made to projects designed to help capacity building in the BME voluntary sector.

The Community Fund's Strategic Plan for 2002–07 highlights the BME community as one of their priority beneficiary groups and includes revised funding policies which will encourage greater sustainability.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Report

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she plans to publish her Department's 2002 departmental report. [52868]

Clare Short: DFID's departmental report for 2002 is being published today. It provides an overview of my Department's achievements during the past year. It shows how we are placing poverty reduction strategies at the heart of the development process and supporting developing countries in their efforts to address poverty. It also describes how we have responded to challenges such as events in Afghanistan.

During the past year important steps have been made to improve the effectiveness of the international system. Developing countries seized the opportunities presented at Doha to secure favourable commitments on issues such as agriculture and building developing countries' capacity to negotiate on trade issues. The recent UN conference on Financing for Development led to commitments by the European Union and the United States which will increase development assistance by $12 billion a year by 2006.

The report also shows the progress made against the targets in our 1998 and 2000 public service agreements which cover 1999–2000 to 2001–02 and 2001–02 to 2003–04 respectively, and our plans for allocating resources during 2002–03 to 2003–04.

Iraq

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the recent research which has been commissioned by her Department in connection with aid projects for Iraq. [51639]

Clare Short: It is a regular part of my Department's work to evaluate the impact of country programmes on an on-going basis. This includes the bilateral humanitarian programme for Iraq.

Malawi

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid is being given to Malawi; and if she will make a statement. [51643]

Clare Short: My Department has allocated £70 million in the 2002–03 financial year, making DFID the largest donor in Malawi. Assistance is concentrated on rural livelihoods, health, education and governance. There has been a substantial shortfall in the country's 2002 maize harvest due to unusually heavy rains and flooding last year. Since January, DFID has provided £4.6 million in food relief for distribution through local non-governmental organisations. We are helping Government with preparation of a medium term food security strategy and stand ready to provide more direct food aid when April/May harvest figures are clarified.

Afghanistan

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress in ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches hospitals in Afghanistan. [51723]

Clare Short: Despite three years of drought and 23 years of conflict, basic health facilities, including hospitals and clinics, continue to operate in Afghanistan with the support of the humanitarian community. The improving security in recent months has facilitated the delivery of increasing quantities of medical relief items into Afghanistan and their distribution to areas of the greatest need. This has included the recent vaccination of around 6 million Afghan children against polio, and the rehabilitation of health facilities through quick impact projects funded by my Department.

While immediate humanitarian needs remain a priority, the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) has laid the foundations for a stronger health care system through the drafting of a National Development Framework, including a policy for reconstruction of the health sector, in partnership with the United Nations and assistance community. This focuses on equitable access to health care and will involve the construction of around 1,000 new health facilities around the country in coming months and years.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the total external spending by her Department was on public-private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [43202]

The Solicitor-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 347W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many private finance initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50559]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* None.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what creche facilities are provided by her Department; and at what cost. [44852]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* None of the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible provides creche facilities.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General (1) what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase the proportion of undisputed invoices paid in accordance with terms of 30 days from 96 per cent. to 100 per cent. by March will be met; [47816]

(2) what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase the proportion of undisputed supplier invoices paid in accordance with terms of 30 days to 100 per cent. by 2001–02 will be met. [47890]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answers 10 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Law Officers' 2002 departmental report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General (1) what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to reduce accommodation costs per head in real terms by 10 per cent. by March will be met; [47885]

(2) what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase by March from 88 per cent. to 97 per cent. the proportion of complaints replied to within 10 working days of receipt will be met; [47814]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Law Officers' 2002 departmental report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General, what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase the Serious Fraud Office caseload to 77 cases by March will be met. [47886]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Law Officers' 2002 departmental report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to reduce the average time from accepting a case and completing investigations to 17.5 months and to reduce the average length of the prosecution stage between transfer/committal and verdict to 16 months by 31 March will be met. [47887]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to improve sickness absence by 30 per cent. by 2003 will be met. [47884]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Law Officers' 2002 departmental report.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49156]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The Attorney-General and I answer parliamentary questions on behalf of all Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible. Large numbers of staff from each of those Departments may, over any period of time, be involved in providing the information on which an answer is based. The information requested would require an examination of all questions answered in the last three years and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47720]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear their commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the cost was to her Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated. [49114]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General which Bills introduced by her Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans she has for the future use of such clauses. [49630]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* In the last five years this Department has introduced two Bills—which became the Law Officers Act 1997 and the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000. Neither contained sunset clauses. I have no plans for the future use of sunset clauses.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in her Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47812]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Information on the Department's forecast Departmental Expenditure Limit outturn for 2001–02 are published in the tables produced in the Budget and spring documents.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are part-time employees. [47168]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 50W.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible in each of the last five years. [50556]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General is not responsible for any non-departmental bodies.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what her policy is on overtime payments for staff in her Department. [49123]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, the general policy is to avoid the need to ask staff to work overtime. Where overtime is necessary, staff below the senior civil service, in overtime grades, are entitled to receive payment, or time off in lieu, or both, for work carried out in addition to weekly conditioned hours.

Staff in the senior civil service are not entitled to receive payment for overtime.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General which of the services of her Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50318]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The CPSS has given a commitment in its current strategic plan to review 60 per cent. of its services by 2004. This target is still on course to be achieved. The CPS has recently undergone a period of significant organizational change and, in the light of this change, is currently evaluating its future approach to the Better Quality Services Initiative.

The legal services provided by the Treasury Solicitor's Department Agency have not been subject to review under the Better Quality Services Initiative. They were, however, subject to an executive agency Quinquennial Review during 2001 which looked at how those services could be better delivered. The main recommendations of the Review were accepted by the Attorney General and are now being implemented.

The Serious Fraud Office does not provide services to the public within the terms of the Better Quality Services Initiative. However, it does actively manage its business processes and continually seeks to deliver efficiency gains across all its outputs. As an example, last year the office undertook a fundamental review of pay and reward structures and introduced pay progression and fluid grading.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [52556]

Mr. Blunkett: Eleven people have so far been detained using powers in Part IV of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. Eight were detained in December 2001, one in February 2002, and two yesterday.

Of the total detained, two have voluntarily left the United Kingdom; the other nine remain in detention.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders have been released from prison with electronic tags in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Lancashire; and how many of these went on to commit further crime while wearing the electronic tag in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001. [45791]

Beverley Hughes: Since the home detention curfew scheme started on 28 January 1999, the number of offenders successfully placed onto the scheme to an address in *(a)* Wales is 1,549 in 2000 and 1,528 in 2001 and in *(b)* Lancashire is 521 in 2000 and 447 in 2001.

The data on offenders who have been reported as either cautioned, convicted or are awaiting prosecution for an offence while they were subject to the scheme is collated centrally and to break this information down into regions or counties would incur disproportionate cost.

Victim Support

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the victim support scheme in Weston-Super-Mare. [47760]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Home Office does not directly inspect individual victim support schemes. Under the terms of the annual Home Office grant to victim support, each local scheme is normally reviewed by Victim Support's National Office on a three-year cycle. The last such review of the Weston-Super-Mare scheme was undertaken in January 2000.

Indecent Publications

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure children do not have access to indecent publications. [49690]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government are particularly concerned that the young and more vulnerable members of society should be protected from potentially harmful material.

The general law underpins this approach. The Obscene Publications Act 1959 is the principal control on broadcast and published works, including material published via the internet, and makes it a criminal offence to publish any article which, in the view of the court, tends to "deprave and corrupt" those who are likely to read, see or hear it. In addition, under the Indecent Displays (Controls) Act 1981 it is an offence to display any indecent material in a public place or where it can be seen from a public place. In addition, where a publication does not fall under these controls, most newsagents abide by a voluntary code of practice, placing pornographic magazines on the top shelves and refusing to sell them to young people under 18.

The internet, while offering many positive opportunities to children, presents a particular challenge in this area and the Government established a Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet in March 2001 with representatives from the internet industry, child welfare

organisations, the police, the Government, the main opposition parties and others. The objectives of the task force include:

> scoping new legislative measures specifically to tackle "grooming" of children by paedophiles online (and offline);
>
> developing effective safeguards for children using the Internet and improved mechanisms for reporting online crimes and concerns about activity online; and
>
> raising awareness of adults and children of how to surf the net and use chat rooms safely.

The Government also support the development of robust and effective rating and filtering tools which can help parents to control their children's access to material on the net. We recently welcomed the launch of the Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA)'s free filtering software as a significant step forward in this area.

Sex Offenders

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons in the UK that accept and detain sex offenders. [49831]

Beverley Hughes: In general, all prisons in England and Wales accept and detain such offenders. The following prisons do not routinely accept such offenders: Blantyre House, Gartree, Kirkham, Latchmere House and Long Lartin.

Sex offenders will be accepted at Leyhill and North Sea Camp at the Governor's specific discretion.

Transsexual Women (Rape)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the number of transsexual women who have been raped vaginally in each of the last five years; and in what way charges against the perpetrator may differ from the same crime committed against other women. [49777]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There are no statistics available relating to the number of victims of vaginal rape who were transsexuals.

Under existing sex offences legislation, rape is an offence perpetrated by a man against a man or a woman. It consists of non-consensual penetration of the vagina or anus. There has been at least one case where a court has held that penile penetration of a surgically reconstructed vagina does constitute rape, but the current law on rape is not clear on this point. Alternative charge could be indecent assault. The Government are currently considering a proposal made within the context of the Sex Offences Review, that the offence of rape should include surgically reconstructed male or female genitalia. This would make clear in statute what is currently a matter for judicial interpretation.

Prisons

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent assessment has been made of the treatment of elderly long-term prisoners suffering long-term illness; what assessment has been made of the risk of suicide among these prisoners; and if he will make a statement; [48673]

(2) how many prisoners serving sentences of over 15 years and who are over 60 years of age suffer senile dementia; what proportion are men; and if he will make a statement. [48674]

Beverley Hughes: Information is not available in the form requested. A study of 203 male prisoners aged 60 and over in 15 prisons in England and Wales (about one-fifth of that total population) conducted in 1999–2000, reported that one per cent. had a clinical diagnosis of dementia. All prisons and their local national health service (NHS) partners were asked jointly to complete prison health needs assessments by March 2001, with the implementation of improvements to health care provision, based on individual prison health plans, following from April 2002.

Copies of the Department of Health's "National Service Framework for Older People" were issued to all Prison Service establishments in England in April 2001. The NSF proposes a move towards a single assessment process for older people's often wide range of health and social care needs. The accompanying Prison Service instruction advised governors that assessment of older prisoners should be comprehensive to ensure that they receive properly integrated, needs-based services both in prison and on release into the wider community. It required governors to develop their working relationships with local health services, social services and housing agencies in order to ensure that prisoners with continuing health and social needs get full access to all the services they need.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in adult prisons in each of the last five years were previously *(a)* children in care, *(b)* children in foster care and *(c)* adopted children. [51080]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* No data are held centrally on the upbringing of persons in prisons in England and Wales. However, according to the Criminality Survey 2000, 31 per cent. of the sentenced male prison population (excluding sex offenders) had been taken into local authority care as a child.

In 1997, a survey was carried out by the Office for National Statistics, called "Psychiatric Morbidity Among Prisoners in England and Wales". A sample of around 1,200 male remand, 1,200 male sentenced, and 800 female prisoners were interviewed. 33 per cent. of the males on remand and 26 per cent. of the males under sentence had been taken into local authority care as a child. 29 per cent. of the females on remand and 25 per cent. of the females under sentence had also been taken into local authority care as a child.

According to the National Prison Survey 1991, when interviews were conducted with around 4,000 sentenced and remand prisoners (juveniles and immigration detainees were excluded):

> "more than a quarter of prisoners (26 per cent) said they had at some point before the age of 16 been taken into Local Authority care. As many as 38 per cent. of prisoners under 21 reported that they had had such an experience".

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reviews of prison inmates' privileges and facilities have taken place in the last 12 months. [51145]

Beverley Hughes: All prisons operate a local scheme of incentives and earned privileges based upon a national framework. National policy requires that all establishments review and evaluate their own schemes annually. A central review of the national framework for the incentives and earned privileges is due to begin later this year.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision is made to house young people leaving prison who are not able to return to the family home; and if he will make a statement. [49982]

Beverley Hughes: The Government are committed to ensuring the effective resettlement of prisoners so as to reduce re-offending and protect the public. We know that prisoners are less likely to re-offend if they have stable accommodation to go to on release.

Juveniles sentenced to a detention and training order are supervised on release by multi-agency youth offending teams, which can include housing specialists as well as social workers, probation officers and others. The teams work with local authority social services departments, which have accommodation responsibilities for juveniles under the Children Act 1989, and voluntary organisations to help secure accommodation for those unable to return to the family home.

18 to 20-year-olds sentenced to custody are supervised on release by the National Probation Service. The service liaises with local authorities, housing associations, landlords and voluntary organisations to try to ensure the housing needs of released prisoners are met. Approved hostels can provide accommodation for those at higher risk of re-offending.

The Homelessness Act 2002 contains provision to prevent the blanket exclusion by local authorities of released prisoners from social housing. A draft order has been published under the Housing Act 1996 which would extend homelessness priority needs groups to include those vulnerable as a result of a period within an institution, including prison. Further impetus to improve housing arrangements for young people leaving custody is likely to be given by the Social Exclusion Unit's current study on reducing re-offending by released prisoners, which will report later this year.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what offending behaviour programmes are available in each of the prisons holding juveniles; and what the programmes involve. [49975]

Beverley Hughes: Individually tailored programmes are run in all juvenile establishments according to the requirements of the young people held there. This means that a range of programmes are used by establishments to ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to address their offending behaviour. Programmes will be drawn from those accredited by the Joint Accreditation Panel, those being developed with a view to accreditation, those being developed in conjunction with the Youth Justice Board and those which are developed locally by the establishment to address specific needs.

The Motivate Offenders to Rethink Everything (MORE) programme is an accredited programme that has been piloted with juveniles at Castington, Lancaster Farms and Wetherby young offender institutions. Staff in the majority of the other establishments that hold juveniles have been trained in the delivery of this programme and it is in the process of being rolled out to the rest of the juvenile estate. MORE is a motivational enhancement programme, which encourages young people to rethink the motivations behind their thoughts and actions.

Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) is a 21 session cognitive-skills programme. This is an accredited programme which was developed on the basis that offenders may have poor thinking skills, which can adversely affect their ability to solve inter-personal problems and lead to an increased likelihood of offending. The programme aims to develop an individuals thinking skills. This programme is currently being delivered to juveniles in Brinsford, Lancaster Farms, Onley, Stoke Heath, Thorn Cross and Werrington young offender institutions.

The Reasoning and Reacting programme (R and Ra) is a cognitive-skills programme specifically designed to meet the needs of juvenile offenders by encouraging them to consider the consequences of their behaviour and to think about the impact such behaviour may have on other people. This programme has recently been piloted at Huntercombe young offender institution although it is not being offered there at present.

The Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R and R) programme is a 38 session cognitive skills programme. This is an accredited programme which is similar to ETS and the R and Ra. It is currently being delivered with juveniles at Wetherby young offender institution.

The programme Stop-Think-Act-Reflect (STAR) is currently being piloted at Feltham young offender institution and is being funded by the Youth Justice Board. This is a cognitive behaviour programme designed to address specific criminogenic factors which modelling has shown to produce delinquent outcomes..

Each establishment that holds juveniles also has a range of locally developed programmes that complement the programmes listed above and ensure that all areas of offending behaviour can be addressed. There are an extremely large number of these programmes, specifically designed by each establishment to address identified needs of the young people in their care. These include specific programmes to address alcohol education, anger control, drug use and illegal driving. The available programmes at any particular establishment are dependent on current need, which may change.

Some of the establishments which hold juveniles also, on a different part of the site, hold young offenders. Because of this there are some offending behaviour programmes available in these establishments that are not delivered to juveniles.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prisoners in UK prisons under 35 years old have also served time in young offenders prison. [49970]

Beverley Hughes: No information is collected centrally on where people served previous sentences. Information relating to prisoners in Scotland and Northern

Ireland is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people sent to prison in 2001 aged under 18 were held more than *(a)* 50 miles from home and *(b)* 100 miles from home. [49983]

Beverley Hughes: In 2001 8,900 under 18-year-olds were received into prison and young offender institutions. Of these: 3,500 were held over 50 miles, but less than 100 miles from their home area; and 700 were held over 100 miles from their home area.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons do not allow lay prison visitors access; and if he will make a statement. [49978]

Beverley Hughes: Admission to a Prison Service establishment is at the discretion of the governor of the prison concerned. Prison Service policy guidelines stipulate that, where appropriate, governors should operate an official prison visiting scheme, but information regarding which establishments operate such a scheme is not held centrally.

Probation Officers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation officers there have been in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the north-west, in each year since 1997. [50636]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is given in the table.

Probation officers in post by area[1]

December

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Cheshire	96	106	114	104	122
Cumbria	65	62	69	71	68
Greater Manchester	488	472	487	492	469
Lancashire	219	215	244	252	271
Merseyside	276	278	286	291	285
North-west region	1,144	1,133	1,200	1,210	1,215

[1] Whole-time equivalent. Includes senior probation officers, senior practitioners, temporary and trainee officers.

Vehicle Clamping

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what controls exist to regulate the maximum amount that can be charged by private individuals and companies in respect of fines applied *(a)* for vehicles clamped on private property and *(b)* for the daily holding of those vehicles. [50002]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 19 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 1254W.

Northallerton Remand Centre

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when an announcement will be made on the long-term future of Northallerton Remand Centre. [50690]

Beverley Hughes: Subject to population pressures and any unforeseen changes in the composition of the general prison population, the long-term objective for Northallerton Remand Centre and Young Offender Institution is for it to hold short-term sentenced adult prisoners.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for reviewing the compatibility of the Official Secrets Acts with the Human Rights Act 1998; and if he will make a statement. [50918]

Mr. Blunkett: Reviewing legislation in the light of Human Rights Act is a continuous process. In its judgment of 21 March 2002 in the case of R v Shayler, the House of Lords held that sections 1(1) and 4(1) and (3) of the Official Secret Act 1989 are compatible with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Halliday Report

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's response to the Halliday report on sentencing. [49939]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Responses to the public consultation exercise on John Halliday's report, "Making Punishments Work", were published on 4 February 2002. The Government are currently considering the recommendations in the light of those responses; its position on the report will be included in a White Paper which will be published this year.

Detention and Training Orders

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detention and training orders were imposed in each month in 2001, broken down by age and length of order. [49969]

Beverley Hughes: Detailed statistics on court proceedings and sentencing for 2001 is not yet available. The annual command paper, "Criminal statistics, England and Wales 2001", will be published by December 2002.

Wildlife Crime

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to issue guidance to magistrates dealing with wildlife crime; and if he will make a statement. [51268]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government are currently looking at the scope for a new set of sentencing guidelines under the auspices of a statutory body. The aim would be to build up a set of guidelines that would eventually embrace all types of offending, including wildlife offences, which would be easily accessible and command the respect of the judiciary, practitioners and the wider public. They will also help the courts in achieving greater consistency in sentencing thereby increasing public confidence in the criminal justice system.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to increase the maximum sentence for illegal dealing in wildlife; and if he will make a statement. [51381]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There are currently no plans to increase the maximum sentence for illegal dealing in wildlife. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) are, however, about to begin reviewing the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 (COTES). This will consider whether the maximum penalties for wildlife trade offences remain appropriate.

Endangered Species

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what penalties exist for *(a)* buying and *(b)* selling (i) ivory and (ii) tiger products. [51242]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The buying and selling of ivory and tiger products is an offence under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 (COTES). The maximum penalty on summary conviction is a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale (£5,000) and/or three months imprisonment. The maximum penalty on conviction on indictment is a fine and/or two years imprisonment.

Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information has been supplied by British security services to *(a)* the Indonesian Government, *(b)* the Australian Government, *(c)* the New Zealand Government and *(d)* the Portuguese Government concerning the deaths of Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters. [51246]

Mr. Blunkett: It has been the long-standing policy of successive Governments not to comment on operational activity of the Security Service and this principle applies in this instance.

Coroners (North-East)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time has been between deaths and inquests in Cleveland in the last 12 months; what assessment he has made of the reasons for unusual delays; and what the average time was in the other coroners' areas in the north-east. [51211]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* I understand from figures supplied by the Teesside coroner that the average time between a reported death and an inquest in his district in 2001 was about 34 weeks. Calculated on the same basis, the national average is about 18 and a half weeks, with a similar average time interval in the north-east.

Many variable factors affect the timing of an inquest. The Teesside coroner attributes delays in his area to a lack of coroners' officers. Additional officers have recently been supplied by the Cleveland police.

Court Duty

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of occasions police were dismissed from court duty on the day of a hearing in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what proposals he has to reduce this. [43693]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Figures are not available. However, central guidance was issued to all criminal justice areas in 2001 asking that courts list cases with due consideration to police officers' availability. The police and Crown Prosecution Service are also working with others in the criminal justice system to ensure that cases are prepared, and witnesses appropriately called, to enable cases to proceed as smoothly as possible when they reach court.

Parole

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) to what extent a prisoner's insistence of innocence is taken into account when deciding whether to grant parole; [48651]

(2) on how many occasions he has rejected the advice given by the Parole Board to grant parole to a prisoner who has maintained his innocence since 1995. [48652]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* Denial of guilt is not of itself a bar to the release of prisoners from custody. The assessment of the prisoner's current level of risk is the pre-eminent factor in determining whether he/she may be granted parole. Although denial makes it harder to conduct a risk assessment, it should still be possible to make one, taking into account, among other things, the prisoner's attitudes and behaviour during sentence. The Prison Service has to assume that the prisoner was rightly convicted. Prisoners who maintain their innocence are advised to contact the independent Criminal Cases Review Commission who are responsible for investigating alleged miscarriages of justice.

Information on the reasons why a Parole Board recommendation has been rejected by the Secretary of State is not collated centrally and would incur disproportionate cost. Since 1998, the Secretary of State has not rejected any recommendation for release on parole licence.

Home Detention Curfew

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners eligible for Home Detention Curfew are in prison; and if he will list the reasons for this. [48657]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* During March 2002 the number of prisoners eligible for consideration under the Home Detention Curfew scheme (HDC) was 5,033, of whom 1,433 were released under the scheme. Therefore, 3,600 remained in custody. There are a number of reasons why those prisoners were not released on curfew:

1. about one fifth of prisoners 'opt out' of the scheme and choose not to be considered for HDC for personal reasons;
2. on examination of prisoners' files it may have been found that they were statutorily excluded from HDC because they were prisoners who have been previously returned to prison under section 40/116 of the Criminal Justice Act/Powers of Criminal Courts (sentencing) Act 2000;
3. they may not have had suitable accommodation arranged on their release. This includes accommodation where it is not possible to install the monitoring equipment due to insurmountable technical difficulties;

4. a small number of prisoners serving very short sentences may not have been released due to the lack of time to process their case; and

5. the prisoner may not have passed the risk assessment for release on HDC carried out by prison and probation staff.

Prison Service Colleges

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recruited prison officers have been trained by the Prison Service colleges during the last 12 months. [51143]

Beverley Hughes: In total, 598 prison officers started the prison officer entry-level training course during 2001–02. This figure includes the 363 new entrants to the Prison Service during 2001–02, some new entrants recruited before 1 April 2001, and some existing staff, mainly from the operational support grade, who were regraded as officers.

Prison Officers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is being taken to provide housing accommodation for prison officers working at London prisons. [50879]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service is working with Bush Housing Association Limited to identify what resources can be used to help staff in areas with high housing costs. It is also considering ways in which it can work with other public services to achieve this.

In January 2002 the Prison Service increased the rates of local pay allowance for staff working in London and the home counties. Staff at inner London prisons now receive £3,500 and those at Belmarsh and Latchmere House prisons receive £2,300.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many trained prison officers have resigned from the prison service in each of the last three years. [50880]

Beverley Hughes: The information is contained in the table. Only staff who were in post for more than 12 months have been included. The figures include all prison officer grades—officers, senior officers and principal officers.

	Prison officer grade resignations
1999–2000	183
2000–01	295
2001–02	506

Prison Service

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* governing governors and *(b)* governor grades of prison establishments in England and Wales are from an ethnic minority group; [50632]

(2) what proportion of staff in the Prison Service are from an ethnic minority group. [50631]

Beverley Hughes: As at 31 March 2002 in publicly managed prison establishments, one governing governor and 21 out of 920 senior operational managers, formerly known as governor grades, were recorded as being from minority ethnic groups. 58 staff have declined to state their ethnicity and data are unavailable on a further three. In privately managed prison establishments no directors, and two out of 85 senior operational staff, were recorded as being from minority ethnic groups.

Race Equality Employment Target is one of the Prison Service's key performance indicators and targets for 2001–02. The target proportion of staff from a minority ethnic group to be achieved in publicly managed prison establishments by April 2002 is 4.1 per cent. The service is updating its personnel records with the introduction of the 2001 census of new ethnicity classifications. Provisional figures at the end of March 2002 suggest that the proportion of staff from a minority ethnic group is 4.9 per cent. In privately managed prison establishments the proportion of staff from a minority ethnic group is 2.8 per cent.

Life Prisoners

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many life prisoners have served their sentences but are yet to be released. [48648]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* Life sentence prisoners are required to serve a minimum period in custody to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence; this is known as the tariff. After the tariff period has been served a life sentence prisoner may be considered for release on life licence but release will only be allowed if the prisoner is judged no longer to be a risk to the public. Prisoners released on life licence are liable to be recalled for the rest of their lives.

On 31 March 2002, a total of 5,060 life sentence prisoners were held in custody. Of these, approximately 1,500 had reached or exceeded their tariff expiry date.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many lifers who maintain their innocence are denied access to education facilities. [48656]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* I would not expect any prisoner serving a life sentence to be denied access to education facilities or the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge because they maintain their innocence.

If my hon. Friend has a particular case which he would like to write to me about, I will ensure that it is followed up.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what statistics are kept on the number of life prisoners yet to be released who are claiming they are innocent of the crime for which they have been imprisoned; [48649]

(2) how many life prisoners who *(a)* maintain their innocence and *(b)* who admit their guilt have been granted parole on their first hearing in each year since 1995; [48653]

(3) what the average number of prison moves has been for *(a)* a lifer and *(b)* a lifer who maintains his innocence in the last five years. [48655]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* This information is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. New guidance for prison and probation staff on how to handle the cases of life sentence prisoners who deny their guilt was recently issued in a revised version of Chapter 7 of the "Lifer Manual (Prison Service Order 4700)". I have arranged for a copy of this to be placed in the Library.

TREASURY

Fraud (Oil)

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a summary of responses to the consultations, and a regulatory impact assessment, in relation to the measures announced in the Budget to tackle oil fraud. [52555]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have today published a paper summarising responses to the consultations and setting out the regulatory impact assessment in relation to these measures. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses, alongside copies of responses to the consultations.

Green Fuel Challenge

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the second round of bids for the Green Fuel Challenge announced in the Budget will be launched; and if he will make a statement. [52395]

Mr. Boateng: I am today launching the second round of the Green Fuel Challenge pilot project exercise, inviting bids for pilots involving practical alternative transport fuels. I have arranged for the detailed criteria and guidance to be placed in the Library of the House.

Customs and Excise

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average number of stop checks made, per day, by Her Majesty's Customs officers, to search for illegal imports at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick, *(c)* Stansted and *(d)* Luton airports was in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [51772]

Mr. Boateng: It is not Custom's Law Enforcement policy to disclose information on levels of Customs checks at specific locations.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many kilograms of illegal meat products have been found as a result of stop checks by Her Majesty's Customs officers at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick, *(c)* Stansted and *(d)* Luton airports in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [51773]

Mr. Boateng: Central records of Customs seizures of meat and meat products are available only from 2000. Records for calendar years 2000 and 2001 are as follows:

Kgs

	2000	*2001*[1]
Heathrow	1,590	5,462
Gatwick	347	2,070
Stansted	2	67
Luton	0	101

[1] In 2001 in addition to the weights shown there were also a total of 60 seizures (Heathrow 49, Gatwick 17, Stansted two, Luton one) where the quantity was not recorded by weight.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is done with illegal meat products once they have been confiscated by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise officers; and if he will make a statement. [51770]

Mr. Boateng: Meat and meat products seized by Customs are disposed of through arrangements made by the local or port health authority.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average number of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise officers working, per day, at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick, *(c)* Stansted and *(d)* Luton airports was in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [51769]

Mr. Boateng: It is not Customs Law Enforcement policy to disclose information on operational deployments of staff at specific locations.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to place amnesty bins at airport departure and arrivals halls to give passengers an opportunity to dump illegal meat products prior to going through the Customs check point; and if he will make a statement. [51774]

Mr. Boateng: The question of amnesty bins at airport departure and arrival halls raises issues of security, health and safety. My officials are working with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), who lead the overall programme on illegal meat imports, on measures to deal with illicit meat inadvertently imported by passengers.

Contraband

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of lorries and containers were randomly searched by Customs for contraband such as beer in 2001; and what assessment he has made of the outcome of those searches. [50044]

Mr. Boateng: Customs selections of freight for examination are made on the basis of intelligence—using either regularly updated profiles or specific (target-related) information. Where a freight scanner is based at the port concerned, consignments are scanned before a physical examination is considered.

Customs do not make random selections of freight for scanning or physical examination.

Correspondence

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letter of 10 July 2001 from the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald, concerning a constituent and the effect of VAT on domestic heating oil bills. [51524]

Mr. Boateng: I replied to the right hon. Lady on 5 September 2001.

Business Taxation

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reductions in taxation on business there have been since 1997. [51484]

Dawn Primarolo: All changes to the tax system are included in the relevant Financial Statement and Budget report, which is available in the Library of the House.

Budget 2002 takes further steps to build a corporate tax regime which recognises the realities of the modern business environment and competes with the best in the world. Reductions in business tax include cutting the main rate of corporation tax from 33 per cent. to 30 per cent., the introduction of a 10 per cent. starting rate, which has now been cut to zero, and the introduction of an R&D tax credit.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the climate change levy brings to the Exchequer; and who is exempt from the levy. [49681]

Mr. Boateng: A forecast of revenue from the climate change levy in 2001–02 and 2002–03 was published in the pre-Budget report in November 2001. A new forecast was published in the Financial Statement and Budget report on 17 April.

The climate change levy is designed to encourage the non-domestic sector to become more energy efficient. Full details of the exemptions are available in the Library and on Customs and Excise's website at http://www.hmce.gov.uk. In addition partial exemption is given to businesses who enter into negotiated energy efficient climate change agreements with the Government.

Following Budget 2002 the Government are exempting two further sources of energy generation from the CCL in view of their environmental benefits:

electricity from combined heat and power (CHP) plants sold via licensed electricity suppliers; and

electricity from coal mine methane (CMM) sold via licensed electricity suppliers.

Road User Charge

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the consultation on the proposed road user charge for lorries will *(a)* start and *(b)* finish. [52366]

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when the further details of the lorry road user charges referred to on page 135 of Budget 2002 will be published; from where these details will be available; and what further process of consultation he intends to undertake; [52387]

(2) if he will list the reasons why the lorry road user charge referred to on page 135 of Budget 2002 is aimed to be introduced in 2005 or 2006; and if he will make a statement. [52379]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are today publishing a document on their proposals for the lorry road user charge, 'Modernising the taxation of the haulage industry—progress report one'. Copies of this document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses today.

The document outlines why the Government have chosen to introduce a distance based rather than time based lorry road user charge, some preliminary thoughts about the nature of the charge and the key next steps. It follows a period of consultation, involving the haulage industry, other business groups and environmental organisations, based on the Government's consultation document, 'Modernising the taxation of the haulage industry—a consultation document', published in November 2001. The Government will continue to ensure that stakeholders are involved in the development of the lorry road user charge.

Tax Credits

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase the take-up of working families tax credit; and if he will make a statement about take-up targets and measures for the proposed *(a)* integrated child credit and *(b)* working tax credit. [48641]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The number of working families with children benefiting from WFTC continues to increase. At November 2001 nearly 1.3 million families with children were benefiting from the working families' tax credit, over 450,000 more families than benefited from family credit at its peak. The child tax credit and working tax credit will be introduced from April 2003 and around six million families are expected to benefit from one or both of the new tax credits.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the rate of take-up for each of the tax credits available in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02; and if he will estimate the (i) numbers and (ii) values of unclaimed tax credits. [52128]

Dawn Primarolo: No reliable estimate of the take-up of the working families tax credit can be attempted until the Family Resources Survey for 2001–02 is analysed.

The children's tax credit (CTC) started in 2001–02. Many claims for the 2001–02 CTC will be made after the end of that year, including via self-assessment, and so no estimate of the take-up rate is available.

Benefit Take-up

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the case load and take-up estimates and assumptions referred to in footnotes 2, 3 and 4 of Table 4.4 on page 79 of the Budget Red Book. [51721]

Dawn Primarolo: Column 2 of Table 4.4 of the Budget 2002 report is based on the levels of housing benefit and council tax benefit take-up in 1997–98, which came from an analysis of the 1 per cent. sample of the Housing Benefit Management Information System, and on actual case load numbers for those receiving family credit in 1997–98.

Columns 3 and 4 of this table are based on the levels of housing benefit and council tax benefit take-up in 1999–2000 and on projected case load numbers for those receiving working families tax credit or disabled persons tax credit in 2002–03 and new tax credits in 2003–04, respectively.

North Sea Oil Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the oil industry about the taxation of North sea oil projects. [52364]

Dawn Primarolo: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis. As with previous Administrations it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Tax Concessions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has assessed on the impact of tax concessions to non-domiciled British residents on the level of *(a)* inward investment and *(b)* employment in the United Kingdom; and if he will place copies of the research findings in the Library. [52233]

Dawn Primarolo: We announced on 17 April as part of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement that we are reviewing the residence and domicile rules as they affect tax liabilities of individuals. I refer to Chapter 5 of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 2002, paragraph 5.83.

Company Vans

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken by the Treasury to review the tax treatment of the private use of vans provided by employers; and if he will make a statement. [52390]

Mr. Boateng: As announced in the Budget, the Government will review the tax treatment of the private use of vans provided by employers. The review will take into account environmental benefits, fairness and modern working practices.

Education Resources (Coalfield Areas)

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to increase financial resources available for education in the coalfields in the local authority finance review. [51556]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

As part of the review of local authority finance we are working up proposals for a reformed system of LEA funding for introduction in 2003–04. Our aim is to create a fairer formula that reflects fairly, on the basis of up-to-date evidence, the needs of authorities in different parts of the country.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice his Department has received from potential bidders for Railtrack about the amount of time likely to be required to end the administration. [49956]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer given to him on 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 52W.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will list for each financial year since April 1998 the amount of money recouped by the Compensation Recovery Unit; [44989]

(2) if he will list for each financial year since April 1998 the number of claims notified to the Compensation Recovery Unit; [44990]

(3) what estimates he has of the benefits likely to be recouped by the Compensation Recovery Unit for each of the next five financial years; [44991]

(4) how much has been recouped by the Compensation Recovery Unit in each financial year since April 1998; [52129]

(5) how many claims have been notified to the Compensation Recovery Unit in each financial year since April 1998; [52130]

(6) if he will estimate how much will be recouped by the Compensation Recovery Unit in each of the next three financial years. [52131]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The available information is in the tables.

Money recovered and claims notified to the compensation recovery unit

Financial year	*Amount recovered (£)*	*Claims notified to the compensation recovery unit*
1998–99	201,468,600.60	572,847
1999–2000	227,783,938.13	660,686
2000–01	273,394,645.64	612,120
2001–02	237,391,302.16	688,691

Notes:

1. The amounts include national health service charges recovered on behalf of the Department of Health.

2. Recoveries made in a given financial year may not relate directly to claims notified during the same period because of time lapses in settling claims.

Source:

Figures are taken from the Compensation Recovery Unit's Management Information Statistics.

Forecast compensation recoveries

Year	*Estimate of benefit recovered (£ millions)*
2002–03	265
2003–04	275

Notes:

1. The figures are consistent with the expenditure totals for social security published in the pre-Budget report, September 2001 which published figures up to 2003–04. Expenditure figures for years up to 2005–06 will be available at the conclusion of the spending review in the summer of 2002.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest £5 million.

3. The forecast amounts refer only to recoveries of social security benefits and do not include recoveries of national health service charges.

Source:

DWP Analytical Directorate.

Single Room Rent

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what information he collates on shortfalls for claimants whose rent is higher than local reference rent or single room rent; [41485]

(2) to what extent rent officers have increased the level of the single room rent by district since July 2001; [41484]

(3) how many localities there have been since 1997 in local reference rent terms, broken down by *(a)* region, *(b)* district and *(c)* constituency; [41486]

(4) what research he has commissioned to evaluate the easing of single room rent restrictions; and how he is monitoring its impact. [41490]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department plans to commission a project to examine the effect of the changes to the single room rent regulations later this year. This will be a joint study with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. We expect to begin work on the specification for the study in the early summer.

In addition, we are gathering information on the single room rent as part of a wider project examining the options for simplification of housing benefit in the private rent sector. The results of this project are expected to be available during the summer.

Information on the extent to which rent officers have increased the level of the single room rent by district is not available. However, recent research by the Rent Service shows that the average single room rent for England increased from £52.87 per week to £54.18 per week between July 2001 and March 2002. Equivalent figures for Wales show an increase from £35.66 to £37.98 and for Scotland, from £40.94 to £42.18.

Information on shortfalls where a person's rent is higher than the local reference rent or single room rent is not available.

Localities are influenced by residential property markets which are fluid and can change rapidly in different parts of the country at different times. Information is not, therefore, collected centrally on the number of localities.

Child Support

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when his Department will introduce the new child support system for *(a)* new and *(b)* existing cases. [51289]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the Statement made to this House by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 315–16.

Minimum Income

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will require his Department to amend its standard answer to letters inquiring about the Government's attitude to the introduction of minimum income standards in the UK. [20608]

Mr. McCartney: We treat each letter individually and answer as we feel is most appropriate.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the New Deal (Lone Parents) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50755]

(2) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security Amendment (Students and Income-Related Benefits) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50747]

(3) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Disability Discrimination (Providers of Services) (Adjustment of Premises) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50739]

(4) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Welfare Reform and Pensions (Persons Abroad: Benefits for Widows and Widowers) (Consequential Amendments) Regulations Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50759]

(5) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security (Loss of Benefit) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50751]

(6) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security Amendment (Capital Disregards) (No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50743]

(7) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Children (Leaving Care) Social Security Benefits Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50735]

(8) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security (Incapacity) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50731]

(9) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Income-Recorded Benefits (Subsidy to Authorities) Amendment (Electoral Changes) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50761]

(10) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security Fraud 2001 (Commencement No. 2) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50745]

(11) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 (Commencement No. 1) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50737]

(12) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 (Commencement No. 12) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50716]

(13) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Income Support (General) (Standard Interest Rate Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50757]

(14) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50749]

(15) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Income Support (General) and Jobseeker's Allowance Amendment Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50741]

(16) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50733]

(17) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security (Medical Evidence) and Statutory Maternity Pay (Medical Evidence) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50762]

(18) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50754]

(19) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Discretionary Housing Payments (Grants) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50746]

(20) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security (Notification of Change of Circumstances) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50738]

(21) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Employment Zones (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50760]

(22) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security Amendment (Residential Care and Nursing Homes) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50752]

(23) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50744]

(24) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) (Scotland) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50748]

(25) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 (Commencement No. 10) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50758]

(26) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security Act 1998 (Commencement No. 13) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50750]

(27) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50742]

(28) what assessment he has made of the cost -effectiveness of the Social Security Amendment (Volunteers) Regulation 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50730]

(29) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50740]

(30) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security Amendment (Personal Allowances for Children and Young Persons) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50732]

(31) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 (Commencement No. 9) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50729]

(32) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50736]

(33) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Income Support (General) (Standard Interest Rate Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [50753]

(34) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security (Literacy etc. Skills Training Pilot) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement. [50756]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We keep these matters under review, but we are satisfied that they are cost-effective.

Backdated Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many men aged between 60 and 65 years were eligible to claim backdated winter fuel payments by the deadline of 30 March 2001 for backdated applications. [51609]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* There are no time limits for claims which cover the past years 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 and successful claims continue to be paid. 30 March 2001 was the deadline for winter 2000–01 claims only.

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of those eligible men aged 60 to 65 years made a successful claim for backdated winter fuel payments in the last three years. [51608]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The information is not available in the format requested. There are no time limits for claims covering the winters 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 and, to date, over 1 million payments have been issued in respect of one or more of these years. It is up to the individual to choose whether to claim.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who has responsibility for *(a)* enforcing regulations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1999 and *(b)* ensuring that pubs are aware of their duties under it. [51174]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has responsibility for enforcement action by means of a formal investigation where it has reason to believe that a person has committed or is committing an unlawful act under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act DDA, and any regulations made under it. It can also help individual disabled people secure their rights by, in some circumstances, providing legal assistance. The DRC also has responsibilities to provide information and advice to service providers, including pubs, about their obligations under the DDA and guidance on good practice. It prepares statutory codes of practice, runs a Helpline and undertakes general awareness raising initiatives. These activities complement the media campaigns run by the Government to raise awareness of the DDA.

Hospitalisation (Benefit Downrating)

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many carers have lost their invalid care allowance because the adult they care for has lost their disability living allowance or attendance allowance as a consequence of hospitalisation; [51569]

(2) how many parents caring for a disabled child have lost their invalid care allowance because their child has lost disability living allowance as a consequence of hospitalisation. [51568]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is not available. Data collected on the reason for termination of Invalid Care Allowance entitlement does not distinguish between loss of Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance for hospitalisation and for other reasons.

Pensions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if old-age pensions are paid by bank transfer in advance or in arrears; and what estimate he has made of the extra cost that would be incurred in beginning pensionable benefits on the relevant birthday rather than on the subsequent payday. [50676]

Mr. McCartney: People who opt to have their retirement pension paid into their bank account are normally paid four weeks in arrears. From 2003, payment directly into bank accounts will become the normal method of paying benefits and pensions. We will be enhancing our computer systems to make payments of retirement pension available in advance and on a weekly basis.

If payment were made for part weeks at the start of a claim only, and there was no recovery of overpaid benefit at the end of a claim, we estimate that this would incur a cost of up to £20 million per annum.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in his Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions he has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within his Department. [50481]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Smart card technology is currently being used within the Department for Work and Pensions for security and access control as part of a project to modernise the Department's IT infrastructure. The project is currently part way through implementation, and all offices should be on stream by the end of 2002. Competitive tenders were sought for the supply of the Smart Card technology. Schlumberger, GemPlus and Giesecke and Devrient submitted proposals and the contract was awarded to GemPlus.

The Department continues to monitor developments in Smart Card technology and will consider it as appropriate for business needs in the future.

Fit for Work Scheme

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he plans to *(a)* re-introduce the Fit for Work scheme operated by the Department for Employment and *(b)* establish an alternative scheme to recognise companies who make life better for disabled people. [48756]

Maria Eagle: Although the Fit for Work scheme was initially successful, it gradually became less effective at promoting employers' awareness of disabled people's potential in the workforce and was ended in 1991.

There are no plans to reintroduce the scheme as it has been replaced by the two ticks disability symbol initiative which was launched in 1990 to foster employers' commitment to good practice in employing disabled people. This scheme is administered by the Jobcentre Plus Disability Service, which maintains a database of employers using the symbol, who currently number around 5,000. The Disability Service updates the database with information from Disability Employment Advisers and compiles the National List of Disability Symbol Users, which gives details of all symbol users and the town or city in which they are located. All symbol users have signed a declaration agreeing that this information can be included on the list. Copies of the list are available to members of the public from their local Disability Employment Adviser.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the cost was to his Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated; [49096]

(2) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49138]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons gave on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his Department. [49126]

Mr. McCartney: Staff who work excess hours are compensated for the excess hours of duty by either time off in lieu or paid overtime. Management decide which method of compensation is appropriate.

Housing Benefit

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 957W, on housing benefit, what information his Department holds on the numbers of housing benefit claimants who have had their entitlement restricted as a result of *(a)* local reference rent determinations and *(b)* single room rent determinations. [45834]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of housing benefit recipients nationally who have had their entitlement restricted as a result of local reference rent (LRR) determinations and single room rent (SRR) determinations is collected in both the annual 1 per cent. sample and the quarterly 100 per cent. case load counts. This information is published in the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Annual Summary Statistics and the Quarterly Summary Statistics, copies of which are available in the Library.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many special advisers there were in his Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46945]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* At 9 April 2002 three special advisers were in post in the Department. On special adviser salaries I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the handling of the claim by Mr. Douglas Gowan, a constituent, for disability living allowance by his Department's Disability Benefits Centre in Wembley; and what internal inquiries have been made into his case. [46411]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 26 March 2002]*: I have written privately to the hon. Member.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families are in receipt of disabled children premium for two or more children in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and in how many families an enhanced disability premium is in payment for one or more of the children. [47985]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available.

Social Security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people who will be affected by the changes to the eligibility criteria for the payment of the lower rate mobility component of disability living allowance, as laid down in S.I., 2002, No. 648; and if he will make a statement. [48911]

Maria Eagle: The provisions of S.I. 2002 No. 648 (The Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations 2002) now form part of the qualifying conditions for the lower rate mobility component of disability living allowance. They potentially affect any claims for the component which are based on fear or anxiety experienced when walking out of doors without guidance or supervision from another person on unfamiliar routes. About 200 people who are known to have qualified for the component as a result of the Tribunal of Social Security Commissioners decision R(D)4/2001, which gave rise to the need for the regulations, may well be affected, but this will depend on the individual circumstances of each claim. As explained in Command Paper 5469 published at the same time as the Regulations, longer-term estimates of people affected can only be made in very general terms.

Asylum Seekers

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the additional funding required for social services if an asylum seekers centre were to be established at Throckmorton airfield. [48724]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

Proposals for trial accommodation centres for asylum seekers include primary health care facilities on site, to be funded by the Home Office. As yet, no assessment has been made in respect of any additional health or social care needs. The Department and the Home Office are working closely on these matters.

HEALTH

Telecommunications Masts

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library all guidance sent to local authorities in respect of the Stewart report recommendations on a cautionary approach to planning and adoption of ICNIRP guidelines. [51606]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

On 22 August 2001 we significantly strengthened the planning arrangements for telecommunications development and introduced two sets of regulations and a revised Planning Policy Guidance Note 8, 'Telecommunications' (PPG8).

The revised PPG8 takes account of the conclusions of the Stewart report and provides advice about taking account of health considerations in making planning decisions about telecommunications development. Copies were placed in the House Libraries at the time of its publication.

Health Checks (Over-75s)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of over-75s have undergone health checks in each year since their introduction. [42088]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not held centrally. General practitioners who work under the national framework for general medical services are required to offer an annual health check to each of their patients who is aged at least 75. The requirement on general practitioners working under the locally managed framework of personal medical services is more flexible. In neither case, however, are data on patient take-up collected.

Edgware Hospital

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of waiting times at Edgware UTC walk-in centre; and if he will make a statement. [45822]

Mr. Hutton: Waiting time data for walk-in centres is collected through the NHS Clinical Assessment System.

Work is currently under way to pilot a new reporting system. Data on waiting times at Edgware walk-in centre, and other walk-in centres across the country, will be available shortly.

Hospital Security

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent *(a)* in 1996–97, *(b)* in 1997–98, *(c)* in 1998–99, *(d)* in 1999–2000, *(e)* in 2000–01 and *(f)* in 2001–02 to the present date on hospital security, broken down by regional health authority. [46289]

Ms Blears: Regional health authorities were replaced by regional offices of the NHS executive in April 1996 with the reorganisation of the NHS.

Collection and analysis of the data on hospital security costs began in 2000, when NHS Estates took over responsibility for facilities management services. Data for the two years available is as follows, broken down by regional offices of the Department of Health:

Region	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Northern and Yorkshire	5,245,462	5,177,717
Trent	2,690,584	5,704,167
West Midlands	2,826,861	2,485,001
North West	5,189,960	5,767,996
Eastern	2,290,679	1,165,665
London	11,855,540	10,362,916
South East	5,797,606	5,047,260
South West	1,814,340	2,004,762

Doctors' Premises

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family doctors' premises have had completed refurbishments since the publication of the NHS National Plan. [47017]

Mr. Hutton: The latest information as at 31 December 2001 indicates that 640 general practitioner premises have been refurbished with a further 276 new or replaced.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for linear accelerators for the Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49513]

Ms Blears: The business case justifying the individual schemes estimating the net savings in present value terms (ie all future costs and benefits discounted to their present values) compared with publicly funding the scheme is shown in the table.

Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust

	Net present costs of PSC v. PFI option
PFI (£000)	4,500
Public (£000)	5,100
Savings in net present value terms (£000)	600
Percentage difference	13.3

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the residences for Poole Hospital NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49508]

Ms Blears: The business case justifying the individual schemes estimating the net savings in present value terms (ie all future costs and benefits discounted to their present values) compared with publicly funding the scheme is shown in the table.

Poole Hospital NHS Trust

	Net present costs of PSC v. PFI option
PFI (£000)	1,577
Public (£000)	1,761
Savings in net present value terms (£000)	184
Percentage difference	11.6

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Patient Administration System for Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49546]

Ms Blears: The business case justifying the individual schemes estimating the net savings in present value terms (ie all future costs and benefits discounted to their present values) compared with publicly funding the scheme is shown in the table.

Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust

	Net present costs of PSC v. PFI option
PFI (£000)	2,900
Public (£000)	3,400
Savings in net present value terms (£000)	500
Percentage difference	17.2

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit for the North Bristol NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49520]

Ms Blears: The business case justifying the individual schemes estimating the net savings in present value terms (ie all future costs and benefits discounted to their present values) compared with publicly funding the scheme is shown in the table.

North Bristol NHS Trust Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit

	Net present costs of PSC v. PFI option
PFI (£000)	94
Public (£000)	232
Savings in net present value terms (£000)	138
Percentage difference	147

Mental Health

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the standard of care provided by clinics offering electric shock therapy for mental illness; what arrangements are in place to monitor and inspect these clinics and this practice; and if he will make a statement. [48867]

Jacqui Smith: Health professionals and mental health services managers are expected to ensure that electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) is administered to patients in accordance with the guidance issued by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

In September 1998, the Chief Medical Officer and the President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists wrote to the chief executives of national health service trusts, consultant psychiatrists indicating the need to consider and improve standards of ECT administration in relation to ongoing developments in clinical governance.

The college has a special committee on ECT and in 1995 it published detailed guidance entitled, "The ECT Handbook—The Second Report of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Special Committee on ECT". This is an important source of practical guidance for health professionals, mental health services managers and patients and includes sections on clinical guidelines; the use and administration of ECT; anaesthesia in ECT; the staffing and layout of ECT suites; matters relating to the law and consent. The appendices include, for example, nursing guidelines in relation to ECT and check lists for good practice in the provision of ECT services. The college is aware of the need to update this guidance and hopes to publish a revised handbook by the end of this year.

The college has established plans to set up an ECT accreditation service and is initially planning to conduct some pilot visits. Currently the college undertakes regular

accreditation visits for senior house officer (SHO) training schemes and ECT services are examined to some extent (because some SHOs seeking accreditation may administer ECT). The college's visiting accreditation teams reserve the right not to accredit that part of a particular training scheme if, for example, there is inadequate training and supervision of SHOs.

The Mental Health Act Commission (MHAC) was set up to help safeguard the interests of all people detained under the Mental Health Act 1983. As part of its work in visiting detained patients MHAC commissioners routinely check on standards of ECT administration.

As part of its ongoing programme of clinical governance reviews the Commission for Health Improvement carries out observations on services provided in hospitals of which ECT is a key area.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of current mental health promotion and early intervention services for children and adolescents. [47436]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The promotion of children's mental health and the prevention of mental ill-health in childhood are central to many Government programmes.

The mental health national service framework has set mental health promotion as its first standard. The Department's mental health project team has recently published an "update" on this standard in which examples of good practice in the promotion of mental health of children and young people at school are described.

The team is also involved in work to promote children's mental health within early years and school settings, including collaboration with the Department for Education and Skills on further initiatives to help schools promote mental health.

To assist future policy development the Department commissioned a research project on the provision of children's mental health care within primary care. A report of the project has been received and arrangements for publication are being made by the research team.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute psychiatric beds there *(a)* were in London in (i) 1992 and (ii) 1997 and *(b)* are; and what the occupancy rate mental health wards in the capital (1) were in (X) 1992 and (Y) 1997 and (2) are. [48863]

Jacqui Smith: Information on beds in wards designated as mental illness short stay/secure is given in the table.

Average daily number of available and occupied beds in mental illness—short stay/secure wards, London regional office area, 2000–01, 1996–97 and 1991–92

	Mental illness				
	Children[1]	*Elderly*[1]	*Secure unit*[2]	*Other ages*[1]	*Total acute mental illness beds*
2000–01					
Available beds	76	1,045	565	3,198	4,884
Occupied beds	57	906	525	3,103	4,591
Percentage occupancy	76.1	86.7	93.0	97.0	94.0
1996–97					
Available beds	50	1,030	458	3,006	4,544
Occupied beds	35	882	431	2,835	4,183
Percentage occupancy	69.6	85.7	94.2	94.3	92.1
1991–92					
Available beds	78	837	150	3,068	4,133

[1] Short stay
[2] Other ages
Note:
Percentages may not match exactly due to rounding
Source:
KH03—Bed availability and occupancy

We are improving and modernising community mental health services to relieve the pressure on in-patient beds. The NHS Plan contained a commitment to create 335 crisis resolution teams, 50 early intervention teams and a further 50 assertive outreach teams by 2004, so that patients can benefit from these alternatives to in-patient care.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the people detained at 31 March 2001 under the Mental Health Act 1983 in private nursing homes were funded by the national health service. [49774]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect information on how patients, detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 in private nursing homes, are funded.

NHS (Adverse Incidents)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the system piloted for reporting, analysing and learning from adverse incidents in the NHS. [49775]

Ms Blears: The piloting phase of the national system for reporting, analysing and learning from adverse incidents, which is being run by the National Patient Safety Agency, concluded at the end of March 2002. An evaluation report of the pilots was presented to the National Patient Safety Agency Board at its public meeting on 10 April, and a report on the implementation programme across the wider national health service will be presented to the Board meeting in May 2002.

Copies of the pilot evaluation report as contained in the Board meeting papers of 10 April will be placed in the Library. The report will also be available on the National Patient Safety Agency website at: www.npsa.org.uk.

Drugs Expenditure

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total drugs bill was in cash terms for the *(a)* hospital and community health service and *(b)* family health service for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [48921]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Total NHS spending on drugs (England only)

£ million

Year	Family health services (FHS)	Cash out-turn Hospital and community health services (HCHS)	Total
1991–92	2,317	591	2,908
1992–93	2,641	643	3,284
1993–94	2,951	710	3,661
1994–95	3,230	764	3,994
1995–96	3,498	874	4,372
1996–97	3,774	961	4,735
1997–98	4,085	1,088	5,173
1998–99	4,339	1,211	5,550
1999–2000	4,833	1,369	6,202
2000–01	5,161	1,530	6,691

Note:

The figures for FHS cash out-turn are net of pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS) receipts.

Dental Amalgam

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what precautions his Department recommends in order to protect dentists and their employees from exposure to mercury during the placement or removal of dental amalgam fillings. [48834]

Ms Blears: Dentists are required to work within health and safety legislation and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations regarding all aspects of their practice, including the handling of mercury and dental amalgam. The British Dental Association also issues guidance on this topic.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require dentists to advise patients of the potential toxicity of dental amalgam. [48833]

Ms Blears: The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) reviewed the safety of dental amalgam fillings in 1997 and concluded that their use was free from systemic toxicity and did not pose a risk. As a precautionary measure, COT advised dentists that it may be prudent to avoid, where clinically reasonable, the placement or removal of amalgam fillings during pregnancy. This guidance to dentists remains current.

Dental Services

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government's target figure is for the number of *(a)* GPs and *(b)* NHS dentists per thousand population; and what the number for the Bolton, South-East parliamentary constituency is. [50594]

Jacqui Smith: There is no Government target for the number of general practitioners (GPs) per thousand population. The number of GPs per thousand at 30 September 2001 is shown in the table for England and also for Wigan and Bolton health authority. Information is not available by constituency.

The GP work force envelope for Greater Manchester strategic health authority, which includes Bolton South East primary care group. is an increase of 180 GPs between 1999 and 2004.

The target is a floor not a ceiling. The guidance on filling GP vacancy issued on 13 March 2002 stated new PCTs below the existing average of 53.2 GPs per 100,000, like Bolton South East, should look to increase GP numbers by at least 6 per cent. or to at least the projected average of 55.7 GPs per 100,000. This would mean Bolton South East should look to recruit at least three and up to 20 GPs by 2004.

There is no Government target for the number of NHS dentists per thousand population. The number of NHS dentists per thousand population at 30 September 2001 is shown in the table for England and also for Wigan and Bolton health authority area. Information is not available by constituency.

The data includes dentists working in the General Dental Service (GDS), Personal Dental Service (PDS), Community and Hospital Dental Service (CHDS) and salaried dentists in the GDS. Dentists working solely in private dentistry are not covered in these figures.

All practitioners[1] per 1,000 population; England and Wigan and Bolton health authority as at 30 September 2001

headcount

	England	Wigan and Bolton
All practitioners[1]	31,835	308
of which:		
NHS Plan GPs[2]	28,802	293
of which:		
Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)	27,843	282
Population	50,186,985	577,707
Practitioners per 1,000 population	0.63	0.53
NHS Plan GPs per 1,000 population	0.57	0.51
UPEs per 1,000 population	0.55	0.49

[1] All practitioners comprises; (GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs collectively known as UPEs) Restricted Principals; Assistants; GP Registrars; Salaried Doctors (paragraph 52 SFA), PMS, Other and GP Retainers.

[2] NHS Plan GPs are defined as Total Practitioners excluding GP Registrars and GP Retainers.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Population date: ONS (1998 based) projected population estimates.

Number of NHS dentists[1,2] per 1,000 population[3]; England and Wigan and Bolton health authority at 30 September 2001

headcount

	England	*Wigan and Bolton*
Number of dentists[1]	22,439	210
Number of dentists[1, 2] per 1,000 population[3]	0.45	0.36

[1] Includes dentists working in the general dental service, personal dental service, community and hospital dental services and salaried dentists in the GDS.

[2] Some dentists work in more than one dental service. Dentists will be counted in each service apart from dentists working in both the PDS and GDS.

[3] ONS 2000 mid-year population estimates based on the 1991 census.

Dental Records

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what appraisal his Department has made of the efficiency of the dental records system; and what plans there are to improve it. [50638]

Ms Blears: All dental practitioners have an ethical and professional responsibility to keep comprehensive, accurate and up to date dental records for their patients. While the Department provides appropriate record cards for use by dental practitioners, it does not dictate the format in which dentists should keep their records. This is a matter for the individuals concerned.

Where claims are made for payment under national health service arrangements, the Dental Practice Board carries out random checks to monitor and follow up as appropriate, the accuracy of individual claims and records

The Department is committed to working with the profession and other stakeholders to improve the system and reduce bureaucracy wherever possible.

Child Tooth Decay

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which primary care trusts/groups have met the national target for tooth decay in children. [50605]

Ms Blears: There are two national targets for tooth decay in children aged five years.

(a) A reduction in the average number of decayed, missing or filled teeth (dmft) to 1.0 teeth by the year 2003.
(b) An increase in the proportion of children with no caries experience to 70 per cent. by the year 2003.

The British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry carries out a survey on dental caries experience of five-year-old children every two years. The latest survey is for 1999–2000.

The health authorities in England who have met either or both of the national targets for the year 2003 by 1999–2000 is shown in the table.

Information is not available by primary care trust or primary care groups.

Health authorities already meeting tooth decay targets for 2003 by 1999–2000

Health authority	*Target 1 Average number of decayed, missing and filled teeth (dmft more than 1.0)*	*Target 2 Percentage of children with no caries experience*
Solihull	0.58	77.2
Dudley	0.59	78.3
Kingston and Richmond	0.66	78.8
Warwickshire	0.70	74.0
Worcestershire	0.71	76.4
South Staffordshire	0.72	73.6
Lincolnshire	0.74	75.2
West Kent	0.78	70.5
Bromley	0.78	75.5
Walsall	0.81	72.5
North and Mid Hampshire	0.83	74.6
North Essex	0.84	72.5
Suffolk	0.87	71.4
Sandwell[1]	0.89	66.0
Croydon	0.90	72.3
East Surrey	0.91	71.5
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	0.91	74.1
Buckinghamshire	0.92	73.9
South Essex	0.92	71.1
Dorset	0.95	72.4
Birmingham[1]	0.97	68.4
Coventry[1]	0.97	68.7
East Kent	0.98	71.8

[1] Health authority has met target 1 but not met target 2.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to combat child tooth decay in the West Hull Primary Care Trust area. [50606]

Jacqui Smith: Starting from May 2002, every baby in the East Riding and Hull area will receive a baby dental pack at their seven to nine month health assessment. Two "Sure Start" pilots in the West Hull area will also benefit from the brushing for life scheme. This Government initiative aims to improve oral health of children under five years. Free toothbrushes and toothpaste will be given to children at their eight month and 18 month general health development check.

Asylum Accommodation Centre (Throckmorton)

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the additional funding required for health services if an asylum seekers centre were to be established at Throckmorton airfield. [48726]

Mr. Hutton: Proposals for trial accommodation centres for asylum seekers include primary health care facilities on site, to be funded by the Home Office. As yet, no assessment has been made in respect of any additional health or social care needs. The Department and the Home Office are working closely on these matters.

Epilepsy

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what surgical treatment is made available to epilepsy sufferers in *(a)* the New Forest, *(b)* Southampton and South West Hampshire and *(c)* Dorset; and if he will make a statement. [48738]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the location of local services is not collected centrally.

In February 2001 the Government announced a national service framework for long-term health conditions. The framework will ensure health and social services work together in all parts of the country to provide the right level of care and treatment for people with long-term health conditions such as epilepsy. The framework is due to be implemented from 2005. In the interim, the Government have asked the Modernisation Agency to advise on the redesign of the pattern of care for people with epilepsy.

Prazosin

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received on the availability of Prazosin through pharmacies. [49323]

Ms Blears: We have not received any representations on the availability of Prazosin through pharmacies. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB) has drawn up a list of therapeutic categories of medicines which might be possible candidates for pharmacy availability. This list includes Prazosin, particularly for use in benign prostatic hyperplasia, following initial doctor diagnosis. Any application for pharmacy availability of Prazosin would be assessed by the Medicines Control Agency, expert committee advice would be sought, followed by a period of public consultation before a decision was made.

Hearing Impairment

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation he has made of the pilot programmes for the modernisation of the hearing-impaired service utilising digital hearing aids; and what plans he has to *(a)* continue with the pilots and *(b)* roll out the programme throughout the NHS. [49726]

Jacqui Smith: The pilots are being evaluated by the Institute of Hearing Research, who will complete their evaluation in December 2002. The existing pilot sites are continuing to participate and I announced on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 465W-66W, the names of those sites who would be joining the project in the financial year 2002–03.

We are now in the process of identifying further sites to receive training and equipment to enable them to join the project after April 2003. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People will be contacting all those sites not yet involved in the project and encouraging those with an interest to have discussions with their health community and put forward a bid.

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health trusts have announced an intention to withdraw from the pilot programme for hearing-impaired patients, citing funding uncertainty; and what his assessment is of the abortive expenditure incurred. [49731]

Jacqui Smith: No trusts have announced any intention to withdraw from the modernised hearing aid services project.

Carers

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the number of carers; and if he will make a statement; [49919]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of support available to carers; and if he will make a statement; [49920]

(3) what recent assessment he has made of the number of children acting as carers; and if he will make a statement; [49917]

(4) what support is available to young people acting as carers; and if he will make a statement. [49918]

Jacqui Smith: The most recent estimates currently available of the number of carers, including young carers, are contained in the report on Informal Carers by the Office for National Statistics published in 1995. A copy of the report is available in the Library. Further data were collected in the 2000 General Household Survey whose results are currently being collated by ONS. I understand that their report is likely to be available shortly. A question to aid the identification of carers was included in the 2001 census.

Under section 17 of the Children Act social services departments can provide support and advice to young carers. We have prioritised services for young carers through the £885 million Quality Protects programme and the National Strategy for Carers.

The carers grant is £85 million this year and it will increase to £100 million in 2003–04 to ensure that more carers are able to receive breaks. We are consulting with external stakeholders on the Carers and Disabled Children (Vouchers) Regulations to be implemented this year. This will give local authorities power to issue vouchers for short term breaks. We are also revising the Hospital Discharge Workbook which gives guidance to the national health service, social services and other agencies on hospital discharge procedures. Improvements in GP computer systems completed at the end of March 2002 means that all GPs are able to record as part of patient record details whether a person is a carer. They are encouraged to do so in order to facilitate the process of sign-posting carers to relevant services. My hon. Friend may also find it useful to note the information about the support available to carers that I referred to in the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 9 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 342–44W.

Photodynamic Therapy

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he plans to meet patient representatives of senior ophthalmologists to discuss the implications of preliminary NICE guidance on the use of photodynamic therapy to treat age-related macular degeneration; [49937]

(2) what guidance he intends to issue to health authorities regarding patients currently being treated on the NHS with photodynamic therapy; and if he will make a statement; [49936]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the preliminary NICE guidance on the use of photodynamic therapy to detect age-related macular degeneration, and if he will make a statement. [49935]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently conducting an appraisal of photodynamic therapy for age-related macular degeneration.

NICE have published for consultation the initial thoughts of the independent appraisal committee. This consultation document is available on the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk) and provides organisations representing patients, professions and manufacturers with the opportunity to comment. The closing date for comments is 30 April 2002.

As it is possible that the document issued for consultation may change, it would be inappropriate for the Department to comment until their final guidance has been published. Guidance will be issued to the national health service when NICE have concluded their appraisal.

In the meantime, we have asked NHS bodies to continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where guidance from NICE is not available at the time the technology first became available. These arrangements should involve an assessment of all relevant factors including the available evidence on effect.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people living in the Greater London area are on hospital waiting lists. [50590]

Mr. Hutton: The latest published waiting list figures for London residents are as follows:

In-patients (February 2002): 139,424

Out-patients waiting 13 weeks or more (December 2001): 61,826.

Hospital Waiting Times

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting 13 weeks or more for an out-patient appointment in Hull and the East Riding in each of the last three quarters. [50613]

Jacqui Smith: At the end of the third quarter of 2001–02, there were 4,275 East Riding and Hull residents with a general practitioner written referral who had not yet been seen for a first out-patient appointment, and who had waited 13 weeks or over. The corresponding figures for the end of the second quarter of 2001–02 and the end of the first quarter of 2001–02 are 4,579 and 4,355 respectively.

Fluoride

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to fluoridate drinking water in *(a)* the East Riding of Yorkshire and *(b)* Hull. [50608]

Jacqui Smith: There are no plans to fluoridate drinking water in the East Riding of Yorkshire and Hull.

Ambulance Services

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average time is for an ambulance to reach an emergency after the initial 999 call is made in the East Riding of Yorkshire over the last available period; [50621]

(2) on how many occasions ambulances have been called to an emergency in the East Riding of Yorkshire since 1 January 2001. [50620]

Jacqui Smith: Information about emergency calls to the ambulance service is not available specifically for the East Riding of Yorkshire. Information about the number of emergency calls and the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response times for Tees, East and North Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust, is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin, Ambulance Services, England 2000–01.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for further reviews of ambulance services in the South East. [51989]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* None. As announced on 15 January 2002, strategic health authorities, together with their primary care trusts, will review the position of their local ambulance services and will make recommendations to the director of health and social care in the south, by September 2002.

Cancer

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of lung cancer were initially misdiagnosed in Hull and the East Riding since 1 January 2000. [50615]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally or locally.

NHS Direct

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what call statistics have been collated for the east riding NHS Direct call centre in Willerby for the last 12 months. [50603]

Jacqui Smith: In the last 12 months (April 2001 to March 2002), NHS Direct Tees, east and north Yorkshire has handled 217,500 calls. For the corresponding time period in the previous 12 months (April 2000 to March 2001), NHS Direct Tees, east and north Yorkshire handled 54,000 calls. This represents a 301 per cent. increase in call volumes.

Accident and Emergency Services

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients were seen by a doctor or consultant within one hour of their arrival at accident and emergency in Hull and the east riding in *(a)* 2002 to the latest available date and *(b)* each of the last three years. [50611]

Jacqui Smith: Between 2 May 2001 and 31 March 2002, there were 86,924 new attendances recorded in the accident and emergency department of Hull Royal infirmary. Included in this figure are 4,044 records where waiting time information is not available. Of the remainder, 356,259 (42 per cent.) were seen by a doctor within an hour of arrival.

Prior to May 2001, the accident and emergency department of Hull Royal infirmary relied upon a basic information system that did not calculate the waiting times in the form requested.

Doctors

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of doctors is per 100 beds in NHS hospitals in England and Wales. [50586]

Mr. Hutton: The figures in the table are for the year 2000. This is the latest year for which the beds data are available.

Average number of hospital medical staff per 100 beds in England, as at 30 September 2000

	Numbers
Staff	65,370
Average daily available beds 2000–01	186,090
Doctors per 100 beds[1]	35.1

[1] Calculation based on unrounded figures

Sources:

Department of Health medical and dental work force census; Department of Health form KH03

The number of hospital medical staff increased by 9 per cent. between 1997 and 2000 and by a further 3.8 per cent. between 2000 and 2001.

Heroin

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the cost effectiveness of the drug naltrexone as a means of rehabilitating heroin addicts. [50628]

Ms Blears: No assessment has been made of the cost effectiveness of naltrexone in the rehabilitation of heroin addicts. Any potential future analysis would be carried out by the National Treatment Agency (NTA). This would most likely be made in consultation with the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). Naltrexone (as described in the British National Formulary) is given as an 'adjunct' to prevent relapse so that cost-effectiveness would need to address the context of use. In general terms there is little evidence on how long naltrexone should be used to remain effective in rehabilitation so adequate data on cost-effectiveness for this indication is unlikely to be available at present.

National Security

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will implement a transparent process for the tender of supplies required for national security. [50895]

Mr. Hutton: The Government have decided that details of its medical countermeasures for response to any possible biological or chemical attack, and any tendering process for these, should not be put in the public domain, as this is information that could be useful to terrorists.

The tender for the supply of medical countermeasures, including vaccination, for response to any possible biological attack, fall outside the usual open competitive tendering process. There are specific exemptions from the usual process allowed for on the grounds of protection of the interests of national security.

There are no plans to change this approach.

South-eastern Ambulance Services

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many executives and managers have left each of the south eastern ambulance services in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [50707]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not held centrally.

Surrey Ambulance Service

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to make an announcement on the future of Surrey Ambulance Service. [50704]

Ms Blears: No.

Children (Leaving Care)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (Commencement No. 2 and Consequential Provisions) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement. [50734]

Jacqui Smith: Costs associated with regulatory proposals are considered at the policy development stage. A regulatory impact assessment (RIA) is completed for regulatory proposals unless there are no or negligible costs, and sets out the impact, in terms of costs, benefits and risks of the proposed regulation which could affect businesses, charities or the voluntary sector. RIAs are available from the Library.

We have yet to have a full year's operation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act, as it was introduced in October 2001. In addition, we have commissioned an evaluation on costs and outcomes for care leavers from the University of York, which will report early in 2004.

Miss P. Brown

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter dated 5 March from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Miss P. Brown. [51424]

Mr. Hutton: A reply was sent on 23 April.

Pneumococcal Disease

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation on the trials on the vaccine's suitability for the immunisation of all children under 2 against pneumococcal disease will be available. [51926]

Yvette Cooper: Trials to investigate how pneumococcal conjugate vaccines could be incorporated into the UK infant immunisation schedule are in progress and will be completed late this year. These studies are assessing the compatibility of giving pneumococcal conjugate vaccines at the same time as other paediatric vaccines, including meningococcal C conjugate vaccine, and whether three doses in infancy plus a booster is necessary.

Studies to document the full burden of morbidity attributable to pneumococcal disease in UK children are also in progress together with cost effectiveness analyses.

The studies will then be reviewed by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) which will make recommendations to the Government based on its conclusions.

Folic Acid

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on folic acid dietary supplementation. [42165]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy issued advice on folic acid in relation to the prevention of neural tube defects in 1992.

Women who are trying to conceive or who are likely to become pregnant, are advised to take a daily 400 micrograms supplement of folic acid until the twelfth week of pregnancy. In addition, all women who may become pregnant are advised to increase their daily intake of folic acid by eating more folate-rich foods and foods fortified with folic acid—especially breads and breakfast cereals.

To prevent the recurrence of a neural tube defect, folic acid supplements at a daily dose of five milligrams (5000 micrograms) are advised and this can be reduced to four milligrams, if this dose becomes available.

Primary Care Centres

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many one stop primary care centres there are in England. [46201]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Data on the creation of primary care one stop centres have been collected since the publication of the NHS Plan.

As at 31 December, 68 one stop centres were in place in England. It is expected that this will increase to 102 by 31 March 2002.

Care Homes

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which care homes in the East Riding of Yorkshire do not comply with the new National Care Standards Regulations. [50617]

Jacqui Smith: The degree to which individual care homes conform to the national standards cannot be quantified in detail at the moment. It is for the National Care Standards Commission to decide in the particular circumstances of each individual home whether the home conforms to the standards necessary to meet the assessed needs of its residents.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people likely to require *(a)* residential care and *(b)* nursing care in a nursing home in (i) 2005, (ii) 2010, (iii) 2015 and (iv) 2020. [50692]

Jacqui Smith: The personal social services research unit (PSSRU) at the London School of Economics was commissioned by the Department to make projections of future demand for residential and nursing home care for older people. The latest PSSRU projections are:

	Residential care	*Nursing home care*
2000	240,000	135,000
2005	245,000	138,300
2010	256,400	145,000
2020	292,300	167,600

These projections take account of demographic pressures but assume no change in patterns of care. The pressures may change as a result of government policies. The PSSRU model does not currently make projections for 2015.

Further information on these projections and the model on which they are based can be found in the recent report by the PSSRU on "Demand for Long Term Care for Older People in England", published in Health Statistics Quarterly 12, winter 2001, a copy of which is in the Library.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by local authority the cost of administering the registration of care homes in the last 12 months. [41374]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Details of the costs of administering the registration of care homes are not available centrally. The table shows gross expenditure by each local authority in England, on all registration and inspection activity (including expenditure on the regulatory function for children under eight, which has now transferred to Ofsted) for 2000–01, which is the latest financial year for which data are available.

£000

Local authority	*Gross expenditure*[1]
Barking and Dagenham	212
Barnet	568
Barnsley	0
Bath and north-east Somerset UA	380
Bedfordshire	889
Bexley	382
Birmingham	785
Blackburn with Darwen UA	278
Blackpool UA	401
Bolton	323
Bournemouth UA	261
Bracknell Forest UA	77
Bradford	623
Brent	360
Brighton and Hove UA	359
Bristol UA	729
Bromley	827
Buckinghamshire	382
Bury	348
Calderdale	240
Cambridgeshire	245
Camden	603
Cheshire	1,143
City of London	0
Cornwall	417
Coventry	719
Croydon	656
Cumbria	975
Darlington UA	112
Derby UA	362
Derbyshire	898
Devon	1,405

£000

Local authority	Gross expenditure[1]
Doncaster	229
Dorset	645
Dudley	444
Durham	771
Ealing	279
East Riding of Yorkshire UA	314
East Sussex	1,189
Enfield	659
Essex	1,754
Gateshead	457
Gloucestershire	365
Greenwich	630
Hackney	481
Halton UA	235
Hammersmith and Fulham	515
Hampshire	1,995
Haringey	535
Harrow	468
Hartlepool UA	118
Havering	455
Herefordshire UA	237
Hertfordshire	857
Hillingdon	836
Hounslow	278
Isle of Wight UA	348
Isles of Scilly	[2]—
Islington	165
Kensington and Chelsea	134
Kent	2,433
Kingston upon Hull UA	330
Kingston upon Thames	492
Kirklees	271
Knowsley	187
Lambeth	562
Lancashire	2,375
Leeds	328
Leicester UA	633
Leicestershire	944
Lewisham	407
Lincolnshire	1,116
Liverpool	775
Luton UA	384
Manchester	548
Medway Towns UA	392
Merton	460
Middlesbrough UA	207
Milton Keynes UA	918
Newcastle upon Tyne	261
Newham	616
Norfolk	1,465
North-east Lincolnshire UA	158
North Lincolnshire UA	161
North Somerset UA	306
North Tyneside	489
North Yorkshire	573
Northamptonshire	1,181
Northumberland	654
Nottingham UA	246
Nottinghamshire	1,031
Oldham	420
Oxfordshire	793
Peterborough UA	79
Plymouth UA	411
Poole UA	48
Portsmouth UA	0
Reading UA	98
Redbridge	755
Redcar and Cleveland UA	23
Richmond upon Thames	288
Rochdale	549
Rotherham	214
Rutland UA	62
Salford	471
Sandwell	225
Sefton	695
Sheffield	484
Shropshire	456
Slough UA	41
Solihull	337
Somerset	0
South Gloucestershire UA	468
South Tyneside	381
Southampton UA	91
Southend UA	308
Southwark	545
St. Helens	238
Staffordshire	1,151
Stockport	118
Stockton on Tees UA	24
Stoke on Trent UA	342
Suffolk	1,069
Sunderland	397
Surrey	714
Sutton	436
Swindon UA	80
Tameside	379
Telford and Wrekin UA	240
Thurrock UA	98
Torbay UA	137
Tower Hamlets	417
Trafford	428
Wakefield	522
Walsall	279
Waltham Forest	432
Wandsworth	520
Warrington UA	215
Warwickshire	380
West Berkshire UA	128
West Sussex	1,482
Westminster	204
Wigan	189
Wiltshire	436
Windsor and Maidenhead UA	74
Wirral	800
Wokingham UA	81
Wolverhampton	157
Worcestershire	608
York UA	89
England Total	73,364

[1] Registration and inspection
[2] Data not available
Source:
Form PSS EX1

Delayed Discharge

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been provided by his Department for *(a)* research into the extent of hospital delayed discharge resulting from elderly patients unable to be discharged because their home does not provide a warm and healthy living environment and *(b)* practical improvement programmes to ensure that elderly people discharged from hospital can return to a healthy and comfortable home. [45637]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Department is not funding any specific research of this nature.

The Department has awarded a total of nearly £1 million over the three years 2001–02 to 2003–04 to Age Concern (England), Help the Aged, and the British Red Cross Society. This is being used to develop local intermediate care projects, which provide practical help through volunteers to ensure that older people's own homes are safe and comfortable, in order to prevent hospital admission or to facilitate discharge from hospital. The Home Office Active Community Unit has matched this funding.

A number of Health Action Zones have funded systems to enable health professionals to refer patients suffering from the effects of cold housing, including patients to be discharged from hospital, for help with heating and insulation. In August 2001, the Department of Health funded publication by National Energy Action of "Affordable Warmth and Health Action Zones, a Good Practice Guide", which describes these projects.

The Department funds the 'Keep Warm, Keep Well' campaign each winter. In the winter of 2001–02, this involved distribution of over 2.3 million leaflets, information packs for healthcare professionals, and a national telephone advice line to enable eligible older people and other groups to claim grants for insulation and heating and benefits.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the PSA target for everyone with suspected cancer to be able to see a specialist within two weeks of his or her GP determining the need to do so was met by the required date of 2000. [47298]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The two week outpatient waiting time standard was introduced for all urgent cases of suspected cancer during 2000. Central monitoring of performance against the standard began on the 1 January 2001. In the first quarter monitoring (January—March 2001) 93.5 per cent. of people urgently referred with suspected cancer were seen within two weeks. The latest data (October—December 2001) shows that 95.1 per cent. of people urgently referred with suspected cancer were seen within two weeks.

User Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new steps her Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if he will publish the findings. [47313]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Data to monitor the Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to reduce the death rate from cancer amongst people aged under 75 years are obtained from mortality data published by the Office for National Statistics. Data are for England.

This PSA target is the target published in 2000 in the NHS Plan and previously in 1999 in the White Paper 'Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation' for a 20 per cent. reduction against a baseline of the average age standardised mortality rate for the three years 1995–96–97.

The trend data are as follows:

Three-year average age standardised

Period	*Mortality rate per 100,000 population*
1995–96–97	139.72
1996–97–98	136.99
1997–98–99	133.43
1998–99–2000	130.86

Sun Protection Creams

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures will be taken to promote the use of sun protection creams over the summer. [46755]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Information about the use of sun protection creams will be available from the normal routes as well as through NHS Direct. We launched on 14 March a new Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/sunsafe providing sun safety advice. We are also collaborating with other key stakeholders this year in ensuring that a range of sun safety advice is publicly available. For example, the Department-funded National Radiological Protection Board has recently launched the "Sunsense" posters describing the use of sunscreens.

Experts recommend:

Using a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or more

applying sunscreen wherever your skin is exposed to sunlight

apply half an hour before exposure and re-apply every couple of hours

if swimming or sweating, apply more often.

Meningitis

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure people over the age of 55 are aware of the risks posed by meningitis. [47532]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* We have not made specific provision of information of meningitis for adults over the age of 55. Information is provided on meningitis in infants and children, students and adults less than 24 years.

Information is also provided for adults and children travelling especially on the Hajj and other pilgrimages.

Women's Organisations (Consultation)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the women's organisations which were consulted over proposed legislation by his Department in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 sessions; and if their responses have been published. [48013]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department is committed to consultation with women's organisations on a wide range of issues, including those where legislation may result. However, this information is not collected centrally.

NHS Contracts

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the contracts signed with non-NHS suppliers for the provision of health care services in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [50801]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Department does not hold details of all contracts signed by national health service organisations with non-NHS suppliers for the provision of health care services. These contracts are local matters for primary care trusts and NHS trusts.

NHS Consultants (Private Work)

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the advantages of withdrawing from NHS consultants with whole time NHS contracts the option of undertaking limited amounts of private work under his review of the consultants' contract. [51266]

Mr. Hutton: We made clear in the NHS Plan that consideration had been given to buying out the bulk of private practice nationally. Analysis suggested this would probably cost at least £700 million and would be unlikely to work in practice. The Government therefore proposed that for an initial period, perhaps seven years, all newly appointed consultants would be restricted from undertaking similar work outside the NHS. After this initial period the right to undertake private practice would depend on fulfilling job plans and NHS service requirements. The concept of a maximum part-time contract would be abolished. The relationship between NHS work and private practice remains under discussion as part of the negotiations on a new consultant contract.

"NHS Plan News"

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 847–48W, on "NHS Plan News", of the copies of "NHS Plan News" distributed, how many were returned for recycling. [47544]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 22 April 2002 at columns 108–09W.

Prescriptions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* atypical and *(b)* traditional prescription items were dispensed in the community in England in 2001; and how many prescription items were dispensed in total, broken down by health authority. [50059]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Information about the prescribing of antipsychotic medication is shown in the table.

Number of prescription items dispensed in the community in England for atypical antipsychotics, other antipsychotics and all antipsychotics, 2001

Prescription items (thousand)

Health authority in which item was dispensed	*Atypical antipsychotics*	*Other antipsychotics*	*All antipsychotics*
Avon	35.2	57.5	92.7
Barking and Havering	13.6	15.9	29.5
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	37.3	36.4	73.6
Barnsley	6.7	14.4	21.1
Bedfordshire	19.2	22.7	42.0
Berkshire	25.3	32.6	58.0
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	19.9	24.9	44.7
Birmingham	40.4	63.9	104.3
Bradford	19.6	31.8	51.4
Brent and Harrow	18.5	18.1	36.6
Bromley	2.1	3.0	5.1
Buckinghamshire	21.5	27.2	48.7
Bury and Rochdale	16.1	34.6	50.7
Calderdale and Kirklees	25.5	32.3	57.8
Cambridgeshire	24.8	36.5	61.3
Camden and Islington	16.1	20.7	36.8
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	14.7	34.7	49.4
County Durham and Darlington	21.1	45.1	66.2
Coventry	19.0	15.4	34.4
Croydon	15.8	15.9	31.7
Doncaster	6.8	20.7	27.6
Dorset	22.2	42.2	64.5
Dudley	6.8	22.6	29.4
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	24.7	32.6	57.3
East Kent	25.7	32.8	58.5
East Lancashire	21.7	39.4	61.1
East London and the City	26.0	28.6	54.6
East Riding and Hull	21.5	36.4	57.9
East Surrey	10.7	19.8	30.4
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	34.1	49.1	83.2
Gateshead and South Tyneside	13.7	23.7	37.4
Gloucestershire	14.6	33.1	47.8
Herefordshire	3.3	10.9	14.2
Hertfordshire	36.6	40.4	77.0
Hillingdon	6.1	8.9	15.1
Isle of Wight Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	28.5	39.9	68.4

Number of prescription items dispensed in the community in England for atypical antipsychotics, other antipsychotics and all antipsychotics, 2001

Prescription items (thousand)

Health authority in which item was dispensed	*Atypical antipsychotics*	*Other antipsychotics*	*All antipsychotics*
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	16.1	11.4	27.5
Kingston and Richmond	13.9	11.6	25.5
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	32.8	31.9	64.6
Leeds	36.2	48.6	84.8
Leicestershire	26.5	48.3	74.8
Lincolnshire	18.9	45.6	64.5
Liverpool	28.3	35.9	64.2
Manchester	28.0	43.1	71.1
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	26.1	26.2	52.3
Morecambe Bay	14.8	25.5	40.3
Newcastle and North Tyneside	34.6	29.8	64.4
Norfolk	26.8	70.2	97.1
North and East Devon	19.8	30.0	49.8
North and Mid Hampshire	21.5	23.6	45.1
North Cheshire	9.0	27.2	36.2
North Cumbria	14.1	18.9	33.0
North Derbyshire	9.2	27.0	36.2
North Essex	30.7	44.5	75.2
North Nottinghamshire	8.7	24.3	32.9
North Staffordshire	14.0	30.5	44.6
North Yorkshire	20.4	40.8	61.2
Northamptonshire	17.1	31.9	49.0
Northumberland	11.7	17.1	28.8
Nottingham	5.7	38.8	44.6
North West Lancashire	24.3	36.3	60.7
Oxfordshire	23.4	21.4	44.8
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	18.1	17.2	35.3
Rotherham	12.4	24.4	36.7
Southampton and South West Hampshire	26.8	30.5	57.3
Salford and Trafford	21.9	45.6	67.5
Sandwell	6.9	19.2	26.1
Sefton	16.8	25.7	42.5
Sheffield	12.0	34.6	46.6
Shropshire	12.8	24.8	37.6
Solihull	6.1	8.2	14.3
Somerset	15.6	22.9	38.5
South and West Devon	28.2	44.7	73.0
South Cheshire	27.9	37.8	65.6
South Essex	23.5	28.5	52.0
South Humber	9.2	22.9	32.0
South Lancashire	11.8	14.7	26.5
South Staffordshire	16.8	30.1	46.9
Southern Derbyshire	11.6	35.9	47.5
St. Helens and Knowsley	18.8	28.3	47.1
Stockport	14.5	34.0	48.5
Suffolk	20.9	39.5	60.4
Sunderland	11.0	12.9	24.0
Tees	19.4	38.4	57.8
Wakefield	15.6	20.7	36.3
Walsall	8.8	19.6	28.4
Warwickshire	19.6	25.1	44.7
West Kent	34.1	43.4	77.6
West Pennine	15.5	31.2	46.7
West Surrey	19.7	25.8	45.5
West Sussex	25.6	47.0	72.6
Wigan and Bolton	26.5	34.8	61.3
Wiltshire	23.6	30.1	53.7
Wirral	20.6	25.9	46.5
Wolverhampton	7.5	16.5	24.0
Worcestershire	13.5	29.8	43.2
England	1,842.0	2,876.0	4,718.0

Notes:

1. The prescription information was obtained from the Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system and is based on a full analysis of all prescriptions dispensed in the community, ie by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors.

2. Antipsychotics are those drugs defined in the British National Formulary (BNF) paragraph 4.2.1, "Antipsychotic drugs". The atypical antipsychotics within BNF 4.2.1 are amisulpride, clozapine, olanzapine, quetiapine, risperidone and zotepine.

Treatment Data

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by which procedures he collects activity information disaggregated by *(a)* private hospitals, *(b)* private beds in NHS hospitals and *(c)* NHS hospitals. [50062]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The Department collects hospital activity information by several mechanisms, including Hospital Episodes Statistics and the Service and Financial Framework Return.

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) provide information on in-patient care delivered by national health service hospitals in England and are compiled from data sent by over 300 NHS trusts. The HES database includes information about the treatment of private patients in NHS hospitals. Information from HES may be downloaded free of charge from www.doh.gov.uk/hes.

The Service and Financial Framework Return (SaFFR) is the mechanism for monitoring the delivery of all NHS targets in the NHS Plan and the NHS Plan Implementation Programme. Data are collected quarterly from primary care trusts and include data on all NHS-funded activity, whether or not it takes place in NHS hospitals.

Some elements within the SaFFR ask for information that distinguishes activity carried out within the NHS from activity commissioned from non-NHS organisations. However, no information is collected solely in relation to activity in private hospitals (as distinct from other independent provider organisations). The Department has also carried out a survey of NHS health authorities and trusts on the acute elective activity they commissioned from the independent sector last year, and will make available key results shortly.

The Department does not collect information about activity in private hospitals for private patients.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he collates into delays in prescription of electrically powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs; and what service standards are set centrally in this area. [48819]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* We do not collect details centrally, of the length of time it takes to receive an EPIOC (electrically powered indoor-outdoor) wheelchair once it is assessed to be appropriate.

We do not set service standards centrally; these are a matter for local services.

The Department is embarking on work, in partnership with the Modernisation Agency and Wheelchair Services themselves, aimed at improving services generally and spreading best practice across the country.

Brain Injury

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence his Department collates on the cost-effectiveness of rehabilitation following *(a)* stroke and *(b)* head injury among persons of working age. [48811]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* We do not collate information centrally on the cost-effectiveness of rehabilitation following stroke or head injury among persons of working age. Getting people back to functional independence following an accident or illness however, is a priority for the national health service. This recovery process will include access to rehabilitation services.

We are working with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Health and Safety Executive on job retention and rehabilitation pilots to test different health and employment strategies to help people with long term sickness or disability to remain in their jobs. They will start in late summer 2002 and run for two years. Job retention advisers will act early to assist those who have been forced to give up work through prolonged illness or disability to retain their skills and links with employers.

NCSC Projects

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the *(a)* NCSC IS infrastructure, *(b)* NCSC Registration and Inspection Package, *(c)* NCSC Finance Package and *(d)* NCSC pay and personnel system have been completed on time; and what the final costs of each project are. [50070]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The design and testing stages of the information systems infrastructure project completed on time. The roll out of the information systems infrastructure to each office has been under way since July 2001. A total of 69 offices have been fully rolled out with a further 11 due to complete by July. Final costs are not available, as the project has not completed but are not expected to exceed the £19.6 million budget for the project.

The registration and inspection system project is expected to complete in June 2002 as scheduled. However the system is now available for initial processing of applications and the start of training. The final costs are not available as the project has not completed but are not expected to exceed the £4.5 million budget for the project.

The finance information technology system was in place on 2 April 2002 as scheduled. Final cost for the project will be £1.4 million.

The pay and personnel system is scheduled to be completed on time at a cost of £1.1 million.

Acute Hospital Trusts

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers PCTs will have to determine service provision by acute hospital trusts. [50807]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Primary care trusts (PCTs) have a legal duty to work in partnership to deliver the agreed objectives of a local health economy. With the shift in the balance of power to the frontline, PCTs (subject to legislation) will lead the development of a local health improvement and modernisation plan that will inform the development of local services. PCTs have a legal duty and freedom to secure the provision of locally relevant, high quality services for the populations they serve. By engaging front-line clinicians in decision making, PCTs will be in a position to ensure better informed commissioning agreements are reached with acute providers.

Performance Measures

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the publicly available performance measures for *(a)* PCTs, *(b)* acute hospital trusts, *(c)* consultants and *(d)* departments within acute hospitals. [50793]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* In September 2001 for the first time, the Government published 'NHS Performance ('star') Ratings' for all acute trusts. The publication is available on the Department's website: http://www.doh.gov.uk/performanceratings. The ratings are formulated on the basis of performance over 2001–01 using a set of key targets supplemented by a balanced scorecard covering the areas of staff, clinical, and patient focus.

In February this year, we published a third set of 'NHS Performance Indicators', and the first to include a full range of indicators for NHS hospital trusts. The publication is available on the Department's website: http://www.doh.gov.uk/nhsperformanceindicators/2002. The set of indicators chosen for publication was developed through a process of extensive public consultation that included the NHS and the Royal colleges.

Our intention is for the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) to take over the publication of 'NHS Performance Indicators' and the 'NHS Performance Ratings', which for future will be brought together into one annual publication covering not just hospitals but all other types of NHS trust including primary care trusts.

To date, we have not published information on the performance of individual departments within acute hospitals, or individual consultants.

National Service Frameworks

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to increase the number of national service frameworks. [50802]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The national service framework (NSF) programme currently includes frameworks for mental health (1999), coronary heart disease (2000), the national cancer plan (2000), older people (2001) and diabetes standards (2001). The diabetes NSF delivery strategy is due to be published in 2002 and work is in hand on NSFs for renal services, childrens' services and long term conditions. These frameworks amount to a significant programme of quality improvement across the national health service. We have no plans to amend the programme at present.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 25 April 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Cleansing Services Group Ltd.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she expects to receive the Environment Agency's third report on the explosion at Cleansing Services Group Ltd., in Sandhurst, Gloucestershire; and if she will make a statement; [26655]

(2) when she will make a decision on holding a public inquiry into the explosion at Cleansing Services Group Ltd., Sandhurst, Gloucestershire; and if she will make a statement. [26654]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The joint Environment Agency and HSE investigation surrounding the fire of October 2000 is principally complete. However, the agency is undertaking excavations beneath concreted areas at the site to investigate allegations that hazardous waste was buried below the transfer station in the early 1990s. Excavations at the site commenced in mid March. Given the co-operation of the company, the agency expect to complete the excavations and associated investigations next month. In the light of which we will make a decision on whether or not to hold a public inquiry.

Household Waste Recycling

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to increase the UK's recycling of household waste; and what funds the Government plan to make available for this purpose. [34657]

Mr. Meacher: "Waste Strategy 2000" announced challenging targets to increase the amount of municipal waste recycled and composted in England and Wales. These targets are:

To recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005

To recycle or compost at least 30 per cent. of household waste by 2010.

To ensure that local authorities contribute to achieving these targets, the Government have set Statutory Performance Standards for recycling and composting for individual authorities. These can be found in the Government's "Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies", published in March 2001. Copies are available in the House of Commons Library and from the DEFRA website: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/management/guidance/mwms/index.htm

The Government have increased funding for the Environmental Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) block, which includes waste management, by £1.1 billion over the SR2000 period. There is also a ring-fenced fund of £140 million for local authority recycling and £220 million for waste Private Finance Initiative projects over the same period. Councils will also benefit from the £40 million to the Waste and Resources Action Programme to overcome market barriers to reuse and recycling of waste.

Following a recent consultation on the £140 million fund, DEFRA has opted for a selective distribution. At the end of March this year we issued guidelines and formally invited applications from local authorities. These guidelines can be downloaded from the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consult/wastefund/index.htm.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current session, for her Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current parliamentary Session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37402]

Mr. Morley: As DEFRA was created in June 2001 annual retrospective media expenditure analysis by territory location does not exist.

Since the formation of DEFRA our records show a total for centralised media publicity expenditure of £2,589,289. This excludes expenditure relating to foot and mouth disease.

The expenditure analysis set out in the table identifies three territorial areas: England, England and Wales and the United Kingdom.

De-centralised expenditure incurred by non-departmental public bodies, agencies and DEFRA directorates has not been included as obtaining this information could be achieved only at disproportionate cost.

DEFRA centrally funded media publicity expenditure

£ thousand

	England	*England and Wales*	*United Kingdom*	*Total*
June 2001	33,585	37,078	21,512	92,175
July 2001	11,983	72,676	—	84,659
August 2001	24,570	33,373	131,229	189,172
September 2001	62,801	44,180	126,895	233,876
October 2001	45,343	41,630	236,786	323,759
November 2001	14,358	37,664	144,688	196,710
December 2001	115,698	16,019	64,664	196,381
January 2002	12,774	96,722	224,856	334,352
February 2002	33,812	37,357	238,502	309,671
March 2002	60,896	117,229	450,404	628,529
Total	415,820	533,928	1,639,536	2,589,284

Rio Earth Summit (Implementation)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken by the Government since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to *(a)* set goals on environmental protection and *(b)* improve eco-efficiency and resource productivity relating to health and the environment issues; and what these (i) goals and (ii) improvements have been. [44346]

Mr. Meacher: The Government set out its targets for safeguarding people's health and protecting the environment from air pollution in the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in 1997 and revised in January 2000. It includes health-based standards for eight pollutants of main concern and objectives for their achievement between 2003 and 2008 together with objectives to be met by 2000 for the protection of vegetation and ecosystems. Good progress has been made towards achieving most of the targets as a result of the measures put in place by central Government and local authorities. We are, for example, broadly on track to meet our policy objectives for carbon monoxide, benzene, 1,3 butadiene, lead and sulphur dioxide, but we will need to do more to meet our targets for nitrogen dioxide, particles and ozone. We have met the objectives for vegetation and ecosystems. The strategy is kept under continuous review and last year we consulted on proposals to tighten several of the current objectives and to add a further objective.

The Government have successfully negotiated and adopted various agreements, both with our partners in Europe and internationally, which will reduce emissions of harmful substances to the air. We are committed to meeting all of the mandatory limit values prescribed by EU legislation. To comply with the EC Directive on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) the UK Government passed the Pollution Prevention and Control (England and Wales) regulations which came into force on 1 August 2000, under the Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999. Separate arrangements apply the IPPC Directive to Scotland, Northern Ireland and the offshore oil and gas industries.

IPPC applies an integrated environmental approach to the regulation of industrial activities. Emissions to aid, water (including discharge to sewer) and land, plus a range of other environmental effects (including noise, vibration and odour) must be considered together. IPPC aims to conserve energy, prevent emissions and waste production and, where not practicable, reduce them to acceptable levels. IPPC also takes the integrated approach beyond the initial task of permitting, through to the restoration of sites when industrial activities cease.

On resource productivity the Government commissioned a major study headed by the Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit. Its recent report, "Resource Productivity: Making more with less", identifies the scope for significant environmental and business benefits. We are committed to following up the report, which includes recommendations on establishing a long-term strategy with indicative targets, policy to encourage innovation in sustainable technologies, and action to integrate sustainable development objectives with the business of Government procurement.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures have been introduced since 1997 to combat car dumping and increase removal of deserted vehicles. [46166]

Mr. Meacher: We have supported pilot schemes in the London boroughs of Newham and Lewisham in which the local authority was given DVLA's powers to wheelclamp and remove unlicensed vehicles after 24 hours. The London borough of Wandsworth joined the scheme on 23 April. We announced the extension of the scheme nationally on 10 April.

In October 2001 we published a consultation document on measures to remove abandoned and untaxed vehicles from the streets more quickly and, for the longer term, bring forward changes to vehicle registration and licensing procedures to ensure greater accuracy of DVLA's vehicle record.

Regulations to reduce the statutory notice periods after which local authorities can remove abandoned vehicles and the storage periods for unlicensed vehicles were laid before the House on 19 March and came into force on 9 April.

Kent police piloted a "blitz" approach (Operation Cubit) on abandoned vehicles in the Medway area in co-operation with Kent county council, Medway council, DVLA and the Kent Fire Brigade for eight weeks in early 2001 and the Home Office has commissioned a detailed evaluation of the pilot which has been academically assessed and circulated to other stakeholders for comments, including the Kent police and Kent county council. It is hoped that it will be published in the near future.

Since the original pilot, similar operations have taken place and are shown in the table.

Operation Cubit

Area	*Date*
Swanley	June 2001
Dartford	October 2001
Gravesend	October 2001
Maidstone	January 2002
Swale	January 2002
Hastings	February 2002
Brighton	February 2002
Liverpool	March 2002

To date the operations have removed almost 3,000 abandoned unlicensed vehicles from the streets of Kent and Hastings.

The response to the consultation paper is now available at www.roads.dtlr.gov.uk/consult/abandon/response/index.htm.

Pesticide Residues

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to encourage children to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables; and if she will make a statement on her policy towards pesticide residues found in these foods, [48323]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* DEFRA works closely with the Department of Health on its initiatives to encourage increased consumption of fruit and vegetables, including the National School Fruit Scheme. The Pesticide Residues Committee advises the Secretary of State on a monitoring programme for pesticide residues in food and drink, including fruit and vegetables. The monitoring programme and its results are described in the annual report of the committee and are available on the internet at http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/committees/prc/prc per cent.5Fannual per cent.5Frep per cent.5F2000.pdf.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and if the target was met. [49644]

Mr. Morley: Chapter 2 of the Treasury's guidance "Non Departmental Public Bodies: Annual Reports and Accounts Guidance" requires executive NDPBs to provide, as part of their annual reports, information about the performance and efficiency targets agreed with their sponsor Departments and performance against those targets.

The annual reports and accounts of the Department's executive self-accounting NDPBs are laid before Parliament each year and copies placed in the House Library.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [49609]

Mr. Morley: Of the non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) for which DEFRA is responsible, only one employs staff under the New Deal for Young People. Since 1998 that body has appointed 14 people on to the scheme, nine of whom have subsequently found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks. Information on those returning to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits is not available.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Private Finance Initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50282]

Mr. Morley: One Private Finance Initiative project, Brooklands Avenue Cambridge, has been subject to refinancing after the contract had been signed. The financial effect was to achieve a net present value saving to the Department of around £515,000 over 15 years, which represents a broadly equitable share of the potential refinancing gain. No other departmental PFI projects have been subject to refinancing.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which of the services of her Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50322]

Mr. Morley: The Better Quality Services (BQS) programme was launched in 1998 and adopted by the Cabinet Office in the Modernising Government White Paper of 1999 as a means of delivering continuous improvements in the quality and effectiveness of Government activities and services. It requires all Government Departments to review every activity and service over a five year period starting in October 1999. The scheme covers all activities in Departments, agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies, and is similar in remit to the Best Value programme in local government.

Following the creation of DEFRA in June 2001, we intend to launch a value for money programme that will review every major function in the Department at least once every five years.

Two major BQS reviews, of the DEFRA Estate and Personnel, are scheduled to take place during the current financial year.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimates she has received of the change in energy efficiency since 1997 of *(a)* processing in the industrial sector, *(b)* heating and lighting in the industrial sector, *(c)* heating and lighting in the commercial sector, *(d)* business machinery and information control technology in the commercial sector and *(e)* heating and lighting in the domestic sector; and if she will make a statement. [50445]

Mr. Meacher: In the domestic sector our most up to date estimate of the change in overall energy efficiency is that it improved by 1 per cent. per annum over the period 1995–2000.

For industry and commerce, energy consumption statistics are collected by fuel but not by end use, so indicators are available only for overall energy consumption. No direct measure exists of "energy efficiency" changes for industry as a whole. However, changes in "energy intensity" (ie energy per unit of output) are routinely published by DTI[1]. These are the result of both efficiency changes and structural ones (eg from changing product mix within an industry). Estimates of changes in energy efficiency can be derived from these data and have been calculated up to 1998 for industry. Over the period 1990 to 1998, we estimate an average annual improvement in energy efficiency of about 0.6 per cent. per annum was achieved in industry.

As part of the Government response to the recent PIU Energy Review, we will consider its recommendation to establish energy efficiency indicators for each sector of the economy.

[1] Energy intensity indicators for industry, commerce and a number of individual industries are given in the DTI publication "UK Energy Sector Indicators".

GM Crops

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who was responsible for the crop management of the Farm Scale Evaluation at Sunnymead Farm, Wivenhoe in 2000; when the GM maize, planted at Sunnymead Farm, was sprayed with herbicide; and when the crop was sprayed with glufosinate ammonium. [50920]

Mr. Meacher: Management of the crops in the Farm Scale Evaluations is undertaken by the farmer hosting each individual trial, with SCIMAC (Supply Chain Initiative on Modified Agricultural Crops) providing advice in relation to the GM crops. As herbicide use is the key factor in the research, this aspect of the crop management is covered by the following protocol:

Protocol on herbicide use for the Farm Scale Evaluations

1. SCIMAC (Supply Chain Initiative on Modified Agricultural Crops) will not offer advice to farmers on management of the non-GM part of experimental fields. This will be carried out by the farmer's own adviser and recorded in detail, as is required under pesticide usage regulations.
2. SCIMAC will provide advice through an agronomist to farmers about herbicide and related management for the GM herbicide-tolerant crops. The agronomist will make a recommendation about the application rate and timing of the herbicide to provide cost-effective weed control. SCIMAC will provide draft detailed herbicide application information in addition to the label on the herbicide container, and provide the necessary amount of the herbicide to the farmers.
3. Farmers will provide their rationale for recommended herbicide usage in the non-GM part of each study field. SCIMAC's agronomist will provide their rationale for recommended herbicide usage in the GM part of each study field. Farmers will provide a report of actual herbicide use in both the GM and non-GM parts of each study field. All this information will be submitted to the independent research consortium carrying out the FSE study, thereby allowing a comparison of the agronomist's advice with actual herbicide usage and thus substantiating whether or not cost-effective weed control has been met.

The independent Scientific Steering Committee overseeing the FSE programme has approved this protocol as being appropriate for cost-effective weed control. The independent team carry out the FSE research audit as to whether cost-effective weed control has been practised by analysing herbicide application records, the weed burden at each trial site and records of crop yield. My Department does not have this management data, but it is planned to make relevant details publicly available at the end of the FSE programme when the research results are published. I can confirm that glufosinate ammonium is the only herbicide being used on the GM maize in the FSE trials.

Sea Wall Defences

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total expenditure on sea wall defences in the county of Essex and the unitary boroughs of Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea was in each year from 1990 to 2001. [50985]

Mr. Morley: Information is readily available only for expenditure incurred by the Environment Agency. The table details capital expenditure by the agency on sea walls in Essex (including Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea) and maintenance expenditure on sea walls and tidal defences:

£ million

	Capital expenditure	*Maintenance expenditure*	*Total*
1990–91	3.8	1.6	5.4
1991–92	8.9	2.0	10.9
1992–93	9.4	2.2	11.6
1993–94	9.1	2.2	11.3
1994–95	6.1	2.2	8.3
1995–96	6.3	2.4	8.7
1996–97	4.2	2.4	6.6
1997–98	5.2	2.0	7.2
1998–99	6.9	2.2	9.1
1999–2000	4.8	2.0	6.8

Note:
Capital expenditure will vary year to year depending upon schemes in progress.

Illegal Wildlife Trade

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what action the Government are taking to tackle global illegal trade in wildlife; [51270]

(2) what assessment the Government have made of the impact illegal wildlife trade is having on endangered species; and if she will make a statement. [51269]

Mr. Meacher: The UK was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The convention is implemented throughout the European Community through EU regulations by means of a system of licensing, to ensure that any trade is carried out at levels which species populations can sustain. Populations of endangered species and levels of trade are under continuous review, and the degree of protection afforded to particular species (which can include a complete ban on all trade) can be changed as a result.

Specimens of some endangered species command high prices on the illegal market. There is a huge incentive to evade trade controls and examples of illegal imports which have been intercepted by HM Customs and Excise are well-documented. It is difficult to assess the full scale of the illegal wildlife trade and thus the impact on species conservation, but reports published by the CITES Secretariat, Interpol, and by respected scientists and other conservation experts show that these are matters which we must continue to take very seriously indeed.

The UK has a good record of CITES enforcement. HM Customs and Excise Wildlife and Endangered Species Officers (including the internationally respected CITES Enforcement Team at Heathrow airport) and Police Wildlife Liaison Officers are at the sharp end of wildlife law enforcement and work with great commitment and determination. This has led to a number of successful prosecutions, including one resulting in a custodial sentence of six and a half years for the illegal import of certain birds. The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime—a multi agency organisation comprising the main Government Departments, statutory enforcement agencies and voluntary organisations with an interest in wildlife law enforcement issues—works hard to support the networks of police and customs officers at the strategic level. In addition, our major information campaign "Souvenir Alert" increases awareness of CITES controls among the general public. The campaign is aimed at tourists who may unwittingly bring back from their travels souvenirs made from endangered species. Over the past six months we have distributed a quarter of a million leaflets publicising the campaign, which has attracted considerable media and public interest.

Our work to combat the illegal wildlife trade took a significant step forward on 22 April, when I announced the establishment of the National Wildlife Criminal Intelligence Unit. The unit, which will be part of the National Criminal Intelligence Service, is well placed to make a real difference in countering organised wildlife crime at a national and international level.

Wildlife criminals are finding ever more sophisticated ways of avoiding detection. The unit will be using equally sophisticated techniques to track down, prosecute and punish these criminals.

Agriculture (Herefordshire)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what changes the Budget of 17 April will make to agriculture in Herefordshire. [51652]

Mr. Morley: Agriculture in Herefordshire, as elsewhere, is made up of a large number of different types of businesses, many of them small businesses. Depending on their individual circumstances, many may benefit from the budget measures offering help to small firms. The freeze in fuel duty and vehicle excise duty levels will also benefit agricultural businesses, as may the reduction in duty on cider. Many agricultural workers and farming families will benefit from the working tax credit and the child tax credit.

Agriculture Council

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason no devolved Adminstration Minister attended the 2419 European Union Council of Ministers (Agriculture) meeting on 18 March; which suggestions and matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation; and what information and evidence was provided by her Department to enable effective post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [51728]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* No Ministers from the devolved Administrations attended the March Agriculture Council as there was nothing on the agenda of specific interest to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the UK Government are well briefed on their interests in more general matters. There was no need for the UK Government to raise any issues of particular concern to the Scottish Executive. On the third point, it is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. The Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

International Environmental Conventions

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which international conventions on the environment *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Government have signed since 1997; what the timetable for implementation is in each case; and what steps her Department is taking to monitor implementation. [51924]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Since 1997 the United Kingdom has signed the following international conventions on the environment:

(i) The Montreal Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Signed: September 1997

(ii) The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships 1973 as Modified by the Protocol of 1978 Relating Thereto—Annexe VI: Regulations for the Prevention of Air Pollution from Ships. Signed: September 1997

(iii) The Kyoto Protocol to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Signed: April 1998

(iv) The Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution. Signed: June 1998

(v) The Protocol on Heavy Metals to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution. Signed: June 1998

(vi) The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade. Signed: September 1998

(vii) The Beijing Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Signed: December 1999

(viii) The Gothenburg Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-Level Ozone to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution. Signed: December 1999

(ix) The Cartegena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Signed: May 2000

(x) The Basel Protocol on Liability and Compensation for Damage Resulting from Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. Signed: December 2000

(xi) The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels under the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals. Signed: June 2001

(xii) The International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti-Fouling Systems on Ships. Signed: October 2001

(xiii) The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. Signed: December 2001.

With respect to the timetable for implementation of these conventions, the United Kingdom must have all measures in force to give effect to a convention before ratification. The timetable for ratification will take into account the need for action by the European Union. Where conventions include specific timetables for action the United Kingdom will comply with those provisions. Reporting requirements on implementation are determined by each instrument on a case by case basis.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made since 1997 in cutting UK emissions of carbon dioxide. [51610]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 24 April 2002]:* The UK Climate Change Programme and Third National Communication under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change were published in November 2000 and October 2001 respectively. These set out the policies by which the UK will meet its Kyoto commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. relative 1990 levels over the period 2008–2012, and move towards our domestic goal of a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide relative to 1990 by 2010.

Actual emissions in 1997 were estimated to be 152.5 million tonnes of carbon (MtC), or about 7 per cent. below the level in 1990. In 2000 (the most recent year for which final data are available) carbon dioxide had fallen by a further 0.4 MtC, but provisional 2001 data show an increase of 1.9 MtC. This increase reflects higher power station emissions (plus 4.1 MtC relative to 1997), colder outside temperatures (plus 2.1 MtC) and trends elsewhere in the economy (minus 4.2 MtC). The increase in power station emissions is due to gas price fluctuations, and colder outside temperatures increased demand on space heating requirements. We do not expect longer term trends to be affected, particularly since trends elsewhere in the economy are tending to reduce emissions. Our estimated reductions set out in the UK Climate Change Programme and the Third National Communication are therefore unchanged.

Noise

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what grants are available for noise insulation. [45750]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply

No such grants are available centrally.

There are statutory requirements for the provision of noise insulation in specified circumstances, in respect of noise from various sources. Under the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 the appropriate highway authority will provide insulation in the form of secondary glazing to the windows and glazed doors, of dwellings and other buildings used for residential purposes, or payment of grants for this purpose, where such properties are not more than 300 m from the nearest point of a new highway, including an additional carriageway added to an existing highway, or an alteration affecting the line or level of an existing highway. The provision of insulation or grant is subject to there being an increase, or expected increase, in noise on the façade of the property attributable to the traffic on the new or altered highway from that prevailing before construction started, provided this is above a prescribed level.

Under the Noise Insulation (Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems) Regulations 1996 an authority responsible for constructing a new railway, tramway or other guided transport system, or for adding to an existing system, has a similar duty to provide insulation for dwellings and other buildings used for residential purposes, or to pay grant for that purpose.

Similar statutory schemes have been made under s79 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, and previous powers, requiring provision of noise insulation in respect of aircraft noise at Heathrow and Gatwick airports. At other airports, noise insulation may be provided on a voluntary basis or in accordance with planning conditions.

Noise insulation schemes under any of these statutory provisions are subject to qualifying dates: they are not open-ended.

Local housing authorities could consider whether it would be appropriate to award a discretionary Home Repair Assistance grant to private home owners and tenants for noise insulation. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, if enacted, will provide authorities with a new general power which they could also use to this end.

Heathrow (Bird Strikes)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment has been made of potential bird strikes at Heathrow airport; and what measures are being taken to deal with this. [52259]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Heathrow Airport Ltd. carries out a continuing assessment of the bird strike risk at the airport and takes remedial action as part of its operating licence obligations. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has also established a working group, involving Heathrow Airport Ltd., the Civil Aviation Authority and other interested parties, to look at a broader range of issues connected with the bird strike hazard in the Heathrow area.

Climate Change

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what work her Department is doing on the impact of climate change. [53303]

Margaret Beckett: The UK Climate Change Programme outlines the Government's approach on adaptation to climate change. An important component of this is the ability to assess possible impacts and adaptation options. To address this, my Department has provided a further three years of funding for the UK Climate Impacts Programme to help the public and private sector carry out studies to assess what climate change may mean for them and how to prepare for it.

To help such assessments, new climate change scenarios for the UK will be published on 26 April 2002. These contain important information on how the UK's climate may change in future as a result of greenhouse gas emissions. Copies of the scenario reports will be placed in the Libraries of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

In addition, the Government have recently begun an inter-departmental process to consider the implications of climate change. My Department is participating in this activity and has also commissioned a survey of the implications of climate change for its policies and operational responsibilities. The study should be completed this year.

Timber

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received concerning recent shipments of Brazilian mahogany to the UK; and if she will make a statement. [44703]

Mr. Morley: Pursuant to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 272W, the final sentence of the second paragraph did not contain the most up-to-date information. Paragraph two should read as follows:

> Greenpeace sought permission to take the Department to Judicial Review in order to compel DEFRA and HM Customs and Excise to seize a recent importation of Brazilian Mahogany. The initial judgment refused Greenpeace's application but they have now successfully appealed against this.

The rest of the answer remains correct.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Transport and Telecommunications Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 379W, on the Transport and Telecommunications Council, what the status of the general orientations reached by the Council is; and whether issues covered by these general orientations could be reopened by the UK. [51722]

Mr. Alexander: A "general orientation", now more often known as a "general approach", is an indication of the formal position the Council might take at a later stage. The term is used when a formal position of the Council cannot be reached because the legislative pre-conditions of the decision-making process have not yet been met, for example because the European Parliament has not yet delivered its opinion.

There were two general approaches reached at the 25 March Telecommunications Council relating to decisions on electronic interchange of data between administrations (IDA) (Council number 11983–01) and Trans-European Telecommunications Networks (Council number 15324–01). Both proposals had cleared parliamentary scrutiny in advance of the Council, so we signalled that there were no outstanding UK issues to raise for the moment. It does however remain open to use to raise additional issues if the European Parliament proposes significant amendments. We will keep the Committees informed of developments.

Data Protection Registrar

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to ensure that businesses are not misled by companies purporting to be acting on behalf of the Data Protection Registrar. [51790]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department is cooperating with relevant enforcement authorities over this issue. We advise those who wish to complain about such an approach to contact their local Trading Standards Office. This is in line with advice issued by the Information Commissioner.

Pubs

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether she plans to investigate the effects on competition and the potential monopolies created by the growth of pub chains. [51512]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In his review of the Beer Orders in 2000, the Director-General of Fair Trading found no evidence to warrant a monopoly reference of the pub chains to the Competition Commission. The Director-General has pledged that he will continue to be vigilant in his pursuit of anti-competitive practices in the industry.

Faulty Products

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Directive 1999/44/EC (Refunds on Faulty Products) will be implemented. [52237]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department is currently consulting on draft regulations to transpose EC Directive 1999/44/EC (on Certain Aspects of the Sale of Consumer Goods and Associated Guarantees) into UK law. The consultation ends on 23 May 2002 and regulations will be laid before Parliament.

Temporary Workers

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to consult the recruitment industry on the content of the proposed European directive on working conditions for temporary workers. [52297]

Alan Johnson: Officials have been discussing the effects of the proposed European directive on working conditions for temporary workers with the recruitment industry, and will continue to do so.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research she has conducted into the average length of temporary work assignments in the UK. [52295]

Alan Johnson: We are aware of existing research on the nature of temporary work. Should further information be needed in light of the Commission's proposals, we will consider the case for further research.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to meet the European Commission to discuss the proposed European directive on working conditions for temporary workers. [52298]

Alan Johnson: I have discussed it with Commissioner Diamantopoulou, and others, and expect to have further contacts.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to safeguard labour market flexibility, with particular reference to the proposed European directive on working conditions for temporary workers. [52316]

Alan Johnson: We are studying the proposal to ensure that it provides adequate protection for agency workers without unnecessarily reducing labour market flexibility.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether she has asked the European Commission to withdraw the proposed European directive on working conditions for temporary workers. [52315]

Alan Johnson: We are studying the proposal to establish whether it protects agency workers without damaging the important contribution agency workers and agencies make to the labour market and to maintaining high levels of employment.

LOTIS Committee

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the LOTIS Committee. [51667]

Ms Hewitt: The LOTIS Committee is part of International Financial Service, London, an independent private sector trade association (formerly known as British Invisibles) representing business interests in the City of London. Government officials are invited to attend the Committee's meetings as observers, as they are with many other trade associations and non-governmental organisations.

Chemical Weapons Act

Mr. Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement about the operation of the Chemical Weapons Act 1996. [53193]

Ms Hewitt: In accordance with the Act, I have laid a report on its implementation during 2001 before the House.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to reply to the letter dated 4 March from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding Mr. R. Roxburgh. [50073]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 16 April 2002.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Public Services (Access)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he collates on the accessibility of residents of wards in England to *(a)* higher education, *(b)* further education, *(c)* general hospitals, *(d)* specialist hospitals, *(e)* nearest towns and cities and *(f)* other services. [52446]

Ms Keeble: Information on access to services by residents of wards is not generally collected. The exception is that access to some *(f)* "other services" (post office, food shops, GP, primary school) has been assembled at ward level as the "Geographic Access to Services" Domain of the Index of Deprivation 2000. My Department is undertaking a major new project this year to develop methods for local authorities to measure accessibility to key services at ward level.

Elected Mayors

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many towns and cities have elected mayors; what the turnout was in each election; and if he will make a statement on the powers of elected mayors. [52152]

Dr. Whitehead: To date, only London has a directly elected mayor, first elected in May 2000 with a turnout of 34.4 per cent. The mayor has wide powers with regard to setting the strategic direction for London and in particular with regards to transport, economic development and regeneration.

Referendum results have supported the introduction of directly elected executive mayors in eight English local authorities and on 2 May 2002 there will be a further five mayoral referendums. Of those eight local authorities, seven are holding their first mayoral election on 2 May 2002 and one on 17 October 2002. These executive mayors will lead their councils and, to the extent each local authority's constitution provides, will be in charge of their council's services.

National Insurance Costs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the cost in the next 12 months of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* agencies of his Department and *(c)* local government carrying out functions within the responsibility of his Department. [52075]

Dr. Whitehead: The changes to both employee and employers' national insurance contributions, announced in the Budget, will come into effect in April 2003. There will be no additional costs in the present financial year.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason no devolved Administration Minister attended the 2420 European Union Council of Ministers (Transport) meeting on 26 March; which suggestions and matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation; and what information and evidence was provided by his Department to enable effective post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [51731]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The UK, as the member state, is represented by a member of the UK Government. It is not normal practice for a Minister from a devolved Administration to join the delegation, nor were there any from any other EU country on this occasion. The devolved Administrations are involved before Council meetings in developing the UK position, which will as necessary reflect matters of particular concern to one or all of the devolved Administrations.

I reported on the outcome of the Council to the Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee and to the Chairman of the Select Committee on the European Union in the House of Lords. A written report prepared by the UK Permanent Representation in Brussels was given wide distribution among officials.

Arrangements for post-Council scrutiny in Scotland are a matter for the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive. My Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Council Tax

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the levels of Band D council tax were in each local authority in *(a)* London, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Scotland, in (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1997–98, and (iii) will be in 2002–03. [52065]

Mr. Byers: Tables giving the equivalent figures for the financial years 1993–94, 1997–98 and 2002–03 are available in "Regional Trends 29", Table 15.2; Department of the Environment Information Bulletin on "Council Taxes in England in 1997–98" (Bulletin 164, 20 March 1997); and the DTLR News Release on "Council Taxes in England—2002/03" (2002–0124, 21 March 2002) respectively. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

The tables provide information on the Band D council tax in each local authority area. The figures are based on two adults and include amounts funded by council tax benefit and transitional relief.

In practice, only a minority of properties in each local authority area are in Band D, with the percentage in Bands A to C varying widely between authorities, from 10.7 per cent. to 96.8 per cent. The average Band D council tax does not therefore allow a comparison to be made of the average amounts of council tax payable by people in different areas.

In contrast, the average council tax per dwelling reflects the wide variation between authorities in the distribution of properties across bands. It is therefore a helpful measure to use when comparing the amounts payable in different areas.

Information on Wales and Scotland is a matter for the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Executive respectively.

Mobile Home Parks

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to publish his report on the economics of running a mobile home park. [52357]

Ms Keeble: The researchers' work on the study into the economics of the park homes industry is nearing completion. We anticipate publication of the final report in early summer.

Investment (Islington)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list, by project, the total Government support for regeneration projects in the Borough of Islington *(a)* for each of the last five years and *(b)* expected for 2002–03. [52273]

Ms Keeble: The information requested is shown in the table.

Regeneration spending in Islington

£

Type	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*[1]
Community Empowerment Fund	—	—	—	—	150,261	150,261
Community Chest Fund	—	—	—	—	137,956	206,934
Community Learning Chest	—	—	—	—	—	55,182
Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	—	—	—	—	3,136,000	4,703,000
Single Regeneration Budget	—	—	410,000	11,203,000	13,519,000	—
New Deal for Communities	—	—	10,000	575,660	483,000	—

[1] Allocations

Notes:

1. Grants under Community Empowerment Fund, Community Chest Fund, Community Learning Chest and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund only commenced in 2001.
2. The London Development Agency is unable to provide a breakdown of SRB expenditure by London borough in 1997–98, 1998–99 and 2002–03.
3. The allocation for new deal for communities for 2002–03 is not yet decided.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list, by project, the total investment in housing capital improvements in Islington *(a)* for each of the past five years and *(b)* expected for 2002–03. [52272]

Ms Keeble: Since May 1997, the London borough of Islington has been allocated the following amounts of funding for specific housing capital improvement projects:

	£
Capital Challenge (Marquess Estate)	
1997–98	1,500,000
1998–99	4,500,000
1999–2000	3,500,000
Estate Action (Harvist Estate)	
1997–98	1,303,000
1998–99	1,693,000
1999–2000	1,119,100
2000–01	777,900
2001–02	500,000
Single Regeneration Budget:	
Kings Cross Partnership (housing projects)	
1997–98	380,000
1998–99	1,962,000
1999–2000	1,301,000
2000–01	846,000
2001–02	577,000
Finsbury Park (Tollington Estate)	
1999–2000	45,000
2000–01	293,000

	£
2001–02	600,000
2002–03	450,000

The following has also been allocated to the borough. However, it is a matter for the local authority to decide how this funding is allocated between their priorities.

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Housing Investment Programme	9.255	7.468	9.075	28.415	12.651	14.970
Major Repairs Allowance	—	—	—	—	25.434	25.030
Capital Receipts Initiative	2.848	9.168	8.334	—	—	—
Disabled Facilities Grant	0.136	0.124	0.131	0.142	0.212	0.237
Cash Incentive Scheme	2.240	1.524	—	—	—	—

Fire Service Pensions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the review of fire service pension arrangements to be concluded; when the review commenced; and which Government Departments and agencies are engaged in the review. [52114]

Dr. Whitehead: In 1998 the Home Office published a consultation document on options for changes to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme. There was no consensus among Fire Service interests on the costs and benefits which might be included in any new pension scheme. We have no immediate plans to introduce a new scheme but continue to discuss amendments to the current scheme with the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Councils which include representatives of the Scottish Executive, the Northern Ireland Administration, Fire Service employers, unions and staff associations.

Council Tax

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out the distribution of properties, by council tax band, in *(a)* Newcastle upon Tyne, *(b)* the London borough of Wandsworth and *(c)* the London borough of Richmond; and what the average distribution by band is in each Government office region of England. [52116]

Dr. Whitehead: Information on the number of properties in each council tax band is shown on the valuation list, compiled by the Valuation Office Agency. The latest information available is at 26 March 2002. The number of properties in each council tax band, and the distribution of properties by council tax band, for Newcastle upon Tyne, the London borough of Wandsworth and the London borough of Richmond are shown in the table. The table also gives information for each Government office region of England.

Number and percentage of properties in each council tax band

	Band A	*Band B*	*Band C*	*Band D*	*Band E*	*Band F*	*Band G*	*Band H*	*Total*
Newcastle upon Tyne									
Number	73,125	17,252	16,508	7,249	3,538	1,654	1,291	115	120,732
Percentage	60.6	14.3	13.7	6.0	2.9	1.4	1.1	0.1	100.0
Wandsworth									
Number	5,995	11,758	34,363	28,792	17,800	11,845	10,751	1,881	123,185
Percentage	4.9	9.5	27.9	23.4	14.4	9.6	8.7	1.5	100.0
Richmond									
Number	596	1,917	11,361	19,250	19,484	11,082	11,692	2,661	78,043
Percentage	0.8	2.5	14.6	24.7	25.0	14.2	15.0	3.4	100.0
Government Office Region									
North East									
Number	667,963	157,421	157,846	80,695	40,190	17,627	10,298	1,173	1,133,213
Percentage	58.9	13.9	13.9	7.1	3.5	1.6	0.9	0.1	100.0
North West									
Number	1,322,421	563,533	514,026	285,914	167,010	82,021	56,127	5,612	2,996,664
Percentage	44.1	18.8	17.2	9.5	5.6	2.7	1.9	0.2	100.0
Yorkshire and the Humber									
Number	1,007,232	422,759	351,695	187,306	119,051	57,371	33,834	2,943	2,182,191
Percentage	46.2	19.4	16.1	8.6	5.5	2.6	1.6	0.1	100.0
East Midlands									
Number	708,205	406,075	320,954	184,684	108,634	52,261	30,941	2,812	1,814,566
Percentage	39.0	22.4	17.7	10.2	6.0	2.9	1.7	0.2	100.0

Number and percentage of properties in each council tax band

	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H	Total
West Midlands									
Number	732,699	559,441	427,208	238,448	149,545	81,514	49,742	5,017	2,243,614
Percentage	32.7	24.9	19	10.6	6.7	3.6	2.2	0.2	100.0
East									
Number	338,768	497,471	617,989	402,793	243,008	132,541	90,901	10,783	2,334,254
Percentage	14.5	21.3	26.5	17.3	10.4	5.7	3.9	0.5	100.0
London									
Number	109,217	424,581	832,400	794,520	478,877	237,732	195,448	52,909	3,125,684
Percentage	3.5	13.6	26.6	25.4	15.3	7.6	6.3	1.7	100.0
South East									
Number	297,106	561,367	883,401	681,627	459,244	276,049	223,648	30,091	3,412,533
Percentage	8.7	16.5	25.9	20	13.5	8.1	6.6	0.9	100.0
South West									
Number	378,657	538,373	508,093	343,986	232,043	117,013	69,361	6,596	2,194,122
Percentage	17.3	24.5	23.2	15.7	10.6	5.3	3.2	0.3	100.0
England									
Number	5,562,268	4,131,021	4,613,612	3,199,973	1,997,602	1,054,129	760,300	117,936	21,436,841
Percentage	25.9	19.3	21.5	14.9	9.3	4.9	3.5	0.6	100.0

Note:
Percentage figures are subject to rounding.

School Run

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research he has commissioned into the psychosocial impact on children of parents taking them to school by car. [51980]

Mr. Byers: In October 2000 my Department commissioned a scoping study and literature review to establish what was already known about the effect of travel mode on children's mental health and cognitive and social development. The study reported in April 2001. The executive summary is on the DTLR website at www.local-transport.dtlr.gov.uk/schooltravel/cogdev/index.htm and has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Voluntary Sector

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1183–85W, on Government funding of the voluntary sector, if he will list the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the housing action trusts, *(c)* English Partnerships and *(d)* the regional development agencies distribute funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51409]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions does not hold information centrally on the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which it distributes funding to voluntary sector bodies. However, information in respect of the bodies specifically mentioned in the hon. Member's question is as follows:

(b) Housing Action Trusts give grants to support a wide range of local community groups and projects. Details are published in each Housing Action Trust's annual report and accounts. In 2000–01 the five trusts gave grants totalling approximately £1.1 million to support over 100 local initiatives.

(c) English Partnerships is not a significant contributor of funds to the voluntary sector.

(d) Regional development agencies currently provide Single Regeneration Budget funding to various regeneration partnerships who support projects that benefit the voluntary sector. Regional development agencies may also choose to provide support to the voluntary sector through their new single programme that started on 1 April 2002.

Housing (East Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what consideration he has given to the proposals submitted to him by local authorities in East Lancashire to tackle the problem of run-down and abandoned housing in the region. [50684]

Ms Keeble: The East Lancashire Housing Forum submitted in December 2001 a proposed programme to tackle the problem of low demand and abandoned housing in the area. The Government is considering the proposal in the context of the spending review, along with the proposal from various northern housing bodies for a housing market renewal fund.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 10 April that nine areas where the problems of low demand housing are most acute, of which East Lancashire is one, were being invited to work with Government to establish pathfinder projects to tackle low demand. Their aim will be to provide lasting solutions for communities blighted by derelict homes through investment and innovation. They will do this by developing a strategic approach for regenerating their sub-regional housing markets that will bring together key stakeholders, inform future investment, and test out new and innovative approaches to combating low demand.

A key element of the pathfinder projects' approach will be a unified agenda. Experience shows that it is not sufficient to tackle the housing problem alone. Local authorities must work closely together with their

partners—the police, the health authority, the Regional Development Agency, Housing Corporation and private sector—to rejuvenate our towns and cities.

Low demand and abandoned housing is a major problem. But it also provides a unique opportunity to restructure and rebuild our cities for the twenty-first century. We must now seize that opportunity. The Government will work with local people to deliver the change necessary and bring hope to those communities.

Blue Badge Scheme

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to extend the blue badge scheme of parking concessions for disabled people to people who are only temporarily disabled. [52294]

Ms Keeble: The administration of the Blue Badge Scheme is the responsibility of individual local authorities. When they have received the information they require to process an application they should be expected to do so without delay.

A comprehensive review of the Blue Badge Scheme is currently being undertaken by my Department, which will look at the administration of the Scheme and will also consider the case for temporary badges. Consultation on a discussion paper, which was issued to the main stakeholders, including disability organisations and local authorities, ended recently. The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC- our statutory advisers on the transport and mobility needs of disabled people) are considering responses and are due to report their recommendations to the Secretary of State around the end of this month. In the light of those recommendations we aim to decide on the way forward with the scheme over the summer.

Helicopter Rescue Services

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the contract for the supply of Maritime and Coastguard Agency helicopter rescue services at *(a)* Portland and *(b)* Lee on Solent will expire; whether the MCA intends to keep the arrangements as they are now; and when the MCA will sign a new contract. [51642]

Mr. Jamieson: The current contracts for the supply of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) civilian search and rescue helicopter services at Portland and Lee on Solent both expire on 13 May 2003.

The agency is considering future contracts and discussions about the detail are continuing.

Any new contracts should be signed by 12 May 2003 to ensure no break in the provision of the service.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has to upgrade facilities at *(a)* Lee on Solent and *(b)* Portland for the Maritime Rescue Helicopter Service. [51641]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is currently in discussion with relevant organisations regarding improvements at Lee on Solent and Portland but no firm decisions have been made.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which locations for helicopter rescue services the Maritime and Coastguard Agency funds; and if he will make a statement about the MCA's future plans for helicopter rescue services. [51640]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) funds contracted civilian search and rescue helicopter services at Stornoway, Sumburgh, Lee on Solent and Portland.

The MCA is currently engaged with the Ministry of Defence about the future provision of UK search and rescue helicopters with a view to harmonising the service in the future.

Rail Freight

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps have been taken by his Department and the SRA to introduce piggyback freight carriers on Britain's railways. [50906]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ms Walley) on 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1274W.

Railways

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 959W, on railways, how the figures in the baseline period compared to *(a)* the previous quarter, *(b)* the average for the previous year and *(c)* the average for the previous five years. [49837]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures on punctuality are available in "National Rail Trends", copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

The Department's rail performance indicators publication of 18 February contained information on serious Signals Passed at Danger (SPAD) in the first, second and third quarters of 2001–02 plus the rolling annual total at the end of each of these quarters. Information on serious SPADs for earlier periods is provided in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) SPAD reports available on the HSE website.

Information on average age of rolling stock at the end of the first, second and third quarters of 2001–02 was published in the second rail performance indicators report on 18 March. Average age of rolling stock is a new measure and information for earlier periods is not available.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has received a completed report from Mercer on the proposed future structure of regulation in the rail industry. [49872]

Mr. Jamieson: Mercer Management Consulting have been commissioned to carry out a wide-ranging consultation of the rail industry stakeholders to gather views about all aspects of the UK railways. This work is not yet completed.

Railway Stations

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new railway stations have been opened since rail privatisation; how many new stations were planned at the time Railtrack went into administration; whether, in administration, Railtrack is continuing to plan to open those stations; when work will commence on the new station at Corsham; and if he will make a statement. [52338]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that 24 new stations have been opened since the privatisation of Railtrack. A number of potential new stations are at various stages of feasibility evaluation and planning. During railway administration, the administrators are keeping the network operational and running Railtrack plc on a "business as usual" basis. This process includes the consideration of potential new stations.

I also understand that commercial agreements between all the parties involved in the project to build a new station at Corsham are close to being finalised, with a view to securing delivery of the station by May 2003.

Windoff

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on Railtrack and its successor body of the German manufacturer Windoff going into receivership. [51981]

Mr. Byers: Such matters are for the company to consider.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from *(a)* the SRA, *(b)* Railtrack plc, *(c)* Newtrack Rail and *(d)* the Office of the Rail Regulator regarding the potential repercussions resulting from Windoff going into receivership. [51982]

Mr. Byers: None.

Multi-Modal Studies

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when each of the modal studies proposed in the 10-year transport plan will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* published. [50041]

Mr. Jamieson: The multi-modal studies that have been completed and a final report published are as follows.

Multi-modal study and location	*Reported*
Access to Hastings	December 2000
Cambridge to Huntingdon (A14)	August 2001
South East Manchester (Stockport, Manchester Airport Link West, Poynton)	September 2001
West Midlands area (M5/M6 and M42 between M40 and M6)	October 2001

The following table shows expected completion/final report dates of the multi-modal studies that are currently in progress:

Study	*Date expected to report*
West Midlands to North West (M6)	May 2002
London to South West and South Wales (A303, M4)	May 2002
A1 (North of Newcastle)	May 2002
North/South movements in the East Midlands (M1 Junctions 21 to 30)	May 2002
Hull (East/West) corridor (A63 and A1033 to Port of Hull)	May 2002
A453 (M1 to J24 (Nottingham)	June 2002
South and West Yorkshire motorway box (M1 J30 to A1 West Yorks/M18/M62 and A1(M)	June 2002
Tyneside area (A1/A19)	June 2002
London to Ipswich (A12)	July 2002
South Coast (Southampton to Folkestone coastal corridor)—(M27, A27 & A259)	August 2002
M60 Junction 12–18 (West to North Manchester)	November 2002
Thames Valley (London to Reading—M4)	November 2002
ORBIT—Transport solutions around London (M25)	Autumn 2002
London to South Midlands (A1, M1, M11, A5 and A421)	December 2002
Norwich to Peterborough (A47)	February 2003
West Midlands to East Midlands (A42/M42 to M6 corridor and M69 and A38)	April 2003

The final two multi-modal studies have yet to commence. Dates have yet to be confirmed although we would expect these to report by end of 2003/early 2004.

Multi-modal study and location

A52 (clifton Bridge to Bingham, Nottinghamshire)

A34 (North from Southampton).

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the titles of the officials from DTLR, the Government Offices for the Regions and the Highways Agency who attended the DTLR multi-modal study infrastructure charging seminar on 1 February; [52088]

(2) when the summary papers for the DTLR multi-modal study infrastructure charging seminar on 1 February were produced. [52087]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The summary papers were produced at the end of January and early February. The titles of those attending are Director, Divisional Manager, Branch Head, Senior Executive Officer, Higher Executive Officer, Network Strategy Manager, MMS Project Manager, Assistant Project Manager, MMS Technical Director.

NATS

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made by his Department of the changes which have taken place within National Air Traffic Services since the beginning of the PPP; and if he will make a statement. [46339]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department, as a major shareholder in NATS, is in regular contact with the company itself and other interested parties regarding the development of NATS since the inception of the PPP. We are confident that the new NATS management will secure the necessary improvements in efficiency and project management.

UK Port Security

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what arrangements have been made for co-ordinating security measures for UK ports with the Royal Navy since 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement; [52104]

(2) what assessment has been made of security risks regarding maritime container traffic since 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement; [52105]

(3) what proportion of UK ports were not in receipt of TRANSEC advice prior to 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement; [52108]

(4) what recent assessment has been made of measures required in respect of protective security for UK ports; and if he will make a statement. [52107]

Mr. Jamieson: Under paragraph 1 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the practice to disclose details of security matters.

Roads (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what resources he will make available to Gloucestershire county council to upgrade the A436 prior to de-trunking the A40; and if he will make a statement. [52935]

Mr. Jamieson: The A436 is a local road for which Gloucestershire county council is the local highway authority. The Government have allocated £16,489,000 to the county council to maintain and improve the local transport infrastructure within the county in the 2002–03 financial year. It is for the county council to decide if it wishes to use part of this allocation to fund improvements to the A436.

Road Accidents

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries have resulted from road accidents involving (i) the Fire Service and (ii) police cars; and how much compensation has been paid, in each of the last five years. [52249]

Dr. Whitehead: Information on deaths, serious injuries and compensation, resulting from road accidents involving the fire service is not held centrally. Chief Fire Officers may be able to provide this information relative to their own brigades

Information relating to the police is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many road accident casualties involving *(a)* fatal injuries, *(b)* serious injuries and *(c)* slight injuries there were in (i) St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council area, (ii) Merseyside and (iii) the Northwest in each year from 1992 to 2001. [51619]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of people killed and injured in road accidents in (i) St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council area, (ii) Merseyside and (iii) the Northwest are shown in the following table.

Road accident casualties: 1999–2000

Year of accident	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*
St. Helens			
1992	10	105	943
1993	10	99	961
1994	14	90	1,105
1995	8	89	952
1996	8	102	1,053
1997	6	99	1,107
1998	10	94	1,035
1999	13	98	1,192
2000	14	72	1,099
Merseyside			
1992	77	993	9,071
1993	71	927	9,439
1994	76	847	9,228
1995	60	763	8,350
1996	66	792	8,793
1997	55	783	9,143
1998	50	713	9,051
1999	55	633	9,271
2000	71	688	9,139
North-West[1]			
1992	501	4,875	37,602
1993	440	4,753	37,935
1994	426	5,389	39,421
1995	418	5,280	37,922
1996	389	5,110	39,318
1997	376	4,875	41,261
1998	355	4,237	41,223
1999	360	4,045	40,345
2000	370	3,931	40,213

[1] Government Office Region (including Merseyside)
Note:
Figures are not yet available for 2001.

Rural Bus Challenge Fund

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will redesignate the Rural Bus Challenge Fund to include *(a)* taxis and *(b)* ferries. [52445]

Ms Keeble: The guidance issued to local authorities on the Rural Bus Challenge scheme already makes clear that the term "bus" will be broadly interpreted to cover a broad range of road-based public transport. It can include for example projects involving taxi buses or shared taxis and a number of such schemes have been supported with Challenge funding.

We however have no plans to extend the scheme to include non-road transport.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Further Education

9. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she last met the Association of Colleges to discuss further education funding and delivery. [50354]

Margaret Hodge: DFES Ministers have met representatives of the Association of Colleges (AoC) on a number of occasions in recent months. The Secretary of State met David Gibson and other representatives from the AoC on 11 February where a wide range of issues relating to FE was discussed. I last met the AoC on 11 April to discuss issues including FE pay and funding.

13. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for increasing funding to further education colleges; and if she will make a statement. [50358]

John Healey: We are making available over £4.2 billion for further education in 2002–03, a 3 per cent. real terms increase. We are looking to the current spending review to deliver the resources we need to meet the Government's ambitions for further education in 2003–04 and beyond.

16. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action her Department is taking to widen participation in further education in this financial year. [50362]

John Healey: Further education plays a key role in driving forward growth in participation and achievement, by providing high quality vocational and academic routes. This year we are investing over £4.2 billion in further education, a 3 per cent. real terms increase on last year and this will enable the Learning and Skills Council to fund a 2.9 per cent. growth in full-time equivalent students in the sector. The Council has recently submitted a report to the Government on its plans for widening participation and we will be working jointly with the LSC to implement this.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what priority she gives to 16 to 18 education in *(a)* schools and *(b)* colleges of further education. [50353]

Mr. Timms: We assign an equally high priority to education in schools and colleges. My hon. and learned Friend will know that the 14–19 Green Paper sets out our aim that schools and colleges should collaborate to provide all young people with an extended range of opportunities from age 14.

School Funding

11. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received about Government funding for schools. [50356]

Mr. Timms: We have received a number of representations about education funding. We are currently working up a new funding system for introduction in 2003–04. Our aim is not only to make funding fairer, justified by the education needs of children, but to make it clearer as well. In the meantime, we are continuing to make significant increases in education funding overall.

Literacy and Numeracy Skills

12. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress is being made to reduce the number of adults lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills. [50357]

John Healey: This Government recognise the vital importance of improving adult basic skills. Since Skills for Life, our national strategy, was launched last year, we have made significant progress. This includes piloting a number of new initiatives, including one in my hon. Friend's constituency, to determine what works best in helping adults improve their skills. Participation by adults in basic skills courses is increasing and from April to October 2001 over 91,000 adults improved their skills.

Higher Education

14. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment her Department has made of recent trends in higher education take-up, particularly in areas of low take-up. [50359]

Margaret Hodge: The Higher Education Funding Council for England has consulted on its plans to ensure sufficient supply and demand for higher education over the rest of the decade, based on a through analysis of trends over the past 20 years. The latest data from the University and Colleges Admissions Service indicate an increase in applications in 2002 compared with last year, a welcome step towards our 50 per cent. target by 2010.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she will take to improve full time applications for higher education from mature students since 1996. [49807]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* We are determined to widen access as we expand numbers. The latest UCAS figures show a 9.5 per cent. increase in the number of mature students from the UK who entered higher education in September 2001 and UCAS has reported a 4.6 per cent. increase in the number of mature applicants from the UK for September 2002.

We have put a number of initiatives in place, including foundation degrees which are new vocational qualifications to address the skills gap, as well as New Technology Institutes which are being set up in each English region. They are partnerships between higher education (HE), further education (FE) and business to provide specialist information and communication technology (ICT) and other high technology learning programmes. We are also developing new ways to access higher education through the "e-Universities" project, which will provide the flexibility many mature students need.

In addition we have provided substantial extra resources for mature students including a child care grant, travel, books and equipment grant and access bursaries for student parents. A single parent with two young children can now get over £16,000 with full student loan and other grants. Our measures have contributed towards the welcome increase in mature student numbers.

Institutions receive a funding premium for all students aged 25 and over in recognition of the additional cost of supporting such students. We are also encouraging the important role that FE has to play in delivering HE, where FE colleges are already significant providers. They offer degree and other provision to wider groups, many of whom are mature students who may not be able to attend a university but can attend the local college.

Teachers (Early Leavers)

15. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the recent research she has commissioned into the reasons for teachers leaving the profession. [50360]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend has commissioned Professor Alan Smithers and Dr. Pamela Robinson, from the University of Liverpool Centre for Education and Employment Research to undertake research into the factors affecting teachers' decisions to leave the profession. The research commenced in December 2001 and we expect the report to be published in March 2003.

School Spending (Wiltshire)

17. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent per *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary pupil in Wiltshire in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 2001–02. [50363]

Mr. Timms: Wiltshire spent £1,690 per primary pupil and £2,260 per secondary pupil in 1997–98. Information for 2001–02 is not yet available.

GCSE Performance Targets

18. **Dr. Ladyman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to ensure all schools in selective education authority areas achieve their GCSE performance targets. [50364]

Mr. Timms: We have put in place a support programme targeted at all mainstream secondary schools where fewer than 25 per cent. of pupils gain at least 5 A*-C grades at GCSE including: financial support through the school improvement grant; Excellence in Cities or Education Action Zones; Ofsted monitoring visits; advice and guidance on good practice; a pilot project for trainee head teachers and an Action Research Project involving eight schools facing extremely challenging circumstances.

School Grants

19. **Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about the system of distributing grants to schools in 2003–04. [50365]

Mr. Timms: We are currently working up proposals for a reformed system of school and LEA funding for introduction in 2003–04. We aim to create a simpler, more transparent and fairer formula that reflects fairly, on the basis of up to date evidence, the needs of authorities in different parts of the country. We expect to consult on proposals for the new system in the summer.

Scientific Research

20. **Mr. McWalter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to ensure that the results of the research assessment exercise do not lead to a lowering of the resources devoted to scientific research. [50366]

Margaret Hodge: The funding distributed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England using the outcome of the research assessment exercise in science, engineering and medical subjects increased from £583.2 million in 2001–02 to £613.1 million in 2002–03. This funding is passed to higher education institutions as part of a block grant and it is for them to determine their spending priorities.

Teaching Assistants

21. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with the teachers' unions regarding the role of teaching assistants. [50367]

Mr. Timms: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg).

Mentoring

22. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for extending mentoring in schools. [50368]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: By the end of this school year some 3,800 Learning Mentors will be working in over 1,000 primary pilot schools and 1,000 secondary schools as part of the Excellence in Cities initiative. An extra £19 million is being made available to existing Excellence in Cities areas to extend their Learning Mentor provision from September; and a further 12 Excellence Clusters will operate from September, serving smaller pockets of deprivation and bringing Learning Mentors to more schools. My Department also funds the National Mentoring Network to promote and develop high quality volunteer mentoring for young people, including support for peer mentoring in 150 secondary schools from October 2002. Together with the Home Office Active Community Unit, we are funding seven Mentor Points—one stop shops for those wishing to become or access a volunteer mentor—three of which focus on provision in schools.

Teacher Recruitment (London)

23. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the support she offers for recruitment of teachers in London, with special reference to allowing for the cost of living. [50369]

Mr. Timms: London allowances for teachers increased by 30 per cent. last year, and by a further 3.5 per cent. this April. The allowance for a teacher in inner London is now £3,105. London teachers will also benefit from shortening of the main pay scale from 9 points to 6, which will mean more rapid progression to the threshold. Assimilation to this new scale will mean significant benefits for many teachers from 1 September this year. For example, an inner London teacher now on £25,911 will receive £28,818 on the new scale—a basic pay increase of over 11 per cent., in addition to the 3.5 per cent. received on 1 April this year.

For post-threshold classroom teachers in inner London, salaries are now at £30,966 before any additions for management responsibilities or recruitment and retention allowances. Schools may pay recruitment and retention allowances of up to £5,262 per annum, both for threshold and main scale teachers.

It is open to local authorities to help teachers with housing, relocation or travel costs. We are helping with more than £42 million available direct to London schools in 2001–02 and 2002–03 through our Recruitment and Retention Fund. We also expect that more than 1,500 teachers in the London area will have benefited from our new Starter Homes Initiative by 2004. We have also recently funded the establishment of a teacher recruitment and retention Unit within the Government Office for London, which will focus initially on affordable housing for teachers.

Teacher Work Load

24. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to reduce the amount of centrally produced work load for teachers. [50370]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg).

26. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent discussions she has had on the reduction of teachers' work loads with teaching unions; and if she will make a statement. [50372]

29. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she is taking to ease the burden of teachers' work loads. [50375]

Mr. Timms: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg).

32. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she next expects to meet representatives of teachers' organisations to discuss plans to reduce burdens on teachers; and if she will make a statement. [50378]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg).

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to reduce paperwork for teachers. [50361]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg).

Vocational Subjects

25. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for GCSEs in vocational subjects. [50371]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Eight new GCSEs in vocational subjects will be introduced in September 2002. Beyond this our proposals for their development are contained in the Green Paper "14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards". Our plans for the new qualifications will depend on the findings of the consultation.

School Sports Facilities

27. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of sports facilities in secondary schools. [50373]

John Healey: The Department has not carried out its own assessment of sports facilities in secondary schools, but as part of the data collected from local education authorities' asset management plans, the Department has some information on the suitability of internal PE spaces. It also has some information on external sports areas and school playing fields, which is currently being appraised. Depending on the reliability of the information, we plan to publish analyses later in the year to provide a basis for benchmarking.

Teachers' Pay

28. **Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to change the system of performance-related pay for teachers in England and Wales. [50374]

Mr. Timms: There are no plans to change the statutory arrangements for awarding performance pay points to teachers set out in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document, which applies to England and Wales. However, the funding arrangements for England have recently been modified. The revised arrangements are set out in a statement made on 5 April, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. Funding in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly.

Tertiary Education (Eastern Region)

30. **Barbara Follett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps her Department is taking to increase participation in tertiary education in the eastern region. [50376]

Margaret Hodge: We are investing substantially in a wide range of policies to raise participation among 16 to 18-year-olds. The Learning and Skills Council has a statutory duty to promote the participation of individuals in post-16 education and training and have allocated it national budget of £3,932 million for 2002–03 for this.

We have put in place measures that provide the support and incentives young people need to take up and succeed in learning. The Connexions Service provides impartial information, advice and guidance to young people on the full range of learning options open to them up to 19 and beyond. We are addressing the financial barriers to participation through piloting education maintenance allowances; providing discretionary funding targeted at specific learning needs and the Connexions card, which will offer discounts on transport and learning materials.

We have also recently published the 14–19 Green Paper: "Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards", which proposes giving young people a range of high quality, general, mixed and vocational options to support our aim to end the culture of leaving education for good at age 16.

Educational Performance

31. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to raise standards at key stage 3. [50377]

33. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on initiatives to improve educational performance among 11 to 14-years-olds. [50379]

Mr. Timms: Our plans to transform secondary education include a major programme to help schools improve the attainment of all 11 to 14-year-olds, as confirmed by the Secretary of State in her recent DEMOS speech. The key stage 3 strategy sets high expectations and challenging targets. It aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom by investing in teachers' professional development. We are supporting expenditure on the strategy of around £500 million from 2001–02 to 2003–04.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33866]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1266W.

Special Educational Needs

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the special schools in each county in England and the numbers of children with special needs attending each school in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1991. [37420]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Tables containing the available information have been placed in the Library. These relate to information published in performance tables for 1996 and 2001. Performance tables were not produced in 1991.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what targets she sets for *(a)* measuring and *(b)* improving teaching standards in schools for children with special needs, with particular regard to children with autistic spectrum disorders. [51200]

(2) what steps she is taking to improve the collation of data in respect of children with autistic spectrum disorders; what she is doing to increase resources for their education; and if she will make a statement. [51201]

(3) what steps are being taken to improve autism awareness among teachers. [51202]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our target is for all children with special educational needs (SEN) to receive excellent provision which meets their needs. Maintained schools are under a duty to use their best endeavours to make the special educational provision children's learning difficulties call for, including children with autistic spectrum disorders. Teachers have a crucial role in meeting this duty. As part of the continuous improvement we seek in teaching standards, we want to see the support given by teachers to children with special educational needs (SEN), including those with autistic spectrum disorder, brought up to the standards of the best throughout the country and in all schools. Ofsted has a regular cycle of inspection of maintained schools, non-maintained special schools and independent schools which cater wholly or mainly for children with SEN, including schools which make provision for children with autistic spectrum disorders. In determining their judgments Ofsted inspectors have to consider the extent to which pupils with SEN are making progress and how well the teaching meets pupils' diverse needs.

As part of their initial teacher training, all student teachers must show that they understand their responsibilities under the SEN Code of Practice, and know how to seek advice. During induction teachers must demonstrate that they can plan effectively to meet the needs of pupils with SEN. £91 million of supported expenditure is available under the SEN category of the Department's Standards Fund. Training is an important sub-head under this category and training in autism is specifically mentioned in guidance on the SEN category as something which local education authorities (LEAs) may wish to support. Grant support has also been made available to voluntary organisations and higher education training providers to create new training opportunities and, again, autistic spectrum disorders are mentioned in the bidding criteria.

The forthcoming publication of guidance from the Department's Autism Working Group will further raise teachers' awareness of the disorder. The guidance will emphasise the benefits of staff who come into contact with children with autistic spectrum disorders having an understanding of the condition. The guidance will help schools and LEAs to make best use of the increasing resources available annually for the education of school children when making provision for children with autistic spectrum disorders. Currently more than £23 billion is available for the education of children in school of which over £1 billion is used by LEAs to provide additional support for children with SEN and some £1.9 billion is identified by LEAs as notionally allocated in schools' budgets towards meeting children's SEN. The guidance will emphasise the benefits of LEAs collecting data on the numbers of children with autistic spectrum disorders. The Department is also examining whether data on different types of SEN could be collected, probably from January 2004. At present there are 12 commonly used categories of SEN. These categories include pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and this would be one of the categories we are likely to collect.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by her Department in each of the last four years. [38933]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department's cost for *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services in each of the last four years is as follows:

	£
In-house	
2000–01	119,541
1999–2000	130,437
1998–99	111,766
1997–98	[1]—
Other catering services	
2000–01	535,188
1999–2000	408,026
1998–99	337,961
1997–98	273,291

[1] No figures available

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the job advertisements placed by her Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39056]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department placed approximately 65 job advertisements in a wide variety of national, local and specialist media in the last 12 months. The media used most regularly included the *Guardian*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Times Educational Supplement*, the *Evening Standard*, *The Voice*, the Ethnic Media Group of Newspapers and the *Pink Paper*.

A more complete answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Modern Languages

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals she has to provide resources to recruit more teachers of modern foreign languages to adult learners. [48234]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* We propose to provide additional resources to assist further education colleges and other post-16 learning institutions to recruit and retain teachers in shortage subjects. The resources will cover the introduction of 'Golden Hello' payments and, subject to the passing of legislation by Parliament, help to pay off, over time, the student loans of newly appointed teachers in shortage subjects. We are currently consulting on the list of shortage subjects which includes modern foreign languages.

Engineering Ambassadors Scheme

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the terms of reference are of the engineering ambassadors scheme; and if she will make a statement. [49848]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Science and engineering ambassadors will build on, strengthen and expand existing work around the country bringing young people and teachers together with people who use science, technology, engineering, and mathematics skills in their careers. It aims to show young people the links between what they learn at school and the world of work, and to give them an understanding of science/engineering career opportunities.

Science and engineering ambassadors (SEAs) has been jointly developed by this Department and DTI colleagues. It was launched jointly by my noble Friends the Minister for Early Years and School Standards and the Minister for Science on 31 January, initially as part of Science Year but is expected to become a permanent activity—a legacy of Science Year. A copy of the SEAs brochure will be placed in the Libraries and more information is available on www.setnet.org.uk.

Trainee Doctors

Mr. Mole: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she intends to take in co-operation with the Department of Health to rationalise student finance for trainee doctors. [49907]

Margaret Hodge: It has been agreed with the Department of Health that, from academic year 2002–03, undergraduate medical and dental students should in year five and any subsequent year of their course become eligible for a means-tested NHS bursary of up to £2,640 a year in London and £2,148 elsewhere and a reduced-rate student loan of up to £2,365 a year in London and £1,915 elsewhere.

For the first four years of their course, medical and dental students will be entitled to loans from the Student Loans Company like other higher education students and they are assessed for a contribution to tuition fees. However, from year five they will not pay any contribution to tuition fees.

In addition, they will also continue to receive extra weeks allowances throughout the course to take account of their longer academic year.

This enhanced package of support recognises that medical and dental training programmes are longer than average; and it should help to guarantee the supply of newly qualified staff.

Tuition Fees

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether figures are available which indicate the number of students who are eligible to pay tuition fees and who do not receive the required contribution from their parents. [49803]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* In England and Wales students on undergraduate courses and their families are expected to make a contribution towards their tuition fees only if they can afford to do so.

In academic year 1999–2000, the latest year for which data are available, the number of higher education students (both dependent and independent) eligible for support was 479,000.

The only data available on parental contributions to tuition fees come from the Student Income and Expenditure Survey in 1998–99 when only first-year students were liable to pay tuition fees. In that survey four in five students, whose parents had been assessed for a contribution, said that they had received the full amount. However, the survey also showed that the parental contribution to students' maintenance was on average £348 more than the assessed amount.

Graduate Debt

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the average level of graduate debt, broken down by social class. [49808]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The average debt of a borrower with a mortgage-style student loan taken out under the previous Government's student support arrangements starting repayment status in 1999–2000 was £3,210. The amount available to students through student loans has increased under the loan-based support system introduced in August 1998. So the average debt of a borrower with a new income-contingent loan entering repayment status in April 2002 has increased and is estimated to be some £6,100. Repayments of income-contingent loans will be linked to graduates' income after leaving higher education so they repay only when their income exceeds the threshold of £10,000 per annum. Interest on student loans is linked to inflation so that borrowers repay, in real terms, only the amount borrowed. The data are not available by social class.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many contracts her Department has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether she can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions she has had with other Government Departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50827]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The information on the number of contracts my Department has with consultants could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

With regard to professional indemnity insurance, my Department's model contract for purchases asks for 'unlimited liability'. As developed by HM Treasury my officials are, however, always prepared to negotiate with contractors and agree a limit of professional indemnity appropriate to the level of risk associated with each individual contract.

It is not the Government's practice to provide details of discussions which form part of the process of policy development and analysis, therefore I am unable to answer your final question.

Specialist Status Schools

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the targets agreed by Sir Thomas Rich's school, Gloucestershire LEA, at the time of its acquisition of specialist status, identifying those not yet achieved. [52144]

Mr. Timms: Sir Thomas Rich's school has been operating as a language college since September 2000. The information requested is being collated. I will therefore write to the hon. Member as soon as possible giving a full reply to the question raised.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the targets agreed by Our Lady's Convent high school, London borough of Hackney LEA, at the time of its acquisition of specialist status, identifying those not achieved. [52143]

Mr. Timms: Our Lady's Convent high school has been operating as a language college since September 1999. The information requested is being collated. I will therefore write to the hon. Member as soon as possible giving a full reply to the question raised.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the targets agreed by Bournemouth school, Bournemouth LEA, at the time of its acquisition of specialist status, identifying those which are not yet achieved. [52142]

Mr. Timms: Bournemouth school has been operating as a language college since September 2000. The information requested is being collated. I will therefore write to the hon. Member as soon as possible giving a full reply to the question raised.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the targets agreed by Katharine Lady Berkeley's school, Gloucestershire LEA, at the time of its acquisition of specialist status, identifying those not yet achieved. [52405]

Mr. Timms: Katharine Lady Berkeley's school has been operating as a language college since September 1996. The information requested is being collated. I will therefore write to the hon. Member as soon as possible giving a full reply to the question raised.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the targets agreed by Pate's Grammar School, Gloucestershire LEA, at the time of its acquisition of specialist status, identifying those not yet achieved. [52404]

Mr. Timms: Pate's Grammar School has been operating as a language college since September 2001. The information requested is being collated. I will therefore write to the hon. Member as soon as possible giving a full reply to the question raised.

Employers' NI Contributions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional costs she estimates Ofsted will incur as a result of the increase in employers' national insurance contributions in 2003–04. [52520]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for HM Chief Inspector of Schools and I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Teacher Recruitment

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of the teachers brought into the profession since 1997 had no teacher training qualifications. [50936]

Mr. Timms: 7.2 per cent. of the teachers who joined the teachers pension scheme and taught for the first time in the English maintained schools sector between

31 March 1997 and 31 March 2000 did not have qualified teacher status (QTS) at 31 March 2000. These figures are the most recent available and are provisional.

Some teachers gain QTS after entering the profession.

IT Skills

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals she has to improve IT skills among mature students. [50349]

John Healey: The Department for Education and Skills is committed to enabling people to learn later in life and to widening access to ICT skills. By the end of 2002 there will be over 6,000 UK online centres throughout England with access points in public libraries, colleges, local community centres and elsewhere. Older people are one of the key client groups for this initiative. In addition there are over 1,600 learndirect centres, which along with FE colleges and adult and community learning centres, offer opportunities for older learners to improve their ICT skills.

Sixth Forms and Colleges

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the direct payments made to secondary schools announced in the Budget will be made to sixth form colleges. [52344]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in the Budget an additional £85 million investment in 2002–03 in school and college buildings in England. Sixth form colleges will receive a proportionate share.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Road Deaths

37. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make it a requirement in court cases involving a road fatality that this fact is made known to the court prior to the sentence being made. [50383]

The Solicitor-General: Where a person is prosecuted for a road traffic offence, such as causing death by dangerous driving, in which the causing of a death is an essential ingredient of the offence, evidence of the death will always be presented to the court.

Where a driver is convicted of some other road traffic offence, such as careless driving, where evidence of a death does not need to be proved in order to secure a conviction, the Crown Prosecution Service will, none the less, bring the death to the notice of the court because they will follow the Court of Appeal guidance which requires them to set out all the relevant facts, including the fact that a death occurred, when presenting their case to the court.

Young Offenders

38. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Solicitor-General how many young people under 17 appeared before the courts in relation to more than three different matters in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [50385]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service does not hold this information centrally. However, what I can say is that in relation to persistent young offenders annual figures for 2001 show that the pledge, to halve the time from arrest to sentence, was met, including the last three consecutive months. In 1997 it took 142 days from arrest to sentence. Overall, over the last 12 months the figures went from 91 days arrest to sentence down to 67 days.

41. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment she has made of the number of young offenders who offended while on bail over the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [50388]

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend will know that the Home Secretary is working with the police to ensure that young offenders do not commit further offences while on bail. The information that he requests is not available in the form he asks for.

42. **Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Solicitor-General what her policy is on the prosecution of young offenders for car-related crimes. [50389]

The Solicitor-General: The principal aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by children and young people. The Crown Prosecution Service is responsible for most youth prosecutions in England and Wales and prosecutes all youth cases according to the aim and principles set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors.

A youth will be prosecuted if a Crown Prosecutor is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction and that the public interest requires a prosecution, irrespective of the type of offence that has been committed. Crown Prosecutors must consider the interests of a child or young person when deciding whether the public interest requires a prosecution but should not avoid prosecuting simply on the basis of the age of the offender. The seriousness and prevalence of the offence and the youth's past behaviour are recognised factors in favour of prosecution.

Youths who admit an offence and have not previously been convicted of an offence will usually not be prosecuted but will be reprimanded or warned by the police. This system of reprimands and final warnings was introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and is designed to stop offending at an early stage and enables a young person to take part in a rehabilitation programme. The police have issued a matrix of "gravity factors" which is used to assess the appropriate action to be taken with reference to the seriousness of the offence under consideration and the offender's previous record.

"Car related crime" is a wide term that covers a range of offences of varying seriousness. Therefore, offences of car related crime will be graded at different levels of seriousness within the police guidelines, leading to different decisions concerning the appropriate way to proceed depending on the seriousness of the offence and the circumstances of the youth offender involved.

Rape

39. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Solicitor-General what plans she has to increase the percentage of reported rapes that are referred to the CPS and result in a court appearance. [50386]

The Solicitor-General: The key to reporting rape is the confidence that the victim has that the criminal justice system will take the allegation seriously. That involves concerted action by the criminal justice system as a whole in the investigation and prosecution of rape. One of the important issues in the appropriate referral of cases by police to the CPS is early legal advice to police preferably before charge.

Incitement to Racial Hatred

40. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Solicitor-General what criteria the CPS adopts in prosecuting individuals for incitement to racial hatred. [50387]

The Solicitor-General: Each case which the police send to the Crown Prosecution Service—involving an allegation of incitement to racial hatred—is reviewed by a Crown Prosecutor. All cases are carefully considered to make sure that they meet the tests set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors.

There are two stages in the decision to prosecute. The first stage is the evidential test. The Crown Prosecutor must be satisfied that there is enough evidence to provide a "realistic prospect of conviction". He must consider objectively whether the evidence can be used and is reliable. The Crown Prosecutor must also consider what the defence case may be and how it is likely to affect the prosecution case. A "realistic prospect of conviction" means that a jury or bench of magistrates, properly directed in accordance with the law, is more likely than not to convict the defendant of the charge alleged.

If the case does not pass the evidential test, it must not go ahead, no matter how important or serious it may be. Ordinarily, if the case does pass the evidential test, the Crown Prosecutor must then consider the second stage test to decide if a prosecution is needed in the public interest. In cases of any seriousness, a prosecution will usually take place, unless there are public interest factors tending against prosecution which clearly outweigh those tending in favour. The Crown Prosecution Service will start or continue a prosecution only when the case has passed both tests.

However, offences brought under Part III of the Public Order Act require the Attorney General's consent to prosecute—so whether or not the public interest requires a prosecution is a matter for the Attorney-General.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the United Kingdom's policy is with regard to the possible use of Britain's nuclear weapons to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction against British territory, armed forces or civilians; [51139]

(2) whether it is his Department's policy to rule out the use of Britain's nuclear weapons in response to the use of chemical or biological weapons against British forces overseas. [51140]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the answer I gave on 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 30W, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith).

Outreach Programme

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Outreach programme of the Defence Diplomacy Mission since July 1998. [51258]

Mr. Ingram: The Government are committed to strengthening stability and security in central and eastern Europe, the Caucasus and central Asia by offering assistance with defence and security sector reform. The Outreach programme was launched by the Ministry of Defence in the early 1990s to engage the 27 countries of the former Warsaw pact, the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia in defence cooperation relationships. Centred in the Defence Diplomacy Mission, the Outreach programme seeks to assist in the development of stable, sovereign and democratic states throughout the region through its programmes of bilateral defence cooperation.

At the highest level, a principal measure of the success of the Outreach programme is the accession to NATO of countries it supports. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland secured membership of NATO in 1999; and a further nine countries—Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Albania, Macedonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania—are candidates for NATO membership this year.

More generally, across the region Outreach has been successful in:

Developing a major programme of English language training (ELT);

Seconding civilian and military special defence advisers to assist directly with the defence reform process in host nation Ministries of Defence;

Establishing a British Military Assistance Training Team (BMATT), based in the Czech Republic but providing training for the countries in the region;

Providing individual and collective military training both in-country and in the UK;

Providing resettlement training in Russia for over 13,000 retiring and redundant Russian military officers at seven centres around Russia;

Contributing positively to multinational initiatives, such as the Baltic Defence College, the Baltic Battalion and the Baltic (Naval) squadron;

The development of robust and valued bilateral relationships with countries across the region.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have been enrolled in the Defence Diplomacy Scholarship at the Joint Services Command and Staff College in each year since 1998; how many have graduated from the scholarship in each year since 1998; and if he will make a statement. [51254]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Diplomacy Scholarship Scheme was one of the initiatives announced in the Strategic Defence Review. The scheme provides an opportunity for foreign military officers and Government officials to study for an Msc in Global Security or undertake the Managing Defence in a Democratic Market Based Society short course, at Cranfield University at the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham.

Since the inception of the scheme in July 1999 the number of students that have enrolled and graduated on each course under the scheme are:

Msc in Global Security

Academic year 1999–2000—10 students

Academic year 2000–01—12 students

Academic year 2001–02—11 students (course finishes August 2002)

Managing Defence in a Democratic Market Based Society short course

7 February to 24 March 2000—30 students

12 March to 27 April 2001—26 students

4 June to 19 July 2001—26 students

24 September to 9 November 2001—23 students

11 March to 26 April 2002—20 students.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many short-term training teams were sent out under his Department's Outreach programme in each year since 1995, stating in each case *(a)* the destination, *(b)* the number of personnel involved, *(c)* the purpose of the mission, *(d)* the cost of the mission and *(e)* the duration of the mission; and if he will make a statement; [51257]

(2) how many attachments were made under his Department's Outreach programme in each year since 1995, stating in each case *(a)* the destination of the attachment, *(b)* the number of personnel involved, *(c)* the purpose of the attachment, *(d)* the cost to his Department and *(e)* the duration of the attachment; and if he will make a statement; [51256]

(3) how many training courses have been set up under his Department's Outreach programme in each year since 1995, stating in each case *(a)* where the training course was set up, *(b)* the number of personnel involved, *(c)* the purpose of the training course, *(d)* the cost to his Department and *(e)* the duration of the course; and if he will make a statement. [51255]

Mr. Ingram: As part of the Defence diplomacy mission, the Outreach programme of bilateral defence co-operation in Central and Eastern Europe contributes to international stability by assisting countries in the region to establish democratically accountable, cost effective armed forces capable of contributing both to national and regional security and, increasingly, to international security through participation in peace support operations. Training courses, attachments and short-term training teams are core components of the Outreach programme, and the full details requested by the hon. Member will take time to assemble. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Specialist Support

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the instances since July 1998 where his Department or the armed forces have been required to offer specialist support to the civil authorities stating in each case the number of personnel involved and the duration of the mission; and if he will make a statement. [51261]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces provide military assistance to the civil authorities (MACA) on a daily basis. The assistance includes, for instance, search and rescue, and support to the police in the identification and disposal of explosive devices. The assistance provided to the Police Service of Northern Ireland also falls under the general heading of MACA. The total number of individual tasks undertaken since July 1998 runs into the thousands. Detailed records of many of these activities are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. There have, however, been a number of large-scale and high profile emergency tasks, details of which are in the table.

	Regular forces			
Operation and duration	*Army*	*RN*[1]	*RAF*	*TA*
Fuel dispute September 2000	600	15	66	0
Fuel On standby November 2000	1,301	162	537	0
Floods October-November 2000	[2]1,100	15	218	154
Foot and Mouth[3] March-October 2001	1,907	178	91	[4]266
Merseyside Fire Strike July 2001	151	191	191	0

[1] Including RM

[2] About

[3] This serial records the maximum number of regulars deployed on a single day during the foot and mouth crisis and the total number of TA soldiers deployed throughout the crisis.

[4] It is possible that the figure may count some individuals involved more than once in support of MAFF/DEFRA, as two individuals.

Support and Humanitarian Operations

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of UK front-line capability was available to the United Nations for peace support and humanitarian operations in *(a)* July 1998 and *(b)* April 2002; and if he will make a statement. [51488]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom does not earmark specific forces for peacekeeping operations, but under the UN's standby arrangements system, designed to facilitate the rapid deployment of forces once political decisions have been made, we have declared a range of forces with information on capabilities and readiness. We announced, as part of the Strategic Defence Review, our intention to declare the full range of our rapidly deployable forces, additional strategic lift and logistics capabilities as potentially available to the UN. This new declaration was incorporated into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which the Government signed with the UN in June 1999.

The MOU makes it clear that we would be prepared to consider the provision of forces up to a full brigade size to meet the specific needs of a UN operation. It is not possible to say precisely which of the forces listed in the MOU are available at any one time. The exact availability of the forces for peacekeeping depends on a range of factors, not least other continuing and known future commitments. The decision to commit United Kingdom forces to any UN operation will continue to be a national one.

Unexploded Ordnance (Kenya)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to ensure that

unexploded ordnance is removed from the sites of Army training exercises in Kenya once the exercises are completed. [49727]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made on 18 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 400–02.

Afghanistan

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the exchange of fire between ISAF forces and members of the Afghan police force which took place on the night of 12 April. [52044]

Mr. Hoon: On the night of 12 April, two observation posts in west Kabul manned by solders from 1 Royal Anglian Regiment came under fire from 30–40 men. During the subsequent exchange of fire, most of these men fled on foot; seven were detained and disarmed. Five of these were dressed in police uniforms, one in combat fatigues and one in civilian clothing. All were handed over to the Afghan Interim Administration in accordance with the Military Technical Agreement.

Despite this incident, there has been a significant improvement in the security and stability of Kabul under the Interim Administration. The ISAF has played a crucial role in this process.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the medical manning and retention review examining the Defence Medical Services to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [51809]

Dr. Moonie: The medical manning and retention review is due to be completed in time to inform the Ministry of Defence paper of evidence to the Armed Force Pay Review Body for the 2003 pay round. The overall aim of the review is to propose effective policies for medical and dental officers, covering both remuneration and other issues, that will help to achieve a satisfactory manning balance, and, thus, delivery of the required Defence medical outputs.

Service Personnel

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* Royal Air Force are claiming (i) working families tax credit and (ii) children's tax credit; and if he will make a statement. [51807]

Mr. Ingram: Statistics regarding the number of service personnel currently claiming children's tax credit are not held as applications are made by the individual direct to the Inland Revenue. The number of service personnel currently claiming working families tax credit is as follows:

	Working families tax credit[1]
Army	1,718
Royal Navy	73
Royal Air Force	345

[1] An employer will usually be expected to take responsibility for paying tax credits 14 days after a notification is sent by the Inland Revenue (IR) for weekly paid employees, and 42 days after notification is sent in all other cases. The IR pays tax credits up to the point at which the employer takes responsibility. Consequently, the statistics provided will not include those personnel in receipt of working families tax credit direct from the IR.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel with children in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* Royal Air Force are earning under £92.90 per week; and if he will make a statement. [51808]

Mr. Ingram: No armed forces personnel, irrespective of their married or parental status, receive as little as £92.90 per week (or £4,830.80 per annum). The minimum rate of pay recommended by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) in their 2002 report, accepted by the Government, was £8,997 per annum for Army new entrants under 17. The minimum rate of pay for all adult service personnel recommended by the AFPRB was £10,778 per annum.

Information Warfare

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution his Department has made since July 1998 to the development of national security policies and technical measures to protect against potential vulnerabilities arising from information warfare; and if he will make a statement. [51492]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence participates in all relevant Government activities relating to the protection of information systems from electronic attack, including contributing to the National Infrastructure Security Co-ordination Centre (NISCC).

It is longstanding Government policy not to make detailed comment on the protection measures applied to communications and information systems, or on techniques such as computer hacking, as these could assist potential enemies to penetrate these elements of national security. I am therefore withholding this information in accordance with exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Arms Sales

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total value of *(a)* arms sales and *(b)* arms-related sales from the UK to Africa has been in each of the last five years. [50082]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is set out in the following table:

£ million

	North Africa	*Sub-Saharan Africa*	*Total Africa*	*Total UK defence exports*
1996	[1]—	35	[1]—	6,177
1997	1.8	3	4.8	6,684
1998	1	10	11	6,030
1999	2.6	5	7.6	4,250
2000	7.9	6	13.9	4,406

[1] It was not possible to breakdown figures for North Africa from the 1996 total.

These figures are derived from table 1.13 (Exports of Defence equipment: deliveries and identified orders) of the Ministry of Defence publication "UK Defence

Statistics 2001", a copy of which is available from the Library of the House. Figures for the year 2001 are not yet available.

Army Attributable Pensions

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the mistaken taxation of Army attributable pensions. [53048]

Dr. Moonie: Since my statement to the House on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 891–902, the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency has been conducting a review to establish more clearly the exact extent of the problem with the mistaken taxation of service invaliding and attributable pensions. This work is not complete, but has revealed that some Royal Navy invaliding and attributable pensions awarded between 1973 and 1999 have also been mistakenly taxed. We will be reviewing all the case files of those who might have been affected and arranging for refunds to be made as appropriate. This will be done as quickly as possible but is expected to take some months given the need to review several thousand pension files. We will also be providing appropriate national publicity to allow those who think they might have a claim to apply for a tax refund.

Our research has not so far revealed any cases where Royal Air Force pensions were wrongly taxed and there is evidence that the RAF has had in place checks which would have uncovered cases where attributable pensions should have been exempt from tax. However, we will include the RAF in our continuing work to ensure that no error is left unidentified.

Our further work to date has confirmed that the problem was more extensive than originally understood but has also shown the complexity of the issues involved as, over time, changes have been made to the organisations responsible for administering the pensions and to the rules governing the schemes. We have therefore concluded that we should set up an internal review, completely independent of the staffs involved, to establish the precise extent of the current problems and to expose any other problems that may exist. This independent review will look across all three services, be launched as soon as possible and is likely to take a number of months to complete. The review team will be headed up by a senior civil servant and consist of staff drawn from the Defence Internal Audit. In order to provide external confidence, the NAO will be invited to validate the procedures. I will report the findings to the House.

Defence Procurement Agency

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [53049]

Dr. Moonie: Five key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency for the financial year 2002–03.

The first three key targets apply to projects covered by the Major Projects Report which have passed their Main Gate approval. Key targets 2 and 3 are consistent with goals set in the Department's public service agreement (PSA), adapted to cover cumulative performance. The fourth key target relates to improvements in DPA customer satisfaction and the fifth to the costs of running the agency. The key targets are:

Key Target 1: Key requirements compliance

Predicted achievement of customers' core requirements for projects[1]: 97 per cent.

Key Target 2: Average cumulative in-service slippage

Average cumulative slippage of in-service dates[2] at 31 March 2003 not to exceed 12.1 months.

Key Target 3: Average cumulative cost growth

Average cumulative cost variation[3] at 31 March 2003 not to exceed 2.2 per cent.

Key Target 4: Customer survey satisfaction rating

Customer satisfaction rating 70 per cent.[4]

Key Target 5: Agency running costs

No excess against DPA resource control totals.

[1] Up to 10 core requirements per project are agreed between the DPA and Ministry of Defence headquarters, defining the essential characteristics of the equipment.

[2] Variation between in-service date (ISD) approved at "Main Gate" (the major investment decision point) and currently predicted ISD. Cumulative target of 12.1 months includes 11.7 months average slippage already incurred on the relevant project population. The in-year target is for no more than 0.4 months average new slippage.

[3] Variation between cost approved at Main Gate and current estimate. The average cost growth already incurred on the relevant project population amounts to 2.2 per cent.: the in-year target is, therefore, for 0 per cent. average cost growth.

[4] Aim is to secure 80 per cent. satisfaction rating by 2005–06 which would place the DPA among best performers for analogous organisations; 70 per cent. would be an incremental improvement on last year's rating of 67 per cent.

Overseas Territories

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the garrisons or other forms of military presence that his Department provided in Britain's overseas territories at *(a)* July 1998 and *(b)* April 2002, stating in each case the territory and the number of armed forces personnel; and if he will make a statement. [51260]

Mr. Ingram: We maintain Overseas Commands in Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, and the UK Sovereign Base Areas on Cyprus, a naval party in the British Indian Ocean Territory and an RAF station on Ascension Island. Until March 2001 we maintained a small military detachment on South Georgia. Small numbers of service personnel are occasionally stationed in other overseas territories. Full details are as follows:

Territory	*July 1998*	*April 2002*
Ascension Island	23	25
Bermuda	1	2
British Antarctic Territory	3	3
British Indian Ocean Territory	40	40
Falkland Islands[1]	[2]1,500	[2]1,300
Gibraltar[3]	[2]800	[2]755
South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands	15	0
Sovereign Base Areas Cyprus	[2]3,260	[2]3,230
Turks and Caicos Islands	4	0

[1] Figures for the Falkland Islands exclude the Falklands Guardship.

[2] Approximate figure

[3] Figures for Gibraltar include the Territorial Army element of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment.

PRIVY COUNCIL

IT Equipment

Norman Lamb: To ask the President of the Council how many Hewlett Packard Office Jet G85 printer/fax/scanner/copiers have been supplied to parliamentary offices; what the total value of the contract is between the Government and Computacenter for the supply of Hewlett Packard Office Jet G85 printer/fax/scanner/copiers; how many replacement Hewlett Packard G85 printer/fax/scanner/copiers have been supplied to parliamentary offices following technical faults; and how much money has been spent *(a)* carrying out repairs to and *(b)* replacing faulty Hewlett Packard Office Jet G85 printer/fax/scanner/copiers which have been supplied to parliamentary offices. [50502]

Mr. Robin Cook: I understand that the Parliamentary Communications Directorate has supplied 613 G85 printers to Members since central provision of IT equipment began in July 2001. The cost to the House is commercially confidential. Because the figure paid is inclusive of installation and maintenance, repairs and replacements for these machines are not costed separately.

If a problem arises with these machines, our maintenance contractors will replace them on site rather than attempt a repair. A total of 109 replacements have been provided for 73 Members. It is likely that these 109 include some machines in which no fault was found.

PRIME MINISTER

Czech Republic

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister whether his discussions with the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic included discussions of *(a)* the sale of Gripen jets to the Czech Air Force and *(b)* the offset arrangements that formed part of the bid of Gripen International. [51487]

The Prime Minister: Yes, as my official spokesman has already made clear, I did make representations regarding the Czech decision to buy supersonic aircraft. As with previous Administrations, backing British business abroad is an important part of my job.

As had also been made clear, I visited Prague primarily to discuss issues such as EU enlargement and to continue our efforts to develop good relations with an important NATO ally.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Stadium

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what conditions were attached to Sport England's grant to the national stadium project; and if she will make a statement. [51763]

Tessa Jowell: The lottery funding agreement between Sport England and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. (WNSL) and the Football Association sets out a number of conditions related to the development of Wembley as the site of the English National Stadium. WNSL is required to develop a national stadium for three sports: football, rugby league and athletics at Wembley. The lottery funding agreement also sets out a number of mandatory technical and operational requirements. The key requirements are:

(i) the stadium must have the capability to meet IAAF, FIFA, UEFA, and Rugby Football League requirements; this includes obligations related to stadium capacity, design quality, playing surfaces, facilities for participants, spectators and the media;

(ii) the stadium must have a minimum seating capacity of 80,000 seats for football and rugby league 75,000 of which must be made available at prices affordable to the general public, and 65,000 seats for athletics;

(iii) the stadium must be made available for World Athletics Championships and Olympic games events on a cost only basis;

(iv) the name of the national stadium will be the English National Stadium and any change, for example to facilitate the sale of television naming rights, requires prior written approval of Sport England;

(v) the stadium may not, except with the prior written consent of Sport England, have an anchor tenant.

WNSL are also required under the terms of the lease agreements with the English National Stadium Trust to assign 1 per cent. of turnover to the trust five years after opening, for distribution by the trust to community-based sports projects.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35606]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security and parts of the Department for Education and Employment. We are currently undertaking a fundamental overhaul of the welfare system, transforming it from a passive organisation paying out benefits to an active system that fights poverty, creates opportunity and helps people become self-sufficient and independent. This is making a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of:

eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and

combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and future pensioners.

Child benefit is now worth £15.75 a week for the eldest child and £10.55 a week for other children: nationally about 7 million families receive child benefit, and in Bristol, East 11,455 families benefit.

The number of people in work is at historically high levels of over 28.2 million. Nearly three quarters of working age people are in employment and in Bristol, East the proportion in employment currently stands at 76.3 per cent. Unemployment is at levels last seen in the early 1970s. Our New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, disabled people, the over-50s and partners of the unemployed to

move from benefit into work. Nationally well over 600,000 people have been helped into work by the New Deals and in Bristol, East over 1,300 have been helped into work.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty. This winter (2001–02) we have made available a winter fuel payment of £200 for each eligible household to help with their heaviest fuel bill. We estimate that around 16,600 older people in Bristol, East will have received a payment this winter.

We want all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement and to share fairly in the rising prosperity of the country. Our first priority has been to help the poorest pensioners.

From this April we will be spending an extra £6 billion a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of our policies. This includes £2.5 billion more on the poorest third of pensioners.

3,000 pensioner families in Bristol, East are receiving the minimum income guarantee which helps our poorest pensioners. Some 15,300 pensioners in Bristol, East will benefit from this year's increases in the basic state pension of £3 a week for single pensioners and £4.80 for couples. Those over 75, of whom we estimate there are about 7,300 in Bristol, East, may qualify for free TV licences.

Other reforms include the new pension credit in 2003 designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings and the introduction of the state second pension from this April. Both of these initiatives will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners. We have also announced that from October 2003 benefits currently reduced after a hospital stay of 6 weeks will not be reduced until 13 weeks. This will benefit both pensioners and people of working age.

Pensioners

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioner units have savings below *(a)* £6,000, *(b)* £8,000, *(c)* £10,000, *(d)* £16,000 and *(e)* £20,000. [50881]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

Pension units in Great Britain with savings below certain limits

	Pensioner units with savings below limit	
Limit	*Number*	*Percentage*
£6,000	4,100,000	60
£8,000	4,400,000	64
£10,000	4,600,000	68
£16,000	5,200,000	76
£20,000	5,400,000	79
All pensioner units	6,800,000	100

Notes:
1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Family Resources Survey (FRS). 2000–01 is the latest year for which data are available.
2. A pensioner unit is a single person or couple living as married and any dependent children where the head of the benefit unit is over state pension age.
3. The estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response and using multi-purpose grossing factors that control for tenure, council tax band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.
4. Questions on assets are a sensitive part of the FRS questionnaire and have relatively low level of response. Evidence suggests some under reporting of capital by respondents.
5. The numbers are rounded to the nearest 0.1 million.

Source:
Figures are from the Family Resources Survey 2000–01.

Incomes

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the total share of national income received by the poorest 10 per cent. of the population was in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2001; [45290]

(2) what percentage of people living below *(a)* 50 per cent., *(b)* 60 per cent. and *(c)* 70 per cent. of median income are in receipt of a means-tested benefit. [45556]

Malcolm Wicks: Such information as is available can be found in the publication "Households Below Average Income 1994–95 to 1999–2000", a copy of which can be found in the Library.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will break down the sentences received by those convicted of benefit fraud as a result of investigations carried out by the Benefits Agency in each year since 1997 by type; and in the case of sentences of imprisonment how many were sentences of *(a)* less than six months, *(b)* six to 12 months and *(c)* more than 12 months. [45334]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is not collated centrally on the terms of imprisonment. For information on the type of sentences, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 540W.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for his Department in each of the last four years. [27915]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on how the operation to clear Afghanistan of unexploded ordnance is being funded. [50087]

Clare Short: The United Nations Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA) is leading on humanitarian mine action and unexploded ordnance (UXO) interventions in Afghanistan. The current humanitarian situation and the challenges ahead, including for mine and UXO action, are set out in the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for the Afghan People (ITAP), prepared by the UN and agreed with the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) for the period to the

end of December 2002. So far 53 per cent. of the £33 million requirements for mine/UXO action in the ITAP have been met by the international community.

In response to the ITAP, DFID has to date allocated £3 million through the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) for the MAPA programme in Afghanistan.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what education on the dangers of unexploded ordnance is being provided to people living in areas of Afghanistan which are affected by the problem. [50086]

Clare Short: In March this year the Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan initiated mine awareness coordination meetings and workshops to ensure that mine awareness operations are fully integrated into the humanitarian response throughout the country.

The Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan is producing mine risk education (MRE) training, which covers UXO, to brief national education focal points including Ministry of Education officials, heads of schools and provincial education representatives to prepare for the integration of MRE in regular school curriculum. All returning refugees from Pakistan and Iran will receive MRA training.

According to UNMAS, all mine risk education messages have been updated to include the threat of new unexploded ordnance (UXO).

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the number of civilian victims of unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan since 11 September 2001. [50084]

Clare Short: We have requested this information from the International Committee of the Red Cross. I will write to the hon. Gentleman with details once this information has been received.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the progress being made in clearing unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan. [50083]

Clare Short: The United Nations Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA) is currently completing a period of retraining and is resuming operations wherever possible. In most regions mine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance operations have returned to their pre-September 2001 capacity. In addition, the process of expanding capacity to address the UXO threat is under way. The UN priorities for 2002 are the execution of emergency operations throughout the country and a subsequent return to 100 per cent. operational capacity, and to continue to expand mine clearance capacity as resources become available.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the accuracy of the information on the geographical locations of unexploded ordnance being provided to clearance experts in Afghanistan. [50085]

Clare Short: The United Nations Mine Action (UNMAS) has been notified by coalition forces of 188 sites where cluster bombs were used. UNMAS is currently undertaking a programme of visits to high priority areas to determine the accuracy of information being provided.

Sudan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the decision to put the Higher Educational Links Scheme in Sudan out to international tender. [52250]

Clare Short: No such decision has been made.

The Higher Education Links Programme aims to enhance the capacity of higher education in developing countries to contribute to the promotion of sustainable development. This is done through promoting collaboration between UK universities and similar institutions in developing countries. Sudan is one of 47 countries in which the programme currently operates.

DFID has recently agreed to extend the current Links Programme for a further year (up to 31 March 2003). We will shortly be developing proposals for a new long-term programme to operate from April 2003. This will reflect the evaluation of the current programme, our strategy for meeting the demand for knowledge and skills, and our policy on untying. We will be consulting the British Council, which manages the current programme, about these plans.

Emergency Aid

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of the additional £120 million allocated for emergency aid in 2001–02 has been spent. [52362]

Clare Short: Following the events of 11 September, additional commitments totalling £120 million, including our share of additional EC spending, were made to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The funds were allocated to emergency aid, budgetary support and debt relief. They were financed from additional allocations from the Treasury Central Reserve, DFID's Contingency Reserve and other resources. Figures for spending will become available with the finalisation of DFID's accounts later this year.

Foreign Infrastructure Programmes

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what foreign infrastructure programmes the Department is involved in. [52148]

Clare Short: We are increasingly allocating our funds to multi-donor or multilateral programmes in order to both minimise the transaction cost and use our inputs to help guide the allocation of funds of other donors.

In addition, much of our programme is now channelled through the central budgets of the recipient developing countries we are assisting.

In both these instances, where our money is mixed with that of others in order to achieve broad development objectives, rather than for individual projects, we are unable to give specific details of the infrastructure projects in which we are involved.

We are however, in many of our recipient countries, still providing funds in direct support of specific infrastructure projects and programmes. Table 1 shows these projects, by number and value in each sector.

Table 1: Infrastructure projects by sector, number and value

(£ million)

Sector	*Number*	*Value*
Air Transport	7	2.5
Energy	10	14.8
Misc. Transport	4	14.1
Roads	15	125.1
Communications	3	0.9
Water and Sanitation	46	82.9

Note:
Table details operational and planned projects over the value of £100,000 that commenced in or after 1998.

National Insurance Costs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the cost in the next 12 months of the budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* agencies of her Department and *(c)* charities in the overseas development sector. [52080]

Clare Short: I do not foresee any significant costs arising in the next 12 months—the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions take effect in April 2003.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Race Equality Scheme

Mr. Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the Home Office Race Equality Scheme. [53194]

Angela Eagle: I am pleased to inform my hon. Friend that the Home Office has today published its Race Equality Scheme, setting out how the Home Office intends to promote race equality in accordance with its responsibilities under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The Scheme is made up of an overarching scheme which describes the high level principles which apply across the Home Office, together with associate schemes for the core (non-IND) Home Office; the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND); the National Probation Directorate; the Forensic Science Service; the Passport and Records Agency and the Prison Service.

Copies of the complete Home Office Scheme are available in the Library and on the Home Office website, www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

Probation Service

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to increase the efficiency of the Probation Service will be met by March. [47222]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Overall, the budgets of assumed probation boards, in line with the public service agreement, that efficiency savings to the value of three per cent. would be achieved. The total amount distributed to boards was based on the national forecast of workload. Providing actual workload is in line with this forecast, the target will be achieved.

In addition, the 42 local probation boards have been asked to report to the National Probation Directorate on the achievement of their efficiency savings. This information is currently being collated. The boards will also be required to report on the achievement of their efficiency savings for 2001–02 in their annual reports. A summary will also be included in the annual report and accounts of the National Probation Service.

Work has now been commissioned on developing the new comprehensive model for measuring efficiency savings taking into account the considerable changes that are being made to the arrangements for dealing with offenders, such as the introduction of accredited programmes. The provisional completion date for this work is June 2002.

Wrongly Convicted Prisoners

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he established a working group on the aftercare of wrongly convicted prisoners; what its terms of reference are; what appointments have been made to the working group; what its target date is to report; and by what means interested parties may make submissions. [48627]

Beverley Hughes: The working group was established and first met in July 2000. The group is made up of Home Office officials and representatives of the National Association for the Care and Re-settlement of Offenders (NACRO) and the Society of Voluntary Associates (SOVA), two national voluntary sector organisations with considerable interest and experience in criminal justice and resettlement issues. The group's terms of reference are to consider and report to Ministers on what assistance might be given on release to ex-prisoners who successfully appeal against conviction and how that assistance might best be delivered within the available budget. No target date was set for the report but the working group is due to report to Ministers shortly. The group commissioned an independent scoping study to inform its work, which identified and canvassed views from a number of interested parties. After consideration of the scoping study the working group decided that a pilot project was appropriate. As there is no procurement exercise or competition for service delivery during the pilot phase, expressions of interest have not been invited. However, it has always been open to those who wish to contribute views to send them direct to the Home Office.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Hassockfield (Medomsley) Secure Training Centre by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49649]

Beverley Hughes: The estimated total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Hassockfield (Medomsley) Secure Training Centre by comparison with a public sector alternative is £29.5 million (excluding VAT).

Prisons

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners have been diagnosed as having a learning difficulty *(a)* while in prison and *(b)* prior to sentencing in the last 12 months; [49973]

(2) what educational facilities are provided in each HM Prison in the UK to *(a)* diagnose and *(b)* treat prisoners who suffer from specific (i) psychological and (ii) educational disabilities, with particular reference to dyslexia and autism. [49972]

Beverley Hughes: Prisons will form part of a pilot being developed by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, which will introduce a greater diagnostic element in the assessment of a prisoner's learning difficulties and disabilities. We know that many offenders have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and we are working with prisons, including young offender institutions, to develop a national policy to support their needs. A working party has been set up to develop an action plan and representatives of the National Autistic Society, the British Dyslexia Association and the Dyslexia Institute have been invited to join the working party. No reliable information is available on the total number of prisoners diagnosed with learning difficulties but new procedures are being developed to capture this kind of information.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent research he has commissioned into the work of prison visitors and voluntary associates. [49985]

Beverley Hughes: A survey into the nature and extent of the involvement of voluntary sector organisations and volunteers in prison, including prison visitors, was conducted in September 2000. The report will be published shortly.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many assaults by prisoners on *(a)* staff, *(b)* prisoners and *(c)* other people took place in prisons and resulted in a positive disciplinary adjudication in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) the period since 1 April 2001; how many prisoners and what percentage of the average prison population during each relevant period this represented; and if he will make a statement. [48801]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The number and rate of positive assaults adjudications for the years in question are given in the table.

	1996–97	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Assaults on prisoners	2,747	3,282	3,552
Rate of assaults on prisoners (percentage)	4.8	5.1	5.3
Assaults on staff/others	2,531	3,107	3,159
Rate of assaults on staff/others (percentage)	4.5	4.8	4.7

[1] Annualised

Figures for 2001–02 are annualised based on positive adjudications to the end of February 2002 and are provisional. The Prison Service does not collect data separately to distinguish between the number of assaults on staff and others, nor the number of individual prisoners charged.

The number of proven adjudications of assault expressed as a proportion of the average prisoner population is a key performance indicator (KPI) for the Prison Service. While the number of assault adjudications has risen recently, all prisons now have an active anti-bullying strategy and there is some evidence that this leads, at least in the short term, to an increase in reported incidents.

Detention and Training Orders

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people serving detention and training orders of eight months or more have been released early, broken down by institution in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [49977]

Beverley Hughes: The most recent data show that on 31 March 2002 there were 113 detention and training orders being served in secure training centres, 151 in local authority secure units and 2,047 in Prison Service establishments. There are no data held centrally on the number of people being released early from detention and training orders.

Temporary Licences

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children aged 18 were released on temporary licence during 2001, broken down by the purpose of the licence. [49976]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the number of 18-year-old prisoners released on temporary licence in 2001 is shown in the table.

	Total	*Males*	*Females*
Total	1,148	1,016	132
Compassionate	42	25	17
Facility	785	685	100
Resettlement	321	306	15

Drugs

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money the Government allocated to drugs rehabilitation programmes and services in each of the financial years from 1997 to 2001; and how much of the allocated sums were spent. [50627]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information is not available in the form requested. Drug rehabilitation programmes form only part of a wider range of drug treatment interventions. During 1997–2001 they were funded through a number of mainstream community care funds from which it is impossible to ascertain exact amounts.

Since 2001, however, they have been financed through the (ring-fenced) pooled treatment budget together with some mainstream funds. In 2000–01 the Pooled Treatment budget amounted to £234 million. This expanded in 2001–02 to £328 million.

Human Rights

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has made of the ECHR judgment in Edwards and Another v UK application No 46477/99. [48658]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The European Court of Human Rights (the Court) found the United Kingdom in breach of Articles 2 and 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights in the case of Christopher Edwards who was murdered by his cell-mate, Richard Linford, in Chelmsford prison in November 1994.

The Court found breaches of Article 2 in respect of the circumstances of Mr. Edwards' death (the failure of various agencies to pass on information about Mr. Linford's mental health and the inadequate health screen given to Mr. Linford at the prison) and the failure to provide an effective investigation. They ruled that there had been a breach of Article 13 due to the lack of an effective remedy available to Christopher's family either through an effective investigation or the payment of compensation.

Mr. Edward's death was the subject of an independent investigation commissioned by the Prison Services and other agencies. The Court has not ordered a further investigation. Although it considered that there were defects, the investigation was regarded by the Court as having been thorough and useful. The Court found that the family were not eligible for compensation under United Kingdom civil law and awarded the sum of £20,000 plus costs (a further £20,000) by way of redress. The Court recognised the changes that have taken place since Mr. Edwards's death. These include introduction of the Prison Escort Record completed before a prisoner enters a Prison Service establishment and improved health care screening. The system of investigating deaths in Prison Service custody is currently under review as part of the Service's new suicide prevention strategy.

Prison Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers have been recruited and employed within the Prison Service during the last 12 months. [51147]

Beverley Hughes: 363 prison officers were recruited by the Prison Service during 2001–02. This figure excludes current staff who re-graded to prison officer during the year but includes staff beginning on the accelerated promotion scheme.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unpaid hours of time off in lieu of hours worked by prison officers at Wandsworth prison there are. [51146]

Beverley Hughes: The number of hours of time off in lieu (TOIL) owed to staff at Wandsworth prison is approximately 5,130 hours for 305 staff.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed in the Prison Service as *(a)* prison officers and *(b)* operational support grades in each of the last five years. [50814]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The information is contained in the table. Officer grades include; prison officers, senior officers and principal officers. Operational support grades (OSG) include prison auxiliaries and night patrols who are able to re-grade to prison officer grades.

As at 31 March	*Officer grades*	*Operational support grades*
1997	23,058	3,925
1998	23,444	5,207
1999	23,875	5,687
2000	24,090	5,939
2001	23,777	5,956
2002	23,052	6,669

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reviews of prison officer/staff ratios have taken place, and when, in the last 12 months. [51144]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service publishes the staff to prisoner ratios for unified staff on an annual basis. A partial review of prison officer staff to prisoner ratios was issued on 23 October 2001. A record of local reviews of prison officer staff ratios is not available centrally.

Prisoners (Drug Use)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of whether there is an incentive in prisons for prisoners to switch from using drugs that remain in the body for a long period to other substances; [51581]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 11 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 567W, what assessment he has made of the reasons for the fall in the detection of cannabis use among prisoners by the mandatory drug testing programme. [51580]

Beverley Hughes: Mandatory drug testing (MDT) figures show that, overall, drug misuse in prisons has declined significantly over the past five years. The statistics suggest that much of this decline has been down to reductions in the use of cannabis, with opiate use static. Deterrence, supply reduction and treatment have been the key elements of the Prison Service's drug strategy and the decline in MDT rates gives evidence of its success.

Available research evidence does not support the assertion that prisoners have switched from cannabis to other drugs which can only be detected for a shorter period. The Prison Service is continuing to look at this issue. The Institute of Psychiatry and the Office for National Statistics are currently reviewing the MDT programme, including the issue of switching. Their findings are expected in May 2002.

Cannabis

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what parliamentary procedure would be required to change the controlled substance classification of cannabis. [51217]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* If a decision to change classification is taken an Order in Council is needed to change the classification, under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, of any controlled drug. Such an Order is subject to the draft affirmative resolution procedure. The draft Order has to be debated in each House, and approved, then submitted to a meeting of the Privy Council for approval and signature.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of drug treatment and testing orders have been breached since October 2000. [51473]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The information is not available in the form requested. Between October 2000 and November 2001 information was only collected at national level on the number of applications for breach action which resulted in the Court ordering revocation of the order for unacceptable failure to comply. From November 2001 more comprehensive data is being collected to record all breach instigations.

Between October 2000 and February 2002, 1,519 Drugs Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTOs) have been revoked by the Courts for unacceptable failure to comply. This represents 27 per cent. of the 5,609 orders made during the period.

Drug Trafficking/Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the maximum penalty is for offences of *(a)* trafficking of class C drugs and *(b)* tobacco smuggling. [51472]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The maximum penalty for importing a Class C controlled drug is five years imprisonment; that for assisting an offence outside the United Kingdom is 14 years imprisonment; that for producing a Class C controlled drug is five years imprisonment. This is also the maximum penalty for supplying and possessing with intent to supply a Class C controlled drug. The maximum penalty for tobacco smuggling is seven years imprisonment.

Money Laundering

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firms of solicitors in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England and Wales reported matters to NCIS relating to money laundering in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001. [51971]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: From the data currently held relating to suspicious transaction reports made to the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS), it is not possible to differentiate between those made by solicitors firms in Scotland and those in England and Wales. However, the total number of reports received from solicitors in the United Kingdom as a whole was 164 in 2000 and 176 in 2001.

Football Hooligans

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals, by category, are classified as football hooligans in England and Wales. [50010]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 37W.

Prisoners' Property

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to improve the security of prisoners' property *(a)* in storage and *(b)* in transfer between establishments, including those operated by private contractors. [51928]

Beverley Hughes: There are no plans at present to alter existing procedures relating to the security of prisoners' property. These procedures are the same across the prison estate, including those establishments run by private contractors. A comprehensive review of matters relating to prisoners' property is currently being conducted and the issue of the security of property is being considered as part of the review.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Egypt

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the detention in Egypt of Mr. Nawaz from Southend and two other persons (Ref: 1–46906/02); and if officials of the embassy have been permitted to see them. [52317]

Mr. Bradshaw: Mr. Nawaz and three other British Nationals have been detained in Egypt since 1 April. Consular access has been granted and the detainees have been visited twice, on 11 April and 23 April. On 18 April the ambassador met the Interior Minister to discuss the case and establish more information about the legal process. The ambassador has also raised the case in a meeting with the Foreign Minister on 11 April.

GCHQ

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the recruitment statistics for GCHQ in 2000. [53244]

Mr. Straw: GCHQ notified the Civil Service Commissioners that as a result of recruitment schemes run in 2000, 324 individuals have joined the Department or are awaiting completion of the application process. This compares with 241 reported for 1999 recruitment schemes. In addition, one former member of staff was reappointed in 2000, compared with nine in 1999.

WALES

Local Government Finance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by local authority the level of *(a)* rent and *(b)* council tax arrears in each year since 1993 in Wales. [50330]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since 1 July 1999 this is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

The following table lists the available information in respect of council tax arrears prior to July 1999.

Comparable information in respect of rent arrears is not held centrally.

Council tax outstanding at the end of each year, in respect of each individual year[1]

£000

Former local authority	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Alyn and Deeside	582	432	175
Colwyn	732	410	456
Delyn	334	264	351
Glyndwr	871	508	254
Rhuddlan	327	288	294
Wrexham Maelor	726	702	580
Carmarthen	475	448	519
Ceredigion	554	538	558
Dinefwr	510	361	433
Llanelli	524	503	526
Preseli Pembrokeshire	327	230	208
South Pembrokeshire	407	304	332
Blaenau Gwent	434	382	390
Islwyn	365	241	217
Monmouth	555	456	379
Newport	787	694	619
Torfaen	268	204	338
Aberconwy	228	271	259
Arfon	241	229	216
Dwyfor	83	141	107
Meirionnydd	151	261	169
Ynys Mon	397	357	417
Cynon Valley	197	170	184
Merthyr Tydfil	215	205	162
Ogwr	618	654	864
Rhondda	227	169	246
Rhymney Valley	373	336	419
Taff Ely	401	428	465
Brecknock	96	162	166
Montgomeryshire	207	203	251
Radnorshire	93	98	104
Cardiff	1,954	2,101	2,338
Vale of Glamorgan	500	453	655
Port Talbot	263	270	276
Lliw Valley	237	238	235
Neath	311	252	370
Swansea	1,005	1,336	1,344
Total Wales	16,575	15,299	15,876
Percentage of total debit	6.1	5.4	4.9

[1] Amounts outstanding at the end of each year in respect of the council tax due for that year. Previous year's arrears are not included.

Council tax outstanding at the end of each year, in respect of each individual year[1]

£000

Current local authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Isle of Anglesey	306	313	402
Gwynedd	595	638	689
Conwy	705	728	887
Denbighshire	1,309	767	703
Flintshire	1,250	1,177	1,376
Wrexham	810	822	920
Powys	393	383	1,445
Ceredigion	648	808	1,266
Pembrokeshire	387	488	540
Carmarthenshire	1,448	2,399	2,536
Swansea	1,923	2,017	2,790
Neath Port Talbot	915	967	991
Bridgend	945	1,009	1,107
The Vale of Glamorgan	537	692	972
Rhondda Cynon Taff	1,234	2,319	2,242
Merthyr Tydfil	161	176	249
Caerphilly	1,006	1,004	1,158
Blaenau Gwent	404	652	658
Torfaen	419	354	917
Monmouthshire	597	419	403
Newport	674	792	913

Council tax outstanding at the end of each year, in respect of each individual year[1]

£000

Current local authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Cardiff	3,244	4,015	4,048
Total Wales	19,910	22,939	27,212
Percentage of total debit	5.2	5.6	5.8

[1] Amounts outstanding at the end of each year in respect of the council tax due for that year. Previous year's arrears are not included.

Strategic Rail Authority Funding

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is taking to ensure that in future Wales is allocated a greater share of Strategic Rail Authority funding. [35636]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Allocation of such funding is a matter for the Strategic Rail Authority. To assist the Strategic Rail Authority in delivering the 10-year transport plan targets, the Government are providing it with an extra £155 million over the next two years. I will shortly be meeting Richard Bowker, Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, and will be discussing their Strategic Plan, and in particular the Welsh dimension.

Welsh travellers will benefit from investment in improved rail links outside Wales, just as those from elsewhere in the UK will benefit from investment in Wales. In these circumstances a simple population share division of investment could be disadvantageous to rail travellers in Wales and I have no intention of pressing the SRA to adopt such an approach.

The Assembly also has a close working relationship with the Strategic Rail Authority, well beyond the formal requirement in the Transport Act which requires that the Strategic Rail Authority consult the Assembly on its strategies relating to Wales.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Personal Injury Pre-action Protocol

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the personal injury pre-action protocol was introduced; and what changes have been made since its inception. [50999]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The personal injury pre-action protocol was published in January 1999 and came into force from 26 April 1999. Some minor amendments were introduced in June 2000 following suggestions from the personal injury protocol working party. The amendments were aimed at clarifying various elements, such as the scope of the protocol, rather than substantive changes.

The personal injury working party is currently conducting a comprehensive review of the protocol and will be considering what, if any, further amendments may be required. The first meeting of the working party to discuss the review is scheduled for 7 May 2002.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Lord Chancellor has to issue guidance on the case of Carlson *v.* Townsend heard in the Court of Appeal in April 2001. [51001]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* My Department has no plans to issue guidance on the case of Carlson *v.* Townsend.

That said, the judgment in that case will be one of the issues considered by the personal injury protocol working party as part of its comprehensive review of the protocol.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the implications are for the operation of the personal injury pre-action protocol arising out of the case of Carlson *v.* Townsend heard in the Court of Appeal in April 2001. [51002]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The question of whether the personal injury pre-action protocol will require redrafting in the light of this judgment is one of the issues that will be considered by the personal injury protocol working party as part of its comprehensive review. The first meeting of the working party to discuss the review is scheduled for 7 May 2002.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what obligation there is on the part of a defendant to disclose medical reports to a third party under the personal injury pre-action protocol. [50924]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Under the personal injury pre-action protocol parties are encouraged to exchange information but are not obliged to do so. However, if the dispute proceeds to court, the judge may impose costs sanctions if it is deemed that by not disclosing information the party has acted unreasonably.

Transsexuals

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she proposes to implement the recommendations of the report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People, April 2000; and if she will make a statement. [52057]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The report has been considered carefully within Government and by other interested groups. The Government are sympathetic to the issues raised in the report and is considering actively how to take the matter forward.

Legal Aid

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much legal aid has been spent on family related issues since 1997. [51504]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Net expenditure on legal aid in family-related matters since 1997 is as follows:

	£ million
1997–98	389.8
1998–99	423.5
1999–2000	[1]399.8
2000–01	419.4

[1] Figures for 1999–2000 do not include the cost of acts of assistance provided under contracting pilot schemes.

Figures are not yet available for the 2001–02 financial year.

Legal Services Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost was of administering the Legal Services Commission in each year since 1997. [51501]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission was created by the Access to Justice Act 1999 and came into existence on 1 April 2000. The Grant in Aid Costs for the Commission are as follows:

£ million

	Grant in aid costs
2000–01	72.700
2001–02	70.350

The staff cost to the Lord Chancellor's Department of administering the Commission is not immediately available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Tribunal Justice

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the Government's response to the Leggatt report on tribunal justice. [50384]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government are currently considering their response to the Leggatt review and will make a statement at an appropriate time later in the year.

The Government's response will take into account the public consultation exercise completed in December 2001, which generated over 350 responses.

Data Protection Act

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether guidance will be issued to staff on the handling of subject access requests under section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998. [53047]

Mr. Wills: My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor has recently issued central guidance on the handling of subject access requests. I have placed a copy of this guidance in the House Library.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Complaints

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many complaints were registered against his Department and its predecessor Departments in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in those periods. [51587]

Mr. Leslie: Details of complaints against the Cabinet Office are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Details of complaints taken up and upheld by the Parliamentary Commissioner are contained in the Parliamentary Ombudsman's annual report. Copies of the annual reports covering the periods specified are available in the Library of the House, and for annual reports from 1997–98 are available on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at:

www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/document/par01/index.htm

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Bills introduced by his Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans he has for the future use of such clauses. [49618]

Mr. Leslie: No Bills introduced by my Department during the period in question have contained sunset clauses. However, as part of their better regulation agenda, the Government are committed to using sunset clauses where appropriate.

Civil Service Secondments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average percentage is of civil service staff on loan from one UK Government Department to another UK Government Department per UK Government Department. [29511]

Mr. Leslie: The following table shows civil service staff reported as on loan to other Departments, as a percentage of the total staff in that Department, as at 1 April 2001.

Staff on loan to other Government Departments, by Government Department, as at 1 April 2001

Importing Department	*Staff on loan*	*Total staff*	*Percentage*
Cabinet Office	540	1,804	29.9
Crown Prosecution Service	3	5,832	0.1
Culture, Media and Sport	83	633	13.1
Customs and Excise	10	22,439	0.0
Department for Education and Employment	35	39,296	0.1
Department for National Savings	0	123	0.0
Department of Health	80	5,708	1.4
Department of Social Security	40	88,793	0.0
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions	111	16,728	0.7
Department of Trade and Industry	84	10,300	0.8
Export Credit Guarantee Department	10	384	2.6
Health and Safety Executive/Commission	8	4,058	0.2
Home Office (Main)	52	16,743	0.3
Charity Commission	2	547	0.4
HM Prison Service	2	42,719	0.0
Inland Revenue	54	71,775	0.1
Lord Chancellor's Department	23	11,227	0.2
Ministry of Defence	52	86,722	0.1
Office for National Statistics	14	3,214	0.4
Office of Fair Trading	58	505	11.5
Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland	1	93	1.1
Privy Council Office	17	38	44.7
Registry of Friendly Societies	1	5	20.0
Scottish Executive	22	5,101	0.4
Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal	1	1,222	0.1
Security and Intelligence Services	21	4,492	0.5
HM Treasury	148	850	17.4
Total	1,472	441,351	0.3

The table represents a snapshot figure as at 1 April 2001. In the year 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, there were 1,577 instances of loans inward to all Government Departments, and 1,694 instances of loans outward. Inter-departmental mobility is a key factor in the delivery of the Modernising Government Agenda. It is important because

1. it reinforces the appeal of variety in an individual's career and can aid staff development;
2. experience of other Government Departments/agencies encourages individuals to think across departmental boundaries and work in partnership, exchanging ideas and good practice;
3. it contributes to the creation of a diverse, but unified, civil service.

TREASURY

Flat Rate Scheme

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a summary of responses to the consultation on the flat rate scheme. [52970]

Mr. Boateng: Customs have produced a summary of responses, which will be placed in the House Libraries, with copies also of the individual responses to the consultation.

Equal Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has established a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment; and what progress has been achieved. [42918]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* A basis assessment of gender effects is one aspect of the equality impact assessment that goes into the formulation of tax policy advice. Like other aspects of Budget policy, this is coordinated by HM Treasury.

The Treasury Guidance for the 2002 Spending Review emphasises that Departments must consider key cross-Government agenda, including equality and sustainable development, and how to implement them in their submissions to the review. The guidance explicitly states that Departments' analysis should also highlight any significant distributional effects—e.g. between regions, types of environment, generations or gender—in their proposals.

Moreover, several of the cross-cutting reviews in the 2002 Spending Review have remits, which include promotion of equality, such as reviews of the public sector labour market and tackling health inequalities.

The Treasury has worked closely with organisations such as the Women and Equality Unit and the Women's Budget Group (WBG)—and an independent UK organisation of gender experts—in order to improve its understanding of gender impact and its analytical capacity.

Analysis is included in internal advice put to Ministers during the development of policy. Policy makers are required to look at the impact legislative proposals may have across the range of equality issues—e.g. race, disability, age and gender. Policy makers have access to guidance on equality impact assessments on an intranet site, which includes information on policy appraisal for equal treatment—and also includes the draft gender mainstreaming guidance produced by the Women's Unit.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if Customs and Excise make random checks on private passengers in order to detect the illegal import of meat and meat products; [46779]

(2) what assessment has been made of the relative cost-effectiveness of measures used by Customs and Excise to detect the illegal import of *(a)* drugs, *(b)* explosives, *(c)* tobacco and *(d)* meat and meat products; [46773]

(3) what priority is given by Customs and Excise to the prevention of the illegal import of meat and meat products; [46780]

(4) what use Customs and Excise make of trained dogs to detect the illegal import of meat and meat products and how this is co-ordinated with dogs working on *(a)* explosives, *(b)* tobacco and *(c)* drugs detection; [46777]

(5) how many people were found by Customs and Excise to be illegally importing meat and meat products in each of the last three years for which figures are available; [46776]

(6) how illegally imported meat and meat products seized by Customs and Excise are disposed of; [46774]

(7) what steps Customs and Excise are taking to prevent the illegal import of meat and meat products. [46778]

Mr. Boateng: Import controls to detect illegal import of meat and meat products are the responsibility of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and local or port health officers. HM Customs and Excise does not therefore specifically target its checks against the risk of illegal import and meat products and does not use dogs to detect such illegal imports.

Customs does however support the controls to prevent illegal import of meat and meat products by:

- dealing with meat and meat products found in the course of checks made in relation to the wide range of controls for which Customs does have lead enforcement responsibility;
- participating in joint exercises organised by DEFRA or local or port health officers;
- supporting DEFRA and local port health officers with information to assist in detection of illegal imports; and
- contributing to the DEFRA led illegal imports programme, for example by assisting in developing risk assessment.

Customs only seize illegal meat and meat products detected in passengers' baggage or found in the post or where the meat is controlled under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Any other detections are detained and referred to the appropriate enforcement authority to take action. Meat and meat products seized by Customs are disposed of through arrangements made by the local or port health authority.

Central records identifying Customs' seizures of meat and meat products are only available from the year 2000. Details for calendar years 2000 and 2001 are:

2000

263 seizures made from persons arriving in the UK

186 seizures made from postal packages

2001

788 seizures made from persons arriving in the UK

237 seizures made from postal packages.

Heritage Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the heritage assets of the *(a)* Office for National Statistics and *(b)* Royal Mint to which values cannot be described are outside the remit of resource accounting and budgeting; [48741]

(2) whether the Valuation Office's heritage items which are not recorded on the Agency's fixed asset register as current assets but are controlled separately as valuable and attractive items are outside the remit of resource accounting and budgeting; [48742]

(3) what the definition is of a non-operational heritage asset, as described in HM Customs and Excise's entry in the National Assets Register; and if non-operational heritage assets are outside the remit of resource accounting and budgeting. [48740]

Mr. Andrew Smith: All assets held by Departments must be accounted for in accordance with resource accounting policies, as set out in the Resource Accounting Manual.

The Manual—which is drawn up following advice from the independent Financial Reporting Advisory Board—recognises that certain assets are held primarily for their cultural and heritage significance. The Manual specifies that in certain circumstances, Departments need not capitalise or value such assets.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans his Department has to sell heritage assets that are outside the remit of resource accounting and budgeting. [48730]

Mr. Andrew Smith: None of HM Treasury's antiques are classified as 'heritage assets'.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the lots of silver that HM Treasury withdrew from auction on 29 October 2001 are part of the 250 items listed as antique assets on page 613 of the National Asset Register. [48731]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Yes.

Tax and Excise Duty

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the cost of collection, *(b)* the revenue realised and *(c)* the cost as a proportion of the revenue of each (i) tax and (ii) excise duty in the last year for which information is available. [51934]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Inland Revenue's annual report for the year ending 31 March 2001 was laid in Parliament in December 2001 as Command paper 5304 and includes on page 35 a detailed analysis of the cost of collection by tax head. HM Customs and Excise have recently produced an analysis of their costs of collecting taxes and duties in 2000–01, as shown in the table.

Tax/duty	*Total net current cost (£ million)*	*Revenue collected (£ million)*	*Cost as percentage of revenue collected*
VAT	406.1	58,622	0.69
Insurance premium tax	2.0	1,707	0.12
Excise duties	53.4	38,444	0.14
Air passenger duty	0.8	949	0.08
Landfill tax	1.8	462	0.38
Customs duties	110.3	2,099	5.26

Core Debt

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer at what intervals the figures for core debt will be published. [52377]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Estimates for core debt will be updated in future Budget and pre-Budget report forecasts as set out in Box 2.4, page 35 of the 2002 Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report.

Community Investment Tax Credit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the community investment tax credit will be implemented; and how it will work. [52370]

Mr. Boateng: Legislation for the Community Investment Tax Credit is being brought forward in the Finance Bill. The scheme will come into force as soon as possible after state aids approval is obtained.

The scheme will offer tax relief to individual and corporate investors who make qualifying investments, through intermediaries, in enterprises in disadvantaged communities. The intermediaries must be accredited as Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) under the rules of the scheme. CDFIs provide capital and technical assistance to businesses and social enterprises in disadvantaged communities that find it difficult to access mainstream commercial finance. Qualifying investments are debt or equity investments made for a minimum period of five years.

The amount of the tax relief is 5 per cent. of the amount invested for the tax year (or accounting period for a corporate investor) in which an investment which qualifies for the scheme is made, and for each of the following four years or periods, making a total of 25 per cent. of the amount of the investment in all. The tax relief is set against the investor's income tax or corporation tax liability as appropriate. So for example, an individual investing £10,000 in an accredited CDFI for at least five years could obtain a reduction in their income tax liability of £500 for the tax year in which the investment was made and for each of the four following years, making a total tax reduction of £2,500 over five years.

VAT

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason motor accident repair shops wholly owned by insurance companies are exempt from charging VAT on the labour element of the service. [52242]

Mr. Boateng: Such motor repair shops are not exempted from VAT. However, it is a fundamental principle of VAT that the use by a business of its own staff is outside the scope of VAT.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was raised in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 by automatic fines imposed by Customs and Excise on firms responsible for late payment. [52373]

Mr. Boateng: The VAT default surcharge system is the only fully automated system within Customs and Excise for applying fines for late payments. During 2000–01, penalties totalling £87 million were paid by businesses who were late paying tax declared on VAT returns. The total for 2001–02 is £75 million (subject to year end accounting adjustments).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses he expects to benefit from the removal for companies with a turnover of under £100,000 of the requirement that a business has to be VAT-registered for 12 months before using the annual accounting scheme. [52375]

Mr. Boateng: As a result of the measures announced in the Budget, approximately 140,000 traders in 2002–03 will have the opportunity to use the annual accounting scheme earlier than would have otherwise been the case.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will allow sixth form colleges the same VAT exemptions as secondary schools which have sixth forms. [52345]

Mr. Boateng: VAT is not charged on education taught in sixth form colleges or in sixth forms within secondary schools. The funding of sixth form colleges takes into account the VAT they pay on their purchases.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the £420 billion allocated for public expenditure in 2003–04 he estimates will be spent in 2003–04. [52620]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Total public expenditure in 2003–04 is projected to be £454.6 billion (Table C11, Financial Statement and Budget Report 2002, HC592).

Rogues Report

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish up-dated versions of tables 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 of the Rogues report to include figures for 2000–01. [26516]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Where available, the Government will publish updates on levels of fraud and other relevant statistics on a routine, annual basis in line with the framework set out in the Customs and Excise paper, "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud", which was published as part of the pre-Budget report package.

HEALTH

Care Standards (Older People)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consultation his Department has undertaken with housing and social services to ensure that the Better Care Higher Standards charter is working, as set out on page 172 of the milestones of the National Service Framework for Older People; and what areas of the charter have been found to have shortcomings; [51526]

(2) how many *(a)* reviews are being undertaken and *(b)* actions plans are being developed to correct shortcomings reflected in the Better Care Higher Standards charter as set out on page 172 of the milestones of the National Service Framework for Older People; [51528]

(3) what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the Better Care Higher Standards charter is working, as set out on page 172 of the milestones of the National Service Framework for Older People. [51525]

Jacqui Smith: The Department commissioned the Nuffield Institute for Health to undertake a full analysis of the first round of local "Better Care, Higher Standards" charters in the summer of 2000. In March 2001, the Department and the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) jointly published (LAC(2001)6/HSC 2001–06) further guidance on the development of "Better Care, Higher Standards" charters for the two years 2001–02 and 2002–03.

By the end of June each year, local councils are expected to publish a local "Better Care, Higher Standards" charter for the year and an annual report, reviewing progress in meeting previous charter standards and targets, and setting out future plans. Councils and their partners are also expected to carry out annual user and carer surveys, the outcomes of which are expected to feed into the annual reports and to drive up standards of service.

In the light of local charters to be published by the end of June 2002, the Department will carry out a review of the effectiveness of "Better Care, Higher Standards" charters.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many councils have reviewed their eligibility criteria for adult social care to ensure they do not discriminate against age as part of the milestones set out in the National Service Framework for Older People, page 172. [51531]

Jacqui Smith: Guidance on eligibility criteria for adult social care will be issued to councils with social services responsibilities shortly. It will provide a framework so that, within their resources, councils review and revise their eligibility criteria according to individuals' needs and associated risks to independence. Through implementing the guidance, councils will fulfil the first stage requirement of standard one of the national service framework for older people with respect to eliminating age discrimination.

Children in Care

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children up to the age of 16 years were under the care of social services departments in the UK on 1 April. [51645]

Jacqui Smith: The number of children aged under 16, who were looked after by local councils in England at 31 March 2001, was 49,600.

This figure excludes children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements.

Information for the number of children looked after in Wales and Scotland is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children up to the age of 16 years have disappeared while living in social services care in each of the last five years. [51644]

Jacqui Smith: The available information is shown in the table.

Estimated number of looked after children aged under 16 whose last placement in their care history is recorded as being absent from agreed placement, by age at start of last placement for years ending 31 March 1996 to 2000 England

Year ending 31 March	*Number*
1996	40
1997	65
1998	55

Estimated number of looked after children aged under 16 whose last placement in their care history is recorded as being absent from agreed placement, by age at start of last placement, for years ending 31 March 1996 to 2000 England

Year ending 31 March	Number
1999	30
2000	90

Notes:
Local councils only recorded children as being missing from their agreed placement after they had been missing for a period in excess of seven days.
All figures rounded to nearest five
Above table excludes children looked after under a series of short term placements
Source:
DH Annual Statistical returns (CLA Episode system)

Long Stay Patients Benefit

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with mental illness in the United Kingdom are in receipt of long stay patients benefit. [51543]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not collected centrally.

North-East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire Health Authority

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the cost has been of provisionally locating the strategic health authority HQ for north and east Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire on the York science park; [41372]

(2) what the total cost of establishing the north and east Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire health authority (designate) has been. [41373]

Jacqui Smith: The only cost incurred in provisionally locating and establishing the strategic health authority (StHA) HQ for north and east Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire is for the rent of two offices in the York science park for February and March 2002. This will be approximately £3,500. This is the project office for the StHA pending a discussion about its permanent location.

An option appraisal completed prior to the appointment of the chairman and chief executive (designate) has been shared with the Department's regional office and national health service estates. The chairman and chief executive (designate) have asked for a business case to be prepared for consideration by the StHA board at its first meeting. This is being prepared by Capitec. All the existing NHS accommodation is proposed for future use in each locality and will largely accommodate primary care trust staff including shared services to support these organisations.

The communication about the proposed location of the StHA HQ has given rise to significant correspondence from local authorities and MPs on the north and south bank of the Humber. These concerns will be made apparent to the StHA board at its shadow meeting on 20 March.

The creation of the StHA is part of the Government's "Shifting the Balance of Power in the NHS" proposals which are committed to delivering savings of £100 million for reinvestment in services.

Care Workers (Training)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities have directly funded the training costs for care workers employed by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* independent providers to National Vocational Qualification level II. [45628]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* Central national health service budgets for the education and training of healthcare staff do not fund the training costs of employees of local authorities or independent providers.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* budget and *(b)* staff are allocated to media relations in the National Care Standards Commission. [45638]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The budget allocation for the National Care Standards Commission does not specifically identify either funding or the staff allocation for media relations. Decisions on such staff numbers and budget are a matter for the NCSC to decide from their overall budget, consistent with their management statement, financial memorandum and business plan as agreed with the Department. The management statement and financial memorandum can be viewed on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/ncsc/manangementstatement.pdf. On publication the business plan will also be available on the Department's website.

Primary Care Centres

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many one-stop primary care centres are under construction; [47015]

(2) how many one-stop primary care centres have been opened since the publication of the NHS National Plan. [47016]

Mr. Hutton: The latest published information as at 31 December 2001 indicates that 68 One Stop Primary Care Centres are in place following publication of the NHS Plan.

This is expected to rise to 102 by 31 March 2002.

Beta-interferon

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of Beta-interferon to multiple sclerosis sufferers in the East Surrey health authority area. [49841]

Ms Blears: In line with the recommendation from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence we have concluded an agreement with five companies on an innovative scheme which allows patients with multiple sclerosis meeting the criteria of the Association of British Neurologists to be treated cost-effectively with disease modifying therapies on the national health service. The companies have agreed terms for the supply of their products under the scheme. Patients will be monitored to confirm whether the drugs are working. Prices will be reduced if patients do not benefit as expected. The scheme starts on 6 May 2002.

Multiple Sclerosis sufferers in the East Surrey area will, from then, have access to beta interferon on the same basis as other NHS patients. NHS bodies are expected to fund any treatment within this scheme prescribed by clinicians for eligible patients, in accordance with statutory directions. Consultant neurologists, in consultation with patients, will have a choice of treatments within the scheme taking into account expected benefit and potential side effects. The products included in the scheme are Avonex (Biogen), Betaferon (Schering), Copaxone (Teva/Aventis), Rebif 22 mg and 44 mg (Serono).

Patients whose condition does not come within the ABN guidelines and who are currently receiving treatment with these drugs will continue to do so in line with NICE's recommendation on this point. I am also taking steps to ensure that those patients who have funded their treatment privately because the drug was not available to them locally on the NHS have had the costs of their prescription met since 4 February.

Copies of the health service circular issued to the NHS to explain the scheme have been placed in the Library.

Primary Care Trusts (Operational Status)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received from the *(a)* East Yorkshire Primary Care Trust and *(b)* West Hull Primary Care Trust concerning operational status prior to 1 April. [50619]

Jacqui Smith: Representations have not been received from either the East Yorkshire Primary Care Trust or the West Hull Primary Care Trust concerning operational status prior to 1 April. The primary care trusts were established after full and open consultation locally, giving every opportunity for views and concerns to be expressed and addressed at that stage.

Heroin

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the benefits of the drug naltrexone being taken in implant form in the rehabilitation of heroin addicts. [50629]

Ms Blears: No assessment of the benefits of naltrexone being taken in implant form in the rehabilitation of heroin users has yet been made. This is because a sufficiently developed evidence base does not yet exist. Naltrexone in implant form is not currently licensed for this indication in the United Kingdom. The National Treatment Agency (NTA) for drug misuse treatment, will continue to monitor the evidence for this proposed treatment.

Lymphoedema

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of clinics which treat lymphoedema in *(a)* England and *(b)* Gloucestershire. [50490]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Data on the number of lymphoedema clinics across England and at a local level are not collected centrally.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health bodies have bid for allocations to support the provision of digital hearing aids following his Christmas Eve 2001 announcement on the subject; for how much each has bid; what resources are available centrally for this purpose; and when he expects to respond to these bids. [50068]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 465W. Discussions will now take place between the project management team and those sites joining the project to determine the resources each will need.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that *(a)* electrically powered and *(b)* manual wheelchairs meet the health and safety requirements of their users in terms of their (i) inherent design, (ii) regular servicing and (iii) planned replacement. [48817]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The Medical Devices Agency, (MDA), has specific responsibility on behalf of the Secretary of State to safeguard public health where medical devices are involved.

Within this overall remit, MDA has a specific unit responsible for wheeled mobility devices where all reported incidents concerning the quality or safety of wheelchairs are considered. If the units investigation highlights a need for an improvement in a wheelchairs design, usage or servicing information then appropriate action is taken with the manufacturer/supplier concerned.

MDA has also issued comprehensive guidance to health services relating to the management of medical devices including the provision of appropriate repair and maintenance procedures and the consideration of whole life costs and life cycle of devices. This guidance has now been incorporated into the new NHS Controls Assurance Standards for medical devices to give all health services basic standards in this area.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding people being placed inappropriately in *(a)* residential care homes and *(b)* nursing homes. [50069]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* In recent years the Department of Health has received representations about inappropriate placements. Systematic information on these representations is not collated.

The introduction of the single assessment process, and the development of preventative and intermediate care services, will help to ensure that placements in care homes are appropriate. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 926W.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 942W, regarding free nursing care, which agencies have failed to pass on the free nursing care payment to residents; [50561]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 942W, regarding free nursing care, whether she has received further representations regarding failures to pass on the free nursing care payments to residents; [50565]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 942W, regarding free nursing care, what plans she has to provide additional funding to residents of the four homes she wrote to which have failed to receive financial benefit from their free nursing care payment; [50562]

(4) pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 942W, regarding free nursing care, whether she will also be writing to these care homes to inform them of the breach in national model contract. [50860]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* I continue to receive correspondence on this subject. I wrote to some national providers about the increases in fees that some residents had experienced since the introduction of national health service funded nursing care. It should not be inferred that all those providers have, in every case, failed to pass on to residents any financial benefit from the NHS funding for part of their care. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 942W.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 310W, on care homes, when the booklet, 'Moving into a Care Home', was published; how much the booklet cost to produce and distribute; and what other means are being considered to ensure the widest possible circulation; and how much the new booklet has cost to produce. [50076]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The booklet 'Moving into a Care Home' was published in October 1996. It focused on financial issues for residents. At today's prices, it would cost approximately £10,000 to produce and distribute 3,000 copies of the original booklet free of charge to councils and other interested parties. The booklet was drafted and consulted upon by departmental staff. These and related costs were absorbed within the Department's running costs and are not separately identifiable, and therefore not included in the cost given above.

A voluntary organisation called 'Counsel and Care' has been commissioned to produce a new booklet for people both entering and in residential care that will be much more detailed and cover a much wider range of topics in addition to residents' finances. It will be distributed on the same basis. In addition, an electronic version will be placed on the internet. The Department awarded a grant of £80,000 for Counsel and Care for this work, which will also include the costs of dissemination events in the form of conferences and seminars.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure the availability of sufficient residential and nursing home places for the elderly. [49924]

Jacqui Smith: Our policy is to enable older people to remain independent in their own homes wherever possible. That is where most people want to receive care. Between 2000 and 2001 there was a 6 per cent. increase in the number of households receiving intensive home care.

We are providing local authorities with an additional £300 million over this year and last to spend on a range of community care services, including care home placements. In addition, as announced on 17 April by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we intend to increase resources for personal social services by an annual average of 6 per cent. in real terms from 2003–04 to 2005–06. Local authorities will be able to use these substantial extra resources to stabilise the care home market and to provide more care home places.

I chair a Strategic Commissioning Group, which aims to improve the commissioning of care services for adults. Last October, the group published an agreement, "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care", which will help councils and independent sector providers to work together to promote a more strategic, inclusive and consistent approach to local capacity planning.

Ambulance Services

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on the review of south-east ambulance services in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [50708]

Ms Blears: No additional work force costs were incurred as most of the work in connection with the review of ambulance services in the south-east has been carried out by existing civil servants at the Department and staff at health authorities and trusts. Additional costs were incurred for printing and the hire of church halls etc. for public meetings.

The wide ranging nature of the consultation and the number of organisations involved have meant that a central collation of costs has not been possible.

Smallpox Vaccine

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whom he consulted in deciding *(a)* the number of units of smallpox vaccine required for production in the UK and *(b)* the number of individuals to be covered; [50791]

(2) if he will make a statement on the process by which it was decided to use the Lister strain of the smallpox virus for vaccination of the UK population. [50792]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The choice of smallpox vaccine strain, the number of units of vaccine and the number of individuals to be covered, was made on the basis of expert advice, under the auspices of a specially convened sub-group of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Information concerning quantities of vaccine or deployment are not made public for reasons of national security.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which companies were asked to tender for the contract to supply smallpox vaccine for the NHS. [51916]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Detailed confidential discussions were held with five major pharmaceutical companies who were known to have vaccine manufacturing capability either in the UK or in Europe. Our requirements for the vaccine strain, timing, and delivery were made clear to each of the companies, who were then given time to submit their responses.

Medical Compression Tights

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* NHS managers and *(b)* private companies, about the provision of extra large medical compression tights; and if he will make a statement. [50925]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* None.

Drug Treatment Centres

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implication of the refusal of planning permission by local authorities in respect of drug treatment centres for the Government's strategy of increasing treatment facilities for drug users; and if he will make a statement. [51294]

Ms Blears: There is currently no evidence that this is a widespread national problem and in fact current data indicate a rise of about 16 per cent. over the past two years of those drug misusers entering treatment. These figures mean that the Government are on track to meet the target of increasing the number of drug misusers in treatment by 100 per cent. by 2008. The Government are of course aware of the negative impact that refusal of planning permission locally could have on the Government's aim of increasing the number of drug misusers accessing treatment.

Local authorities are autonomous bodies, accountable to their electorates, and the Government do not routinely comment on, or intervene in, their day-to-day administration of the planning system. Nor would it be appropriate for a Minister to comment on the merits of an individual planning decision, because of the appellate role of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. It is for the local planning authority to assess each planning proposal on its individual merits, in the light of the authority's development plan and of any other considerations material to planning.

Elderly People (Care Facilities)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number and percentage of people over *(a)* 95 and *(b)* 100 who are being cared for in (i) an NHS hospital and (ii) a nursing home. [51306]

Jacqui Smith: We do not have data available in the form requested. However, there were an estimated 57,910 nursing beds occupied by people aged 85 and over being cared for in private nursing homes, hospitals and clinics in England during the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001. This represented 38 per cent. of all occupied beds.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in the UK are diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy; how many new patients were diagnosed with the condition in each of the last six years; and what the annual mortality rate for children and young adults with the condition was in the last six years. [51142]

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the annual rate is of new diagnosis for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy in the UK; [51813]

(2) what the mortality rate for children and young adults with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy was in the last 12 months. [51812]

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the incidence has been of new diagnosis of Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy in each of the last three years; and what the annual death rate is for children and young adults with this condition. [52051]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect statistics on the incidence of individual conditions.

Anti-stab Vests

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce the provision of light-weight anti-stab vests for front line ambulance personnel. [51286]

Ms Blears: There are no national plans to introduce the provision of light-weight anti-stab vests for front line ambulance personnel. The use of anti-stab vests is something local managers in ambulance trusts need to consider after undertaking a thorough assessment of the risk faced by their staff, and the need for this type of protective wear.

The London Ambulance NHS Trust has recently piloted the use of anti-stab vests at two ambulance stations. The evaluation of the pilots was positive, and this information is being shared with all other NHS ambulance trusts.

Spinal Cord Injury

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Department has spent on research into spinal cord injury since 1997; what efforts have been made with *(a)* his European counterparts and *(b)* the World Health Organisation to increase resources for the treatment of spinal cord injury; and what measures have been introduced to help people suffering from spinal cord injury. [51230]

Jacqui Smith: Since 1997–98 we have spent around £5 million on research of relevance to spinal injuries. We also support a great deal of basic underpinning work on the structure and function of the nervous system; spend on this is not included in the figure above.

We have not been asking either the World Health Organisation or our European counterparts to increase resources for the treatment of spinal cord injury.

In February 2001 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that a national service framework would be developed for long-term conditions, and that this would have a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological disease and brain and spinal injury.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 25 July 2001 from RD Fouracre and subsequent correspondence of 6 November 2001 and 7 February 2002. [51400]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* I regret the Department was unable to trace the original correspondence. Following receipt of further information from the hon. Member on 18 April, a reply was sent on 23 April.

Modern Matrons

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the modern matron posts were *(a)* newly created and *(b)* redesignated from existing nursing staff posts. [51607]

Mr. Hutton: Trusts were not required to submit information on how many of their modern matrons were newly created or redesignated from existing nursing staff.

All of the 1,895 posts comply with the requirements set out in HSC 2001/010.

Child Protection

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the increase announced in the Budget for social services departments, will be devoted to child protection. [52246]

Jacqui Smith: Detailed decisions on the allocation of resources will follow in the autumn.

Ambulance Accidents

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries have resulted from road accidents involving ambulances; and how much compensation has been paid out, in each of the last five years. [52248]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 26 April 2002

PRIME MINISTER

Accountability to Parliament

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about his accountability to Parliament. [53474]

The Prime Minister: I have approached the Chairman of the Liaison Committee with a view to appearing before Select Committee Chairmen to discuss domestic and international affairs every six months. Further discussions will continue with the Liaison Committee and the House Authorities to work out the precise details. These sessions will be held in public and will give Select Committee Chairmen the opportunity to ask me a range of in-depth questions. I will of course continue to account to Parliament weekly on the issues of the day during Prime Minister's Questions on a Wednesday.

Voluntary Sector

Mr. Drew: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects the Performance and Innovation Unit's investigation into the voluntary sector to report. [52324]

The Prime Minister: The Performance and Innovation Unit's report on the legal and regulatory framework of the voluntary sector will be published in due course.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister how many digital radios are owned by his Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52853]

The Prime Minister: None.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by his Office, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost; [52846]

(2) if he will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by his Office, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52845]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 188W.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the process by which Ministers decide whether an announcement is too controversial to be made in a pre-election period. [52884]

The Prime Minister: Guidance is issued in relation to the conduct of Government business in pre-election periods. Decisions on announcements during pre-election periods will be taken in accordance with the guidance.

Guidance specific to the forthcoming elections to local government on 2 May was published on 21 March 2002. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House, and are also available from the Vote Office.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Empty Council Housing

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the lost income from empty council housing was broken down by local authority in England, in each of the last three years. [42234]

Mr. Byers: Lost income from empty council housing can be due to two main sources: *(a)* lost rent and *(b)* lost council tax.

(a) I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column 32W concerning the lost rental income from empty council dwellings in 200/01. The figures for 1998/99 and 199/00 have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

(b) Specific information on lost council tax by local authority is not available centrally.

Affordable Housing (Rural Areas)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the provision of social and affordable housing in villages; and how proposals in the planning Green Paper would affect this. [52333]

Ms Keeble: Our planning policies encourage the provision of affordable housing on allocated sites in villages and through the "rural exception policy". The exception policy is a special provision that applies only to rural areas and to sites, within or adjoining a village, where permission would not otherwise be given for new housing development. We have proposed to replace the present system of negotiated planning obligations with a tariff set by local authorities which will widen the type of developments contributing to affordable housing. The tariff would be spent in line with the priorities set out in local development plans, based on local and regional assessment. We expect the provision of affordable housing to be a high priority.

Passenger Transport Authorities

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he issues to passenger transport authorities about travel and subsistence costs. [52118]

Ms Keeble: The Government issued "Guidance on Councillors" Allowances, Tax and Social Security Benefits" to local authorities, including passenger transport authorities, in August 1997. In April 2000 the Department issued an appendix to Joint Circular 1/86 setting out the maximum rates of travel and subsistence allowance which may be paid to members of local authorities, including passenger transport authorities.

10-year Transport Plan

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the status is of each of the 100 new bypasses aimed at reducing congestion and pollution outlined in the 10 year transport plan; what the *(a)* start and *(b)* completion date is of each project; and what the date is on which each of the 11 multi-modal studies outlined in the 10 year transport plan will be completed and published. [52551]

Mr. Jamieson: On *(a)* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) on 18 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1098W. In regard to *(b)*, of the 11 Tranche 1 Multi-Modal Studies outlined in the Ten-Year Transport Plan, four have already reported as indicated below:

Multi-Modal Study & Location	*Reported*
Access to Hastings	December 2000
Cambridge to Huntingdon (A14)	August 2001
South East Manchester (Stockport, Manchester Airport Link West, Poynton)	September 2001
West Midlands Area (M5/M6 & M42 between M40 and M6)	October 2001

The timetable for the remaining seven Tranche 1 Multi-Modal Studies that are currently in progress is set out in the following table:

Multi-Modal Study & Location	*Date Expected to Report*
West Midlands to North West (M6)	May 2002
North/South Movements in the East Midlands (M1 Junctions 21 to 30)	May 2002
London to South West & South Wales (A303, M4)	May 2002
South & West Yorkshire Motorway Box (M1 J30 to A1 West Yorks/M18 & A1(M)	June 2002
Tyneside Area (A1/A19)	June 2002
A453 (M1 to J24 (Nottingham))	June 2002
ORBIT—Transport Solutions Around London (M25)	Autumn 2002

Urban Sounding Board

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the sub-groups of the Urban Sounding Board, the membership of each group and their terms of reference. [52092]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Four sub-groups have been set up to help target the advice members of the Urban Sounding Board give to Ministers. The sub groups cover:

(i) the obstacles to effective physical regeneration and how these might be addressed (led by Prof. Brian Robson);

(ii) how good practice in urban design quality and public space provision might be adopted more widely (led by Robin Nicholson);

(iii) how urban policy performance management might be used to improve target setting and measurement for delivering better towns and cities (led by Wendy Thomson);

(iv) how to make the Urban Summit, to be held in Birmingham on 31 October/1 November, a worthwhile experience for all those expected to attend (led by Prof. Michael Parkinson).

They are informal, short-term groups of members tasked with taking forward discussion on the above issues and identifying areas for possible action. The groups are made up of members of the Urban Sounding Board and others with particular interests and expertise invited by the sub-group leader. Their findings will be considered by the Urban Sounding Board as a whole.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many telecommunications masts are located in areas of outstanding natural beauty, world heritage sites and other conservation areas; and what these locations are. [52292]

Ms Keeble: The Department does not hold information about the number or locations of existing mobile phone masts.

However, the Radiocommunications Agency have made information available to the public via their website (www.radio.gov.uk). The database, called "Sitefinder", gives details about all operational mobile phone base stations and their emissions. Sitefinder employs a "user-friendly" map-based facility indicating the location of cellular phone base stations. More information on a particular base station is available by simply clicking on the position indicator for the base station in question.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures are being taken to minimise the number of telecommunications masts that are sited in areas of outstanding natural beauty, world heritage sites and other conservation areas. [52291]

Ms Keeble: Proposals to install telecommunications masts are for the Local Planning Authority to determine in the first instance, taking account of local planning policies and national planning policy guidance. Current planning guidance on telecommunications is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 8 (revised) (PPG8). Advice on proposed development in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks is given in PPG7—The Countryside. Advice on proposed development in world heritage sites and conservation areas is given in PPG15—Planning and the Historic Environment.

The Government attaches great importance to minimising the impact of telecommunications development on the environment. Our policy is to encourage mast and site sharing and to make good use of existing buildings and other structures for the siting of antennas. The mobile phone industry has pledged to provide local planning authorities with annual rollout plans for each authority's area. We strongly encourage the use of pre-rollout discussions based upon these plans and collaboration between the operators and authorities as a means of overcoming potential technical and environmental constraints, particularly in designated areas. These discussions should also provide an early opportunity to explore possible alternative approaches,

particularly the opportunities for mast and site sharing and also in terms of the location and alternative design of the apparatus.

Planning Appeals

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will issue guidance to the Planning Inspectorate on the interpretation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights in the determination of appeals. [52598]

Ms Keeble: Inspectors received extensive training on human rights matters prior to the coming into force of the Human Rights Act. Inspectors are kept appraised of key Court judgments involving various Convention rights.

Gypsies

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to amend the regulations governing rights of abode for gypsy families. [52597]

Ms Keeble: The main legislation governing rights of abode for Gypsy families are the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960, and the subsequent Caravan Sites Act of 1968.

There are no current plans to amend the legislation.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance his Department issues to the Planning Inspectorate in determining appeals concerning gypsy families. [52599]

Ms Keeble: The Government's policy on Gypsy sites and planning is set out in Circular 1/94. This puts Gypsies on the same footing as others in relation to the planning system whilst recognising their special accommodation needs. Inspectors will also have regard to other relevant planning policies set out in Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Circulars. As with all planning decisions, each must be considered on its particular circumstances and merits.

Councillors' Interests

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his response to those parish and town councillors who are refusing to sign the new declaration of interests. [52329]

Dr. Whitehead: As we have consistently explained, Parish councillors have for many years been subject to a Code which includes the requirement to declare their interests. The new Code, which includes a new requirement to complete a register of interests, has been supported by the National Association of Local Councils and the Association of Larger Local Councils, and by the majority of Parish Councils who responded to our consultation. I would encourage all councillors to accept the new Code.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the instances in which breaches of declaration of interest by parish and town councillors have been reported to his Department. [52330]

Dr. Whitehead: There is no requirement for such breaches to be reported to my Department. Under section 58 of the Local Government Act 2000, written allegations of a councillor breaching the new code of conduct are to be sent to the Standards Board for England.

Rural Bus Services

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on what support is available to maintain and enhance rural bus services. [52331]

Ms Keeble: My Department provides support for improving and maintaining rural bus services by means of the Rural Bus Subsidy Grant and Rural Bus Challenge schemes. A total of £198 million has been allocated to those two schemes for the period 2001–02 to 2003–04.

In addition, the Countryside Agency supports small-scale rural transport projects, such as community mini-buses, through its Rural Transport Partnership scheme for which £32 million is available for the period 2001–02 to 2003–04.

Local authorities of course can—and do—add to this funding by support from their own resources.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the role of the Traffic Commissioners with specific regard to the maintenance and enhancement of bus servies in rural areas. [52332]

Ms Keeble: The Traffic Commissioners have no role in the provision of individual bus services. That is entirely a matter for the bus operator, and the relevant local authority if the service is subsidised.

All local bus services must have their particulars registered with the relevant Traffic Commissioner. Operators can face disciplinary action by the Commissioner if they do not operate the service as described in the registration. A new, more flexible penalty power comes into force on 1 May.

Mass Decontamination

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent reports have been commissioned on effective methods of mass decontamination from *(a)* chemical and *(b)* biological (i) attacks and (ii) disasters; and if he will place the reports in the Library. [50855]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

Reports have been commissioned from experts in the health, fire and military fields both in the UK and overseas. These reports are not being made public.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the functions of his Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [42989]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department has not market tested any of its functions.

However, it currently outsources a number of services including payroll (Chessington ADP), PCSPS pension services (Paymaster), cleaning, security, building maintenance and IT service and support all of which have been in place for longer than five years.

During 2001, the Internal Management Consultancy Branch of the Cabinet Office undertook a review of Central Services (Personnel, Finance and Accommodation). The recommendation was that all services were to be kept in-house to retain value for money and service levels to staff and management.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by his Office, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52842]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department subscribes to the following magazines and periodicals:

Name	*Frequency*	*Copies*	*Annual Cost*
Diplomatic Service List Book	Six monthly	1	£27.50
Vacher's Parliamentary Companion	Quarterly	24	£3072.00
The Railway Guide	Monthly	1	£99.00
The New Statesman	Weekly	2	£211.20
The Economist	Weekly	1	£132.00

Mr. Yeo: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by his Office, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52841]

Mr. Robin Cook: My department subscribes to the following newspapers:

Monday to Saturday	*Copies*	*Annual cost*
The Guardian	6	£720.00
The Guardian (Saturday)	1	£48.00
The Daily Telegraph	2	£240.00
The Independent	6	£720.00
The Independent on Sunday	1	£43.20
The Daily Express	5	£420.00
The Daily Mail	5	£480.00
The Mirror	5	£384.00
The Sun	5	£288.00
The Times	2	£192.00
The Financial Times	3	£720.00
The Scotsman	2	£240.00
The Daily Record	2	£168.00
The Tribune	1	£60.00
Evening Standard	4	£336.00
Sunday papers		
The Sunday Times	1	£57.60
The Independent on Sunday	1	£57.60
Scotland on Sunday	1	£38.40

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how much has been spent by his Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52728]

Mr. Robin Cook: For years in which information is available, my Department spent the following on training staff in leadership skills:

	£
1998–99	1,355
1999–2000	1,250
2000–2001	2,495

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council (1) how much has been spent by his Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years; [52704]

(2) how much has been spent by his Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52744]

Mr. Robin Cook: Nothing.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the President of the Council how many digital radios are owned by his Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52856]

Mr. Robin Cook: None.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many claimants have been in receipt of incapacity benefit payment for *(a)* six months or less, *(b)* between six months and one year, *(c)* between one and two years and *(d)* between two and five years; [27873]

(2) what the average period of payment is for current claimants of incapacity benefit; and what the comparable averages were in each year since 1997; [27874]

(3) how many people received payment of incapacity benefit in each year since 1997; and how many of these represented new claims; [27875]

(4) how many new claimants of incapacity benefit in the last six months represented *(a)* transfers from other social security benefits, *(b)* people moving from employment onto benefit and *(c)* people moving onto benefit from unknown origins; [27876]

(5) how many people leaving incapacity benefit in the last six months represented *(a)* transfers to other social security benefits, *(b)* people moving from benefit into employment and *(c)* people moving off benefit to unknown destinations; [27877]

(6) what percentage of the working age population is in receipt of incapacity benefit; and what the comparable averages were in each year since 1997; [27878]

(7) how many new claimants of incapacity benefit in the last six months had been in receipt of either *(a)* jobseeker's allowance or *(b)* income support at any time during the previous 12 months. [27879]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are committed to helping Incapacity Benefit (IB) recipients into work where they wish to do so and to provide security for those who cannot. Since 22 October 2001, people making new or repeat claims to IB in the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices are required to participate in a Jobcentre Plus interview and a review at least every three years.

The reviews enable IB customers to discuss with their Personal Advisor the help, benefits and opportunities available to them. The interviews also provide an ideal opportunity for people to participate in the New Deal schemes.

For many people the key aim of the review is to ensure that they are receiving the right level of benefit. For others we can show them the help and support that is available to enable them to move back into full or part-time work.

The available information is in the tables:

The number of people in Great Britain receiving Incapacity Benefit (IB) at 30 November 2001, by the duration of their claim.

	Duration of IB	*Number (Thousands)*
	Total	1,503.8
(a)	Under six months	132.5
(b)	Six months to one year	108.7
(c)	One to two years	154.9
(d)	Two to five years	348.6

Notes:

1. Figures are expressed as thousands and are rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. The table includes a small number of people who are resident overseas.

Source:

Figures are taken from a 5 per cent sample of the Incapacity Benefit computer system and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

Average IB claim duration between 1997 and 2000

Average IB claim duration at:	*Average Duration (weeks)*
31 March 2001	328
31 March 2000	326
31 March 1999	315
31 March 1998	302
31 March 1997	292

Note:

Average duration has been rounded to the nearest week.

Source:

Figures are taken from 1 per cent sample of claimants.

The number of people who were receiving IB in Great Britain and the number that were new awards.

	IB recipients current at some time in the previous year	*Of whom were current IB recipients at the dates shown*	*Thousands Total who started a non-linking[1] spell in the previous year (new awards)*
31 March 2001	1,979	1,573	388
31 March 2000	1,995	1,514	364
31 March 1999	2,125	1,615	379
31 March 1998	2,287	1,729	456
31 March 1997	2,362	1,798	488

Notes:

1. These figures do not include IB claims, which link to a previous IB claim, although they may link with Statutory Sick Pay.

2. The table includes a small number of people who are resident overseas.

Source:

Figures are taken from 1 per cent samples of the Incapacity Benefit Computer System.

Information on Incapacity Benefit claimants immediately prior to a new claim or immediately after ceasing claiming IB.

Information on the status of IB claimants immediately prior to starting a claim and immediately after ceasing to claim is not available.

Percentage of the working age population in Great Britain receiving Incapacity Benefit (IB)

IB recipients at:	*IB as a percentage of the working age population*
31 August 2001	4.2
31 August 2000	4.2
31 August 1999	4.3
31 August 1998	4.3
31 August 1997	4.5

Sources:

Figures are taken from 5 per cent samples of the benefit computer system, which excludes a small number of cases held clerically.

Population data are from the Office for National Statistics, mid-year population estimates.

Note:

The table includes a small number of people who are resident overseas.

Number of Incapacity Benefit (IB) spells commencing in the period 1 December 2000 to 31 May 2001 in Great Britain, and whether they had been in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Income Support (IS) at some time in the previous year.

	Thousands
All IB commencements	330.5
Both Income Support and JSA shown	29.7
IS only shown	40.5
JSA only shown	90.7
No IS / JSA shown	169.5

Notes:
1. Figures are expressed as thousands and are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Not all of these shown in the table below will have moved directly from JSA or IS to IB, some will have worked in between claims.
3. The table includes a small number of cases where the customer is resident overseas and excludes a small number of short duration Income Support claims.

Source:
Figures are taken from merges between 5 per cent samples of the IS, JSA and IB benefit computer system extracts.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the Department's procedure is for responding to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998; if he will place a copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [33483]

Mr. McCartney: The Department's Procedures for responding to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 is documented within the DWP Data Protection Manual. A copy of the manual has been placed in the Library.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in his Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits; [38152]

(2) if he will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in his Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38188]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by my hon. Friend for Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 421W.

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years; [38723]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past five years. [38724]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding reply 28 February 2002]:* The questions cover a period prior to the establishment of the Department for Work and Pensions in June 2001. The information requested on contracts let by the ex Employment Service and ex-Department of Social Security is not held centrally in the new Department and the question could only be answered at disproportionate cost.

The Department for Work and Pensions lets a large number of contracts in a year, most of which are for low value purchases. The information required to answer the question is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

User Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what new steps his Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if he will publish the findings. [47303]

Mr. McCartney *[holding reply 9 April 2002]:* The Department has undertaken a number of surveys with users of its services in 2001–2002. Details are in the table.

Title	*Actual/planned publication date*	*Report Number (where appropriate)*
Disability and Carer Service—Customer Satisfaction Survey	Publication will be in line with normal Departmental arrangements	
Benefits Agency—Customer Satisfaction Survey	Results are used internally to help improve service delivery	
Evaluation of the Minimum Income Guarantee Claim Line	August 2001	DWP Research Report 147
Survey of Entitled Non-recipients of the Minimum Income Guarantee and possible future Pension Credit Recipients	End of 2002	
Survey of Attitudes to Electronic Government	May 2002	
The Short-term effects of Compulsory Participation in ONE—Survey of Clients Cohort 2 Wave 1	December 2001	DWP Research Report 156
Medium term effects of Compulsory Participation in ONE—Survey of Clients Cohort 2 Wave 1	Winter 2002–3	
Work Based Learning for Adults—Large Scale Survey	July 2003	
New Deal for Young People: Increasing Flexibilities in Provision	Spring 2003	
Evaluation of the StepUp programme	First Interim Report due July 2003	
Evaluation of remote Jobpoints	June 2002	
Evaluation of enhanced JSA regime at 6 and 12 months	Date to be determined	
Evaluation of ES Plus Online	Internal report completed February 2002	
Joint Claims: Quantitative Survey Stage 2	June 2002	
Evaluation of New Deal for Disabled People—National extension	Series of reports will be published from late 2002 to Spring 2004	

Title	Actual/planned publication date	Report Number (where appropriate)
Early Evaluation of Jobpoints in Pathfinder Offices	June 2001	ESR 76
Employment Service National Customer Satisfaction Survey 2000	June 2001	ESR 80
New Deal for the Long Term Unemployed Pilots: quantitative evaluation Stage 2 survey	June 2001	ESR 81
Northern Region Call Centre Pilot Employers and Jobseekers Surveys	July 2001	ESR 84
Evaluation of the New Deal 50 plus: Research with Individuals (Wave 1)	September 2001	ESR 91
Joint Claims for JSA—Stage 1 Survey	September 2001	ESR 94
Evaluation of New Deal for Lone Parents A survey of Lone Parents on Income Support	November 2001	ESR 101
Modernising ES—Baseline Employer Survey	January 2002	ESR 107
Baseline Jobseeker Traffic Survey	January 2002	ESR 108
Early Views on the Internet Job Bank	January 2002	ESR 109

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much has been spent by her Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52711]

Hilary Benn: Spending on training in Leadership skills for which records are maintained centrally was as follows:

	£
2001–2002	6,150
2000–2001	16,804
1999–2000	10,075
1998–1999	80,781
1997–1998	nil

As training budgets are delegated to individual DFID departments both in the UK and overseas, these figures may not represent the totality of spending in this area. An exhaustive calculation would involve disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much has been spent by her Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52698]

Hilary Benn: In the past five financial years DFID's spending on voice coaching has been as follows:

	£
2001–2002	Nil
2000–2001	Nil
1999–2000	Ministers Nil, Officials £250
1998–1999	Nil
1997–1998	Nil

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much has been spent by her Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52737]

Clare Short: There has been no spending by my Department in the last five financial years on training for Ministers and officials by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by her Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52813]

Hilary Benn: The Department no longer purchases newspapers from a central budget. Our last record for central subscriptions and expenditure is shown below, for November 2001.

Subscription	Number of copies (Mon–Sat)	Number of copies (Sunday)	Annual cost
Daily Mail	1	—	£100.80
Daily Mirror	1	—	£80.64
Daily Telegraph	3	—	£378.00
East Kilbride News	1	—	£24.00
Evening Standard	3	—	£252.00
Express	1	—	£88.48
Financial Times	5	—	£1,260.00
Guardian	5	—	£1,102.50
Herald	2	—	£260.00
Independent	4	—	£504.00
Scotsman	2	—	£208.00
Sun	1	—	£79.20
Times	5	—	£815.60
Independent on Sunday	—	1	£72.00
Observer	—	1	£72.00
Sunday Telegraph	—	1	£60.00
Sunday Times	—	1	£72.00
		Total cost	£5,429.22

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by her Department, stating for each subscription the *(a)* number of copies taken and *(b)* annual cost. [52814]

Hilary Benn: The Department's core, central subscriptions to magazines and periodicals are listed in tables, copies of which have been placed in the library. A number of DFID departments and country offices have direct journal subscriptions, but full details of decentralised expenditure could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Sudan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on what help she provides to assist the development of primary education in the Sudan. [52322]

Hilary Benn: As my right hon. Friend said to the House recently, *Official Report*, 17 April, column 561, development in the Sudan cannot take place around an ongoing war. It is not realistic to expect sustained improvements to education while the conflict continues. We are trying to improve the humanitarian effort and will do what we can to support education for children affected by the conflict within that context.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the Government of the Sudan on the subject of its use of oil revenues for development purposes. [52323]

Hilary Benn: During my right hon. Friend's visit to the Sudan in January she made clear to the government the importance of their commitment to poverty reduction and the use of government revenues (not only from oil) for sustainable development.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the British Council with regard to the teaching of English in the Sudan. [52418]

Hilary Benn: Neither myself nor my right hon. Friend have had recent discussions with the British Council with regard to the teaching of English in the Sudan.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mental Health

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are set for the *(a)* circumstances and *(b)* length of custody of persons with a history of mental illness; and if he will make a statement. [41884]

Mr. Denham: If a police officer has any suspicion that a person held in police custody may be mentally disordered or mentally handicapped, he must apply special protections for that person as set out in the relevant code of practice (Code C) issued under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE). These include summoning an "appropriate adult" to assist and advise the detained person and (where the person appears to be suffering from a mental disorder) calling for the police surgeon.

Persons with a history of mental illness are subject to the same rules covering length of detention as other detainees. Under PACE where a person has been arrested for an offence they may be detained in police custody for up to 24 hours without being charged. This period can be extended to 36 hours by a police officer of the rank of Superintendent or above where a person is arrested for a serious arrestable offence. Further periods of detention up to a maximum of 96 hours can be approved by a magistrates' court.

Where a person arrested is charged with an offence they must be released from police detention unless certain conditions apply, such as where the custody officer has reasonable grounds for believing that the person charged will fail to appear in court to answer to bail. Where such a person is kept in police detention they must be brought before the relevant magistrates' court as soon as is practicable and normally not later than the first sitting after they are charged with the offence.

Where a person charged with an offence is arrested on warrant for failing to attend a magistrates' court, they must be taken back to that magistrates' court as soon as practicable. If a person is arrested in a different part of the country they must appear not later than the first sitting of the magistrates' court after their transfer back to the relevant area.

All persons detained in police custody have their detention reviewed on a regular basis. The first review is no later than six hours after the detention was first authorised. The second review is no later than nine hours after the first review. Subsequent reviews are at intervals of not more than nine hours.

A mentally disordered or mentally handicapped person who has been detained under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 can be taken to a police station as a place of safety to be assessed. The person can be detained only until such time as they have been interviewed and examined by an approved social worker and a registered medical practitioner, and suitable arrangements have been made for their treatment and care.

There are currently several strands of work focused on improving police practice in relation to mentally ill individuals. The Home Office, the Department of Health and the Association of Chief Police Officers are considering the development of national protocols covering the interaction between the police and health services in dealing with the mentally ill. The current review of the PACE Codes of Practice is seeking to strengthen further the protections for mentally ill detainees, particularly in terms of assessing their vulnerabilities and fitness for interview. In addition, the review of the Mental Health Act which is underway recognises that police cells are not generally appropriate places for assessing whether a person needs medical treatment.

Disorderly Conduct

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of disorderly conduct were reported in 1997 and each subsequent year in *(a)* Preston, *(b)* Blackburn, *(c)* Lancashire, *(d)* the North West, *(e)* Wales and *(f)* the UK. [45794]

Mr. Denham: The Information requested is not available.

Crimes Against Tourists

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes against tourists in London have been reported in each of the last five years. [45956]

Mr. Denham: The requested information is not collected centrally.

Police (East Midlands)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers serving in the

(a) Leicestershire and *(b)* Nottinghamshire constabularies were previously employed in the Metropolitan Police. [46211]

Mr. Denham: I am told by the Chief Constable of Leicestershire Constabulary (David Wyrko) that there are 65 officers in the force who previously served with the Metropolitan Police.

I am told by the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire (Stephen Green) that information about the previous forces of officers who have joined on transfer is not routinely collated centrally. The force does, however, have a record that 12 officers transferred into the force from the Metropolitan Police in 2001–02.

Police Reform Bill

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the ACPO concerning the Police Reform Bill. [46210]

Mr. Denham: We had extensive discussions with The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) when formulating the provisions of the Bill. Those discussions, have continued following the introduction of the Bill in another place.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many local authorities make use of mediation and restorative justice services in tackling antisocial behaviour. [46572]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not held centrally.

Prison Suicides

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners who have attempted suicide died whilst being transferred to hospital in the last three years; and if he will make a statement; [48672]

(2) how many people have *(a)* committed and *(b)* attempted suicide whilst in prison in the last five years; how many of these were on a life sentence; how many were in for more than 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [48549]

Beverley Hughes: The total number of self-inflicted prisoner deaths and reported incidents of self-harm in establishments in England and Wales are set out in the given tables.

Information relating to the number of prisoners who have died whilst being transferred from prison establishment to hospital is not kept separately.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett), the Director General of the Prison Service (Martin Narey) and I take every self-inflicted death and incident of self-harm in prison custody very seriously.

The Prison Service's new three-year suicide prevention strategy commenced in April 2001 and aims to make prisons safer for all who live and work there. There is an early focus on pilots in five establishments with a range of changes being made, including physical improvements to reception and induction areas, and more first night support centres and safer cells. Suicide Prevention Co-ordinators have been trained and appointed at 30 high-risk prisons, and revised risk assessment tools are being devised.

The Prison Service's internal review into the prevention of suicides and self-harm found that those serving life sentences are at higher risk than those with determinate sentences. Research to find out at what stage in their period of custody life sentenced prisoners are most at risk, and how the self-inflicted deaths of life-sentenced prisoners differ to those in other sentence categories, is now being planned.

1. Self-inflicted deaths at establishments in England and Wales 1998–2002

Year	*Number of Deaths*	*Lifer Prisoners*	*Already served 10 years or more*
1998	82	8	0
1999	91	4	1
2000	81	3	0
2001	72	7	1
2002	19	0	0
Total	345	22	2

2. Self-harm incidents at establishments in England and Wales 1998–2002

Year	*Number of Incidents*
1998	3,207
1999	3,721
2000	5,227
2001	7,486
2002	2,119
Total	21,760

up to and including 08/04/02

Notes:

1. Not all self-inflicted deaths result in an inquest verdict of suicide.
2. Data in above table include all attempted suicides. Self-harm incidents are not categorised by intent for data collection purposes or by prisoner status.
3. Self-harm incidents do not equate to numbers of prisoners as an individual prisoner may self-harm more than once.

Professor Michael Barber

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the work of Professor Michael Barber in his role as advisor on crime; [51214]

(2) if Professor Michael Barber continues in his role as a Home Office advisor on crime; and if he will make a statement; [51212]

(3) to which of his recent crime fighting initiatives Professor Michael Barber has contributed; and if he will make a statement; [51215]

(4) if he will place in the Library copies of the research undertaken by Professor Michael Barber in his capacity as the Government's adviser on crime; and if he will make a statement. [51438]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Professor Michael Barber is head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit which is working closely with the Treasury

and other Delivery Departments to ensure that the Government achieve their delivery priorities during this Parliament across the key areas of public service: health, education, crime, asylum and transport. He reports to my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister (Mr. Blair), and is not separately an adviser on crime.

Sentences (Drug Smuggling)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the maximum custodial sentence for the smuggling of *(a)* class A controlled substances, *(b)* class B controlled substances, *(c)* class C controlled substances, *(d)* alcohol and *(e)* tobacco. [51216]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The maximum custodial sentence for the smuggling of Class A controlled drugs is life imprisonment; that for smuggling of Class B controlled drugs is 14 years' imprisonment; that for smuggling Class C controlled drugs is five years' imprisonment. The maximum custodial sentence for the smuggling of alcohol and tobacco is also seven years' imprisonment.

Released Prisoners (Accommodation)

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people aged under 18 have been released from prison with no fixed abode in each year since 1998; and from which prisons. [49981]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the accommodation of prisoners after release is not recorded centrally for all prisoners. However a survey of prisoners' resettlement has recently been carried out for the Prison Service. This involved interviews with a representative sample of about 2000 prisoners shortly before discharge. It will provide information about the proportion reporting in the last two-three weeks of sentence that they have no accommodation to go to on release. Results will be available shortly.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Geneva Conventions will be applied to prisoners captured by UK forces in Afghanistan; and whether such prisoners will be handed directly to US forces. [45409]

Mr. Hoon: The Geneva Conventions will be applied to prisoners captured by United Kingdom troops in Afghanistan. Any such prisoners would be handed to the Afghan Interim Authority.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which *(a)* machine guns, *(b)* light machine guns and *(c)* assault rifles are in service with the Royal Marines deployed in Afghanistan. [52899]

Mr. Hoon: 45 Commando Group Royal Marines is equipped with General Purpose Machine Guns and 50 Calibre machine guns. The Light Support Weapon and the Minimi provide their light machine gun capability.

The SA80 A2 assault rifle is the standard individual weapon for the Royal Marines, although the Brigade Reconnaissance Force is equipped with M16 owing to its specialist role.

Radar

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the upgrading of the software of the radar in Fylingdales and Menwith Hill; how long it is expected to last; how much it is expected to cost; and if he will make a statement. [52119]

Mr. Hoon: We have not received a request from the United States for assistance with the deployment of a missile defence system. It would be premature, therefore, to make an assessment of the work that might be required to upgrade the facilities at RAF Fylingdales or RAF Menwith Hill for missile defence purposes, and how long such work might take. The costs associated with any such upgrading would be first and foremost a matter for the United States.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the proposed time scale is for a decision on the development of X-band radar in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [52097]

Mr. Hoon: We have no indication of the timing of any possible requests from the United States to build an X-band radar in the UK, nor do we work on the assumption that such a radar would necessarily be sited in the UK. I cannot therefore give a timescale for any UK decisions which might be required.

BUPA Referrals

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been referred to BUPA consultants over the past two years; whether the number has increased over that time; and what the costs to the MoD were of those referrals. [46871]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Referrals have been made to BUPA under centrally led initiatives by the Royal Navy, the Army Training and Recruiting Agency and the Defence Secondary Care Agency, and locally by RAF Units. Under these arrangements, some 3,000 referrals have been made to BUPA since April 2000 at cost to date of some £2.7 million. The number of referrals is evenly spread across the two financial years.

Unexploded Ordnance

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much unexploded ordnance has been left on the ground following British Army training exercises in *(a)* Kenya and *(b)* in foreign countries other than Kenya, broken down by type. [49306]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Wherever it trains, the British Army aims to destroy unexploded ammunition it uses as soon as possible after it has been fired—usually during the exercise itself. In Kenya, we also conduct an annual clearance exercise at the end of our exercise period in support of the Kenyan Authorities.

Information about amounts of unexploded ordnance that may have been left on the ground following British Army training exercises is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much unexploded ordnance he estimates has been left by British forces in Kenya in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002; and if he will make a statement; [49991]

(2) how much unexploded ordnance he estimates has been left by British forces; how much money has been spent by the Ministry of Defence in clearing unexploded ordnance in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001; and if he will make a statement. [49996]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Wherever they train, British Forces aim to destroy unexploded ammunition as soon as possible after it has been fired—usually during the exercise itself. In Kenya, we also conduct an annual clearance exercise at the end of our exercise period in support of the Kenyan Authorities.

I have assumed that the hon. Member is seeking information about the amount of ordnance left unexploded following exercises by British Forces and the costs of clearing it, rather than operational deployments. These details are not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Blue Danube Atomic Bomb

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aspects of the Blue Danube atomic bomb continue to be covered by exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to Government information relating to defence, security and international relations. [51023]

Mr. Hoon: Certain specific aspects which might be of value to a potential nuclear weapons proliferator. For obvious reasons, it would not be appropriate to go into greater detail.

Computer Thefts

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 498W, on stolen equipment, if he will list the reported thefts and the related property code of *(a)* computer equipment and *(b)* computer data, indicating whether the property was recovered; which of those reported thefts are recorded as (i) no crime, (ii) closed detected and (iii) closed undetected; and if he will make a statement. [51195]

Dr. Moonie: Reported cases of stolen equipment are held centrally on a summary basis relating to suspected theft by Crown Personnel or contractors. Full details of computer property codes and recovery, including details related to computer data related to the suspected thefts identified in the answer on 31 January 2002, could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The same also applies in respect of outcomes recorded as no crime, closed detected, or closed undetected.

Gulf War

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Gulf War troops have been medically examined by the Medical Assessment Programme. [51571]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence's Gulf Veterans Medical Assessment Programme (GVMAP) was established in July 1993. Any Serviceman or Service woman, including those who have since left the UK armed forces, and Ministry of Defence civilians, who served in the Gulf at any time between August 1990 and July 1991, or who believe that their health has suffered as a direct result of the Gulf conflict can apply. Individuals who worked for contractors providing direct support to UK operations during the Gulf conflict may also be seen. All patients are seen following referral from their general practitioner or their armed forces medical officer. As at 19 April 2002, GVMAP consultants had physically examined 3,117 members and former members of the armed forces. This equates to 5.8 per cent of all UK armed forces deployed. Further information about the GVMAP can be obtained from my Department's web site: www.mod.uk/issues/gulfwar or by telephoning Freephone 0800 169 5401.

Voluntary Sector (Funding)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire of 25 January, *Official Report*, columns 1185–6W, on Government funding of the voluntary sector, if he will list the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which his Department distributes funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51412]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Funding to voluntary sector organisations by the Ministry of Defence is effected via the provision of grants in aid. These are grants from voted monies to particular organisations or bodies, which may include, but are not restricted to, voluntary sector organisations. The list of organisations for Financial Year 2001–2002 is as follows:

The Air Training Corps
The Army Sports Control Board
The Atlantic Council
The Commonwealth War Graves Commission
The Millennium String of Pearls
The National Army Museum
The Royal Air Force Museum
The Royal Air Force Sports Board
The Royal British Legion
The Royal Hospital Chelsea
The Royal Marines Museum
The Royal Naval Museum
The Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm Museum
The Royal Navy Sports Board
The Royal Navy Submarine Museum
The Scott Polar Research Institute
The Victoria and George Cross Association
The Welfare Council

Aircraft

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by aircraft type, the Royal Navy's operational fleet; how many aircraft of each type are *(a)* owned and *(b)* leased by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [52135]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* The numbers of aircraft in the RN operational fleet (which is entirely owned by the Department), listed by type as at 1 April 2002, are shown in the table below. The table includes those aircraft operated by Royal Navy personnel serving within Naval Air Squadrons within both Joint Force Harrier and the Joint Helicopter Command.

Type/Class	*Aircraft Type*	*No*
Fixed Wing	Sea Harrier F/A2	29
	Harrier T8 Trainers	4
	Hawk	12
	Jetstream	11
Rotary wing	Sea King	66
	Lynx	63
	Merlin	21
	Gazelle	8

Ships

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by ship type, the Royal Navy's operational fleet; how many ships of each type are *(a)* owned and *(b)* leased by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [52134]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answers 25 April 2002]:* The strength of the Royal Navy Fleet (which is entirely owned by the Ministry of Defence), by ship type, as at 1 April 2002 is as follows:

Type/Class	*No.*	*Operational or engaged in preparing for service, trials or training*	*No.*	*Undergoing refit or held at a low level of readiness*
Submarines				
Trident	3	Vengeance, Victorious, Vigilant	1	Vanguard
Fleet	6	Talent, Tireless, Torbay, Trafalgar, Triumph, Turbulent	1	Trenchant
	1	Splendid	4	Sceptre, Spartan, Sovereign, Superb
Aircraft Carriers	2	Illustrious, Ark Royal	1	Invincible
Landing Platform Dock*				
Landing Platform Helicopter	1	Ocean		
Destroyers				
Type 42	8	Cardiff, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Newcastle, Nottingham, Southampton, York	3	Liverpool, Gloucester, Manchester
Frigates				
Type 23	13	Argyll, Grafton, Kent, Lancaster, Montrose, Northumberland, Norfolk, Portland, Richmond, St Albans, Somerset, Sutherland, Westminster	3	Iron Duke, Monmouth, Marlborough
Type 22	5	Campbeltown, Chatham, Cornwall, Cumberland, Sheffield		
Offshore Patrol				
Castle Class	2	Leeds Castle, Dumbarton Castle		
Island Class	5	Alderney, Anglesey, Guernsey, Lindisfarne, Shetland		
Minehunters				
Hunt Class	11	Atherstone, Brecon, Brocklesby, Cattistock, Chiddingfold, Cottesmore, Dulverton, Hurworth, Ledbury, Middleton, Quorn		
Sandown Class	10	Bangor, Blyth, Bridport, Grimsby, Inverness, Pembroke, Penzance, Ramsey, Sandown, Walney	1	Shoreham
Patrol Craft				
Coastal Training Craft	14	Archer, Biter, Blazer, Charger, Dasher, Example, Exploit, Explorer, Express, Puncher, Pursuer, Raider, Smiter, Tracker		
Gibraltar Search and Rescue Craft	2	Ranger, Trumpeter		
Ice Patrol Ship	1	Endurance		
Survey Ships	3	Gleaner, Roebuck, Scott		

* As a result of the withdrawal from service of HMS FEARLESS announced on 7 March 2002 (*Official Report*, column 474W), there were no Landing Platform Docks in the strength of the Fleet as at 1 April 2002. However, two Landing Platform Dock replacements (HMS ALBION and HMS BULWARK) are planned to enter service in 2003.

Conflict Expenditure

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been spent on the conflicts that the UK has been involved in as combatants since 1972. [52481]

Mr. Hoon: This information is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Missile Defence System

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate has been made of the possible cost of a UK missile defence system; and if he will make a statement. [52281]

Mr. Hoon: As we have not reached the stage of developing specific proposals regarding missile defence, a firm estimate of cost has not been made.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the post offices which are expected to be closed in the restructuring of Post Office Counters networks stating in each case *(a)* the number of redundancies expected in each case, *(b)* the cost to her Department of redundancy payments and *(c)* the expected savings to her Department from the closures broken down by (i) region and (ii) constituency; and if she will make a statement. [48797]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The detailed implementation of the programme to restructure the urban post office network is an operational matter for Post Office Limited. The programme has not yet begun, but Government support of up to £210 million has been allocated to advance our aims for the urban network as set out in the PIU report.

Pubs (Guest Beers)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the numbers of pubs hosting guest beers *(a)* voluntarily and *(b)* as a result of the Beer Orders. [51513]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The 1989 Orders applied only to the then six large brewers owning tied estates of 2000 or more pubs. No such brewers exist any longer so the number of pubs selling guest beers as defined in the Beer Orders is now zero. So-called guest beers are sold on a voluntary basis and so cannot be estimated.

Micro-renewable Technologies

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what policy measures, in addition to her Department's capital funding, have been introduced since 1997 to support the development of micro-renewable technologies in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [51510]

Mr. Wilson *[pursuant to the answer, 23 April 2002, Official Report, columns 214–15W]:* Unfortunately an incomplete answer was given and herewith is the full text.

In addition to the general support for renewables provided by the Renewables Obligation and Climate Change Levy exemption, there have been a number of initiatives aimed specifically to encourage smaller projects.

In February, I launched the Community Renewables Initiative to encourage community-based renewable energy projects, many of which are likely to be small.

The 1998 Non Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) Order included a small-scale wind energy band for projects up to 0.995 MW declared net capacity under which 36 contracts were approved.

Small hydro stations up to 1.25 MW declared net capacity will be eligible for the Renewables Obligation without being required to refurbish.

The £20 million photovoltaics (PV) programme which I announced on 26 March is entirely directed at projects no greater than 100 kWp, and includes a band for very small projects. Applications for individual systems of 0.5–5 kWp will be accepted from householders, schools, community groups and SMEs on a rolling basis and 50 per cent capital grants will be automatic provided that the basic programme criteria are met.

Simplified connection guidelines for small PV generation have been made available as Engineering Recommendation G77 published by the Electricity Association.

The Distributed Generation Co-ordination Group is addressing grid connection and related issues to ensure that smaller generators have fair access to the electricity market. One of its workstreams is specifically addressing microgeneration solutions.

Ministerial Visits (Business Contracts)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when Ministers in her Department have visited other countries in support of firms seeking contracts in those countries, stating *(a)* each company, *(b)* each contract and *(c)* whether each bid was successful in each of the last three years. [52127]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers take every opportunity on visits overseas to lobby in support of UK commercial interests generally and, where appropriate, in respect of specific contracts. Information is not, however, recorded centrally in the form requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

EU Powers (Pay and Benefits)

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the European Union has the power to set the *(a)* pay and *(b)* benefit entitlements that must be offered by (i) public and (ii) private enterprises to their workforces. [52300]

Alan Johnson: Whether the European Union has the power to set these entitlements will depend on the nature of particular proposals that could have the effect of setting pay and benefits for certain individuals. Where the aim of EU legislation is to prevent discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, age or

disability, this may affect the minimum levels of pay and other benefits that public and private sector enterprises must offer to some members of their workforces.

Temporary Workers

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the likely impact that the proposed European Directive on working conditions for temporary workers will have on the creation of new employment opportunities in the UK. [52303]

Alan Johnson: The Department's officials are preparing a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) which will look at the possible costs and benefits of the Directive to workers, agencies and user companies in the UK. The RIA will be placed in the Libraries of House in due course.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what amendments she will be seeking to make to the proposed European Directive on working conditions for temporary workers. [52299]

Alan Johnson: The European Commission published a proposal for a directive on temporary agency workers in March 2002. We are currently studying the proposal to establish whether it protects agency workers without damaging the important contribution agency workers and agencies make to the labour market and to maintaining high levels of employment.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many temporary workers were, at the most recent date for which figures are available, fulfilling assignments in the public sector. [52306]

Alan Johnson: According to the Labour Force Survey, in Autumn 2001 there were 600,000 temporary employees in the public sector.

The Labour Force Survey defines temporary employees as including individuals engaged on: employment business assignments, seasonal work, fixed term contracts, casual work and other non-permanent work.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research she has undertaken to assess the impact that the proposed European Directive on working conditions for temporary workers will have on the competitiveness of SMEs in the UK. [52302]

Alan Johnson: The Department's officials are preparing a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) which will look at the possible costs and benefits of the Directive to workers, agencies and user companies in the UK including the impact on small businesses. The RIA will be placed in Libraries of the Houses in due course.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people were employed in temporary work in the UK in *(a)* February 1992 and *(b)* February 2002. [52304]

Alan Johnson: (a) According to the Labour Force Survey, there were 1,150,000 temporary employees in the three months March–May 1992.

The Labour Force Survey defines temporary employees as including individuals engaged on: employment business assignments, seasonal work, fixed term contracts, casual work and other non-permanent work.

(b) According to the Labour Force Survey, there were 1,650,000 temporary employees in the three months December 2001–February 2002 (the latest data available).

Business Regulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cost compliance assessments had been carried out by her Department before the introduction of additional regulations affecting businesses in each of the last three years. [52110]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* The Department is required to publish final Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) for all regulations which have either imposed or reduced costs for business. The number of final RIAs the DTI has published in the last three years are as follows:

1999 = 41

2000 = 40

2001 = 30

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by her Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52819]

Ms Hewitt: My Department's expenditure on newspapers and mass circulation magazines for the financial year 2001–2002 was £201,341.

This includes expenditure on national newspapers, regional newspapers, and mass circulation magazines. A list of titles and the number of copies taken cannot be supplied except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by her Department, stating for each subscription the *(a)* number of copies taken and *(b)* annual cost. [52820]

Ms Hewitt: My Department's expenditure on periodicals for the financial year 2001–2002 was £408,650

This includes expenditure on general and academic periodicals, plus annual reference and statistical publications. Expenditure on mass circulation magazines is included in the answer to PQ No. 52819. A list of titles and the number of copies taken cannot be supplied except at disproportionate cost.

Websites

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the potential for confusion between the websites www.ukonline.gov.uk and www.ukonline.co.uk; and what discussions have been held with the proprietors of the private site to minimise this. [51560]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Discussions were held with UK Online the Internet Service Provider (ISP) about how to distinguish our respective sites. The presentation of the Government UK online site was modified to distinguish it from the ukonline.co.uk site and it was agreed that mutual links to each others' sites would be put in place.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Queen Mother

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost to public funds was of *(a)* official actions arising from the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother until the funeral and *(b)* the funeral. [52261]

Tessa Jowell: A number of organisations were involved in the preparations for the funeral of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother. They are now starting to settle bills and prepare detailed estimates. It is still too early to provide an estimate of the likely final cost of the funeral arrangements.

Correspondence

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how she determines whether a letter from *(a)* a member of the public and *(b)* an hon. Member receives a reply personally signed by (i) her, (ii) other Ministers in her Department and (iii) her officials. [52887]

Tessa Jowell: The decision as to who replies to correspondence is based on advice from officials. Of the 28,593 items of correspondence received by the Department in 2001–2002, all letters from honourable Members (18 per cent) received a reply from Ministers as did 8 per cent of the letters received from the general public.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* letters and faxes and *(b)* e-mails addressed to (i) her, (ii) other Ministers in her Department and (iii) officials her Department have received since 8 June 2001. [52888]

Tessa Jowell: In 2001–2002 the Department received 28,593 items of correspondence via letter, fax and email.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if her Department takes into account the political party of hon. Members when answering *(a)* letters from and *(b)* written questions tabled by hon. Members. [52879]

Tessa Jowell: No.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many letters *(a)* she and *(b)* Ministers in her Department have personally signed since 8 June 2001. [52889]

Tessa Jowell: Between 8 June 2001 and 27 March 2002 DCMS Ministers personally replied to 5,240 items of correspondence from hon. Members and the general public as follows;

	Number
Secretary of State	673
Minister for the Arts	673
Minister for Sport	2,323
Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	1,571

This excludes letters originating from Ministers as these records are not collected centrally.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her Department's targets are for the length of time taken from the receipt of a letter from *(a)* a member of the public and *(b)* an hon. Member to the sending of a reply; and if those targets have been met since 8 June 2001. [52886]

Tessa Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 576W and on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 955W.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which constituencies *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department have visited since 8 June 2001. [52885]

Tessa Jowell: Ministers in DCMS have made a number of official visits since 8 June 2001 but the information you have requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost. These visits allow Ministers to see developments in their sector at local and regional level at first hand and to demonstrate their support for such projects and initiatives.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the method by which it is decided whether *(a)* she or *(b)* other Ministers in her Department answer oral questions in the House. [52878]

Tessa Jowell: Responsibility for answering oral Questions is initially allocated according to Ministerial responsibility with the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting answering on behalf of the Minster for the Arts. This is then adjusted to ensure an even spread of Questions between Ministers.

Ceremonial Occasions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the role of her Department in the *(a)* funding and *(b)* organisation of state and royal ceremonial occasions. [52880]

Tessa Jowell: My Department is responsible for providing and funding certain facilities for state and royal ceremonial occasions. They are:

Inward State Visits—Erection of reception pavilions, flag poles and flying of flags in either London or Windsor depending on arrival arrangements.

Remembrance Day—Erection of media stands, installation of public address system and marking out of standing positions around the Cenotaph.

The Queen's Birthday Parade—Erection of flagpoles and flag flying down the Mall and along Horse Guards Approach Road.

Flag Flying—Erection of flag poles and flying of flags around Parliament Square for Commonwealth Day, UN Day and Europe Day.

Royal and State funerals—Responsibility for co-ordinating the multi-agency response to preparing the processional route and provision of media and public facilities.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33869]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Deputy Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1265W.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for his Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39923]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department's communications functions were incorporated into a new group in 1998. The full annual costs for arrangements for earlier FYs are no longer available. The annual budget since 1999–2000 for the LCD Communications Group, which serves LCD Headquarters; the Court Service; the Law Commission and the Official Solicitor's Office is listed below. These figures include salaries and other staff costs. The costs of any work done in other parts of the Department which contributed to communications objectives are not available.

	£
1999–2001	927,000
2000–2002	1,081,000 (Plus funding of £4 million for a public information campaign on the introduction of the Community Legal Service).
2001–2003	1,431,000 (Estimated to end of financial year).

During this period, the staff of Communications Group increased from 12 in 1998–1999 to 24 in 2001–2002 which reflects the increased responsibilities of the Lord Chancellor's Department including functions transferred from other Government departments, and the development of the LCD website team.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many special advisers there were in his Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [47057]

Mr. Wills: A Special Adviser was appointed on 5 March 1998. He was reappointed after the General Election in 2001. There are no other Special Advisers. The salary of Special Advisers was dealt with in the answer provided by the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, column 11W.

Royal Peculiars

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will publish the response to the Review of Royal Peculiars. [50577]

Mr. Wills: On current plans, the response to the Review of the Royal Peculiars will be published in October of this year.

Court Costs

Ms Buck: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average cost per day of a court case in *(a)* a Crown court and *(b)* a magistrates' court was over the last 12 months. [51292]

Mr. Wills: The estimated average cost per day of a court case for the financial year 2001–2002 is *(a)* £2,975 in the Crown Court, and *(b)* £1610 in the magistrates' court. These figures exclude Legal Aid costs.

TREASURY

Volunteering

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the joint discussion document on fiscal and other changes to promote volunteering and community service will be published; and if it will then be subject to consulation. [52358]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government believes that voluntary and community service plays a key role in building strong and cohesive communities. As the Chancellor announced in Budget 2002, a joint discussion document by HM Treasury and the Home Office will be published later this year on how best we can promote and develop voluntary and community service.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the additional £1 billion that he is allocating to the NHS and other public services in 2002–03, referred to in the *Official Report*, 17 April 2002, column 590, will be spent in 2002–03. [52867]

Mr. Ansrew Smith: Our projections assume that spending within Departmental Expenditure Limits will be fully spent in 2002–03.

Cancer Deaths

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths were caused by *(a)* lung cancer, *(b)* breast cancer, *(c)* skin cancer, *(d)* lower gastrointestinal cancer, *(e)* upper gastrointestinal cancer, *(f)* gynaecological cancers, *(g)* head and neck cancers and *(h)* all other cancers; and what percentage each of *(a)* to *(h)* represented of recorded cases of cancer in *(A)* St Helens and Knowsley Health Authority, *(B)* Merseyside,

(C) Manchester, *(D)* the North West, *(E)* the South East and *(F)* England, in (1) 1991, (2) 1997, (3) 1998, (4) 1999, (5) 2000 and (6) 2001. [50503]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward dated 25 April 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on cancer. (50503) Data for the number of recorded cases of cancer for the years 1999 to 2001 are not yet available. Data for 1998 have recently become available but have not yet been coded to geographical boundaries that would allow comparison with earlier years. Figures for 1991 and 1997 are presented in the table below.

Numbers of deaths from selected cancers and number of deaths from cancer as a percentage of cancers registered in the same year, for selected areas of England**, 1991 and 1997.*

Numbers of deaths

Area of usual residence	*Lung*	*Breast*	*Skin*	*Lower Gastrointestinal*	*Upper Gastrointestinal*	*Gynaecological*	*Head & Neck*	*All other cancers*
1991								
St Helens and Knowsley Health Authority	274	74	6	112	96	49	13	329
Merseyside Metropolitan County	1,383	342	30	551	467	232	71	1,552
Greater Manchester Metropolitan County	2,041	677	40	919	802	382	108	2,628
North West Government Office Region	5,417	1,764	127	2,497	2,123	1,082	300	7,196
South East Government Office Region	4,553	2,166	220	2,468	1,808	1,103	218	8,390
England	32,124	12,979	1,090	15,813	12,756	7,045	1,603	50,785
1997								
St Helens and Knowsley Health Authority	*279*	*67*	*8*	*90*	*90*	*35*	*11*	*373*
Merseyside Metropolitan County	*1,184*	*354*	*35*	*455*	*395*	*182*	*57*	*1,669*
Greater Manchester Metropolitan County	*1,753*	*536*	*60*	*792*	*698*	*321*	*90*	*2,640*
North West Government Office Region	*4,704*	*1,552*	*146*	*2,103*	*1,889*	*894*	*261*	*7,421*
South East Government Office Region	*3,956*	*1,794*	*310*	*2,263*	*1,706*	*1,115*	*246*	*8,646*
England	*28,129*	*11,255*	*1,314*	*14,003*	*11,615*	*6,520*	*1,582*	*52,413*

Deaths as a percentage of the number of cases of cancer registered in the same year

Area of usual residence	*Lung*	*Breast*	*Skin*	*Lower Gastrointestinal*	*Upper Gastrointestinal*	*Gynaecological*	*Head & Neck*	*All other cancers*
1991								
St Helens and Knowsley Health Authority	90	38	50	62	95	51	36	72
Merseyside Metropolitan County	97	38	35	63	86	55	50	65
Greater Manchester Metropolitan County	95	47	28	66	96	59	66	69
North West Government Office Region	97	44	29	65	93	57	58	67
South East Government Office Region	93	44	32	59	91	53	47	66
England	94	45	31	62	89	55	52	66
1997								
St Helens and Knowsley Health Authority	94	35	29	53	91	40	61	66
Merseyside Metropolitan County	87	42	25	54	85	44	47	68
Greater Manchester Metropolitan County	87	34	28	51	79	45	36	61
North West Government Office Region	87	37	23	53	82	46	44	63
South East Government Office Region	89	31	31	48	83	52	42	59
England	90	36	28	50	82	48	43	61

*Deaths registered in 1991 and 1997, and cancers registered in 1991, selected using International Classification of Diseases, Ninth revision (ICD9) codes.
*Cancers registered in 1997 selected using International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD10) codes.
**All boundaries as at 1 April 2001

Cancer	*ICD9*	*ICD10*
Lung	162.2 to 162.9	C340 to C349
Breast	174.0 to 174.9	C500 to C509
Skin	172.0 to 172.9	C430 to C439
Lower Gastrointestinal	153.0 to 154.1	C180 to C219
Upper Gastrointestinal	150.0 to 151.9	C150 to C169
Gynaecological	179.0 to 184.9	C510 to C589
Head & Neck	140.0 to 149.9	C000 to C149
All other cancers	140.0 to 208.9 minus above and excluding 173	C000 to C979 minus above and excluding C440 to C449

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent by his Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52708]

Ruth Kelly: Nothing.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent by his Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52732]

Ruth Kelly: Nothing.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent by his Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52748]

Ruth Kelly: Nothing.

Annuities

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the age rule affecting annuities. [52318]

Ruth Kelly: As the consultation document "Modernising Annuities" sets out, there are sound financial reasons for people to annuitise their retirement savings by age 75. So the Government does not propose to abolish the age 75 rule.

The consultation, which ran until 5 April, was intended to stimulate discussion on annuity issues. The Government is now considering the responses carefully before deciding how to proceed.

Debt Management Office

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the UK Debt Management Office's targets and business plan for 2002–03. [53584]

Ruth Kelly: The DMO's targets for 2002–2003 are set out below, together with a brief commentary on last year's outturn in relation to the comparable target. The DMO is today also publishing its Business Plan for 2002–2003. I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library. The DMO, with HM Treasury, will in due course be reviewing its planning objectives in the light of the decision that I announced on 25 March to integrate the National Debt Office (NDO) and the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) into the DMO with effect from 1 July 2002.

Targets for the Debt Management Office 2002–03

1. To ensure full compliance with the Government's remit for the DMO as set out in the Debt and Reserves Management Report 2002–03, within the tolerances and subject to the review triggers notified separately to the Office and consistent with the objectives of monetary policy. *[Target met in 2001–02]*

2. To ensure that the maximum time taken to issue the results of gilt auctions does not exceed 40 minutes, that for structured Treasury Bill tenders does not exceed 30 minutes, and that for ad hoc Treasury Bill or other tenders does not exceed 15 minutes, while achieving complete accuracy. *[Target met in 2001–02]*

3. To achieve complete accuracy, within agreed accounting tolerances, in the recording and reporting of transactions through the Debt Management Account (DMA), and in delivering money (and reconciling payments) to the National Loans Fund (NLF) and to meet the statutory deadlines for publication or submission for audit of the annual accounts of the DMO Agency, and DMA. *[First half of target met in 2001–02. The second half relating to timeliness of publication of accounts was also met].*

4. To acknowledge all letters and e-mail enquiries from the public within 5 working days and for at least 95 per cent to be sent a substantive reply within 2 weeks. *[Target met in 2001–02]*

5. To achieve less than 6 breaches of the operational market notices (excluding any breaches that the Treasury accept were beyond control of the Office). *[Equivalent target met in 2001–02]*

6. To ensure that the statutory constraint on DMO market borrowing (not to exceed its deposits with the NLF and Bank of England) is always met. *[Target met in 2001–02]*

7. To ensure that, when there is a late change in the forecast, any necessary use of end-of-day borrowing or lending facilities is notified by the due time. *[Target met in 2001–02]*

8. To ensure that instructions to counterparties, agents and external systems are complete, accurate and timely, and that monitoring of the progress of transactions through to settlement is effective, so that DMO achieves at least 99 per cent (by value) successful settlement of agreed trades on the due date. *[Target met in 2001–02]*

To release all market sensitive data on announcements in a timely manner and to achieve no more than 10 factual errors in material published by the DMO, including on the web site (insofar as the material is under the control of the DMO and not third parties). *[Equivalent target—which required complete accuracy covering also immaterial errors—not met in 2001–02. In particular on 14 March 2002 there was a premature release onto the web site of market sensitive information on the breakdown of planned gilt sales in 2002–03. The proposed target has been expanded to include timeliness of release allows for some but fewer errors than in 2001–02.]*

EU Tariffs

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new tariffs the EU has imposed on imported goods in the past 10 years. [52307]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Common Customs Tariff of the EU has over 10,400 tariff lines. Over the past ten years the EU has progressively reduced its tariffs in accordance with its GATT/WTO obligations. Over the same period for most tariff lines "preferential" (i.e. lower) rates have been charged on imports from a range of countries. In addition, on around 1000 tariff lines the EU has autonomously suspended duties on goods not produced or not available in sufficient quantity in the Community. As well as reducing tariffs, the EU has introduced anti-dumping or countervailing duties in response to unfair trade.

Within this complex framework of multilateral obligations, preferential agreements, tariff nomenclature changes, autonomous suspensions and remedies to unfair trade, the EU has imposed and modified a wide range of duties.

The detail of all these changes could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Birth Statistics

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the rate of *(a)* infant mortality, *(b)* still births and *(c)* birth defects in (i) 1985, (ii) 1986 and (iii) 1987 was for the old County of Clwyd. [51533]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The infant mortality rate (deaths of infants under one year of age, per 1,000 live births) was 10.9 per cent in 1985, 8.7 per cent in 1986 and 10.2 per cent in 1987 for the county of Clwyd.

The still birth rates was 6.4 per cent in 1985, 5.3 per cent in 1986 and 5.0 per cent in 1987 for the county of Clwyd. These figures are based on still births of 28 or more complete weeks gestation per 1,000 births. The legal definition of a still birth was altered on 1 October 1992 to include babies born dead between 24 and 27 weeks.

The babies notified to the National Congenital Anomaly System for mothers resident in the former Clwyd health authority was 20.5 per cent in 1985, 17.7 per cent in 1986 and 12.1 per cent in 1987, per 1,000 live and stillbirths. Reporting to this system is voluntary, and differences may reflect changes in reporting practice rather than true changes in prevalence.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent by his Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52730]

Mr. Paul Murphy: It is not possible to say how much of this training related to leadership skills.

My Department was created in July 1999. In 2000–01 it spent £2,400 on training and in 2001–02 £4,200. Comparable figures for 1999–00 are not available. My staff also receives training provided through the National Assembly for Wales for which there is no charge.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent by his Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52747]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since my Department came into existence on 1 July 1999 it has incurred no such expenditure.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent by his Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52706]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since my Department came into existence on 1 July 1999 it has incurred no such expenditure.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52827]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Currently, the Wales Office subscribes to the following newspapers—

The Western Mail (Mon–Fri)—21 copies (22 on Monday)
The Western Mail (Sat)—1 copies
The Daily Post (Mon–Fri)—7 copies (7 on Monday)
The South Wales Echo (Mon–Fri)—2 copies
Wales on Sunday—2 copies
South Wales Argus (Mon–Sat)—2 copies
Wrexham Evening Leader (Mon–Sat)—2 copies
South Wales Evening Post (Mon–Sat)—2 copies
The Evening Standard (Mon–Fri)—4 copies
The Guardian (Mon–Fri)—5 copies (6 on Monday)
The Guardian (Sat)—1 copy
The Times (Mon–Fri)—7 copies (8 on Monday)
The Times (Sat)—1 copy
The Daily Telegraph (Mon–Fri)—5 copies (6 on Monday)
The Daily Telegraph (Sat)—1 copy
The Independent (Mon–Fri)—6 copies (7 on Monday)
The Independent (Sat)—1 copy
The Financial Times (Mon–Fri)—6 copies (7 on Monday)
The Financial Times (Sat)—1 copy
The Daily Mail (Mon–Fri)—5 copies (6 on Monday)
The Daily Mail (Sat)—1 copy
The Daily Express (Mon–Fri)—5 copies (6 on Monday)
The Daily Express (Sat)—1 copy
The Daily Mirror—incl. Welsh edition—(Mon–Fri)—7 copies (8 on Monday)
The Daily Mirror (Sat)—1 copy
The Sun (Mon–Fri)—5 copies (6 on Monday)
The Sun (Sat)—1 copy
The Daily Star (Mon–Fri)—1 copy
The Daily Star (Sat)—1 copy
The Scotsman (Mon–Sat)—1 copy
The Glasgow Herald (Mon–Sat)—1 copy
The Daily Record (Mon–Sat)—1 copy
The Observer—1 copy
The Sunday Times—1 copy
The Sunday Telegraph—1 copy
The Independent on Sunday—1 copy
The Mail on Sunday—1 copy
The Sunday Express—1 copy
The Sunday Mirror—1 copy
The News of the World—1 copy
The Sunday People—1 copy
The Scotland on Sunday—1 copy
The Sunday Herald—1 copy

Many newspapers are cancelled over periods of recess, depending on staff and Ministerial presence in the London and Cardiff offices. It would prove disproportionately expensive to provide local figures on cost per title and due to the irregular nature of cancellation periods those figures would anyway provide an inaccurate picture of departmental spending.

The overall cost of newspapers to the Wales Office in the last invoiced month, February 2002, was £916.06.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52828]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Office has annual subscriptions to the House magazine (1 copy)—£345; the Parliamentary Monitor (1 copy)—£310; Private Eye (1 copy)—£19; The Spectator (1 copy)—£97; The New Statesman (1 copy)—£100.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many digital radios are owned by his Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52863]

Mr. Murphy: None

Hospitality Budget

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the purpose and dates of the events paid for through the hospitality budget in the previous 12 months. [53103]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have hosted a small number of receptions to mark St Davids Day and key parliamentary occasions. Members of both Houses from all parties and journalists have attended, including the hon. Member.

I believe these have been valuable events enabling parliamentarians from all parties to mix informally and exchange views and opinions.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by her Department and which took place on non-Departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34299]

Mr. Morley: As DEFRA was created in June 2001 retrospective annual budget analysis is not possible.

Our records show that there were 66 events commissioned centrally by DEFRA at a cost of £491,941. A list of these events is attached.

This figure does not include any expenditure for Foot and Mouth Disease, non-Departmental Public Bodies, Agencies or de-centralised expenditure within DEFRA. Further extrapolation of expenditure on these events would incur disproportionate cost.

No.	*Title*	*Description*	*Date*	*Location*
1	Brockhole Centre	Exhibition	2001–2002	Cumbria
1	FMD	Information Unit	18–19/06/01	N. Yorkshire
1	BBC Gardeners World Live	Show	13–17/06/01	NEC Birmingham
1	FMD	Information Unit	18–19/06/01	N. Yorkshire
1	Hampton Court Palace	Show	3–8/07/01	Hampton Court
1	Developing DEFRA	Conference	11/07/2001	London
1	Tatton Park	Show	18–22/07/01	Tatton Park
1	CLA Game Fair	Show	27–30/0701	Shuttleworth
1	Fruit Focus	Show	01/08/2001	East Malling
1	FMD	Information Unit	02/08/2001	Warwick University
1	Devon County Show	Show	9–11/08/01	Exeter
1	Town & Country Festival	Show	22–25/08/01	NEC Birmingham
18	FMD Recovery	Seminars	2001	Various Locations
1	Royal Cornwall Show	Show	13–15/09/01	Wadebridge Cornwall
1	Beef 2001	Conference	14/09/2001	Cirencester
1	SEAC Open Meeting	Conference	18/09/2001	London
1	European Dairy Farming	Conference	19/09/2001	NAC, Coventry
1	Developing DEFRA	Conference	20/09/2001	Birmingham
1	National Energy Crops	Conference	27/09/2001	London
1	Bath & West Dairy Show	Show	03/10/2001	Shepton Mallet
1	Careers Fair	Exhibition	26–27/10/01	London
1	Food & Farming	Conference	10/11/2001	Oxford
1	Map Launch with Countryside Agency	Show	11/11/2001	London
1	Careers Fair	Exhibition	13/11/2001	London
1	Waste Seminar	Seminar	21/11/2001	London
1	Supreme Car Show	Show	31/11/01	London
1	Agrivision	Show	5–6/12/01	NAC, Coventry
1	National Cat Club Show	Show	08/12/2001	London
1	Golden Rules Seminar	Seminar	12/12/2001	Kendal
1	Horizon Scanning	Press Briefing	11/01/2002	London
1	Planning & Diversification	Seminar	15/01/2002	Wye College
1	Public Appointments Seminar	Seminar	21/01/2002	Abingdon
1	Planning & Diversification	Seminar	22/01/2002	Bucks/Berks & Oxf
1	Agrivision Cornwall RCAA	Show	23/01/2002	Wadebridge Cornwall
1	English Rural Development Programme	Seminar	23/01/2002	Ardingley
1	Planning & Diversification	Seminar	24/01/2002	Sparsholt College, Hants
1	English Rural Development Programme	Seminar	30/01/2002	Devon

No.	Title	Description	Date	Location
1	Public Appointments Seminar	Seminar	07/02/2002	Norwich
1	Anti-Microbial Resistance	Seminar	12/02/2002	NAC, Coventry
1	ESC Study Group Meeting	Conference	14/02/2002	London
1	Agrivision South of England Agr. Society	Show	21/02/2002	Ardingley
1	Crufts Dogs Show	Show	07/03/2002	NEC Birmingham
1	Daily Mail Ideal Home Show	Show	07/03–01/04/02	London
1	Public Appointments Seminar	Seminar	20/03/2002	Nottingham
1	Careers Seminar	Seminar	20/03/2002	Bromsgrove School
1	TSE Research Workshop	Workshop	20–22/03/02	Durham University
1	English Rural Development Programme	Seminar	21/03/2002	Bewl Water
1	Brockhole Centre	Exhibition	23/03/2002	Cumbria
1	English Rural Development Programme	Seminar	28/03/2002	Reading

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what legal costs have been incurred by her Department in each of the last four years. [34348]

Mr. Morley: MAFF/DEFRA Legal Expenses for Financial Years were recorded as follows:

	£
1998–1999	714,705
1999–2000	729,829
2000–2001	586,597
2001–2002	722,113 (subject to year-end adjustments)

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when a substantive reply will be given to Mr. B. Jull's letter of 1 October 2001, concerning non-bovine waste; [36839]

(2) when she will reply to the letter of 1 October 2001 from Mrs. B Jull and subsequent correspondence of 7 February and 17 February. [51399]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 21 April I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Totnes dated 25 September 2001 concerning Mrs. M. F. Hutchinson of Rattery, Devon and legislation for Sellafield. [43137]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 18 April. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Rio Earth Summit (Implementation)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken by the Government since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to *(a)* set goals on environmental protection and *(b)* improve eco-efficiency and resource productivity relating to ocean and sea issues; and what these (i) goals and (ii) improvements have been. [44347]

Mr. Meacher: The OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the North East Atlantic came into force in 1998. The contracting parties have agreed strategies and goals in five areas: the protection and conservation of the ecosystem and biodiversity; hazardous substances; radioactive substances; eutrophication; and offshore oil and gas. The United Kingdom played a full part in developing the strategies. The Quality Status Report published by OSPAR in 2000 highlights progress made and future challenges.

The Marine Stewardship Report, to be launched on 1 May 2002, highlights past achievements and new initiatives relating to our policy on promoting sustainable development of the marine environment. Furthermore, oceans and seas will be a priority issue for the UK at the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost has been of criminal damage to her Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44835]

Mr. Morley: The cost of criminal damage to buildings used by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (and before 8 June 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) over each of the past four years is as follows:

	£
1998–1999	2,500
1999–2000	11,250
2000–2001	1,800
2001–2002	4,200

The figures above ignore damage or mess which was repaired or cleaned by facility management contractors at no extra cost to the Department.

Ham Fen Beaver Project

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many of the animals involved in the Ham Fen Beaver Project have died; and what information her Department has collated on the causes of death. [44767]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* I understand from the Kent Wildlife Trust that two of the beavers in their care have died. The Department does not collect information on the causes of death of animals, other than cats and dogs, once rabies has been ruled out.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the average cost is per household treated of administering the Warm

Front Scheme, incurred by each of the two scheme managers appointed for England, excluding the cost of the actual measures carried out; [50622]

(2) what the average cost was per household treated of administering the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. [50623]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's main programme for tackling fuel poverty in the private sector in England is the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES), now marketed as The Warm Front Team.

The New HEES was launched on 1st June 2000, replacing the more basic scheme that had operated since 1991. The Scheme is administered by two scheme managers, TXU Warm Front Limited (Eastern, East Midlands & Yorkshire and the Humber) and Eaga Partnership Limited (the rest of England).

The original scheme provided low income and disabled households with a single main insulation improvement, or a combination of smaller measures, mainly in the social housing sector. The new Scheme provides packages of insulation and heating measures, linked to the condition of the property and the householder's needs and is focussed on the private sector. To provide these packages the grant maximum was increased from £315 to £2,500 in the case of low-income households aged 60 years or more.

Under the original. Scheme, the role of the scheme manager was relatively limited. Their main role was the management and payment of appointed installers. The average management cost per household was £15 excluding recoverable VAT.

The current Scheme introduced a significant shift in the role and responsibilities of the scheme managers. They are now responsible for marketing the scheme, the set up and maintenance of local referral networks, carrying out independent surveys of properties, providing householders with energy efficiency advice, advising and agreeing the most appropriate measures for properties, recruiting and managing heating and insulation contractors through open competition, and managing payments to contractors for work completed. This additional work has increased the average administration cost to £77 for EAGA and £86 for TXU per household excluding recoverable VAT. These costs exclude one-off start-up costs paid by the Department.

In the current scheme, the average cost for HEES installers has reduced to reflect the shift of responsibility for activities outlined above.

Coastline

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many schemes for managed realignment of the coastline have been approved for England and Wales since 1995; and if she will make a statement. [50982]

Mr. Morley: This Department has policy responsibility for flood and coastal defence in England. Several schemes for managed realignment of the coastline have been undertaken since 1995 with some not requiring DEFRA approval when funding was not being sought. The Department is aware of the following schemes:

Scheme	*Led by*
Tollesbury, Essex	Environment Agency
Orplands, Essex	Environment Agency
Brancaster, Norfolk	Environment Agency
Freiston, The Wash	Environment Agency
Saltram, Devon	Environment Agency
Porlock, Somerset	Environment Agency
Thorngumbald, Humber Estuary	Environment Agency
Havergate Island, Suffolk	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Thornham Bay, Chichester Harbour	Private landowners
Brean, Somerset	Wessex Water, National Trust and Avon Wildlife Trust

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1190W, to the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) if she will break down the CAP information shown by county in England and Wales. [50679]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is held on legacy systems which are neither flexible nor user friendly. A county breakdown is available for SCPS, BSPS, SPS, VCSPS, SAP & HFA schemes at the time of interrogation and is available in the Library of the House. It is not available for EPS. New flexible systems are being developed as part of the Rural Payment Agency change programme which should provide a range of statistical interrogation functions.

Dairy Industry

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the recent change in the farmgate price of milk on the future viability of dairy farming; and what recent representations she has received from the dairy industry regarding agrimonetary compensation available to dairy farmers. [51454]

Mr. Morley: This year has witnessed considerable pressure on the farmgate price of milk, due in a large part to weak international markets for dairy commodities and to high current levels of domestic milk production. Official figures show that in February the average farmgate price of milk had fallen to 18.33 pence per litre. I am aware that some purchasers have recently announced more price cuts that are not yet reflected in official figures and which will further depress the average farmgate price of milk.

It is unlikely that prices at these levels are sustainable in the long term under the current milk regime and there are some potentially hopeful signs on world markets. The USA has recently exhausted its GATT commitment for subsidised exports of skimmed milk powders, while substantial quantities of New Zealand milk powders have already been sold. Furthermore, the EU has taken action—strongly supported by the UK—to assist dairy exports. We may therefore see some recovery in international markets that could ease pressure on domestic farmgate prices.

On 16 April, the National Farmers Union wrote to Lord Whitty, the Minister for Food, Farming and Waterways, presenting their case for further agrimonetary compensation for dairy farmers.

Wildlife Crime

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she has made in implementing the recommendations in the report on Wildlife Crime in the UK October 2001, conducted by Wolverhampton University and commissioned by her Department. [51506]

Mr. Meacher: We commissioned this research on behalf of the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime, to support its work in developing proposals for the National Wildlife Crime Intelligence Unit.

The report's recommendations made a valuable contribution to this process, and I was delighted to be able to launch the Unit on 22 April.

Many of the recommendations have already been wholly or partly implemented. The others will be considered as the Unit settles into its new role. The wider recommendations will be considered by the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime.

Nitrate-vulnerable Zones

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received concerning the cost to pig producers of the Government's nitrate vulnerable zone proposals. [51758]

Mr. Meacher: The National Pig Association (NPA) has made representations to the Government about the cost to pig farmers of the Government's proposals for Nitrate Vulnerable Zones. It drew particular attention to the greater difficulty that pig farmers will encounter with the export of surplus manures to neighbouring farms in the proposed, larger, new zones. The Government has considered this representation and proposes to increase the cost assessment in recognition of the need for additional slurry storage capacity to provide more flexibility with the management of exported manures on pig farms.

The NPA urged the Government to introduce a grant scheme to assist farmers to adapt their manure storage facilities to the meet the standards required by the NVZ Regulations. The Government expects to extend the existing Farm Waste Grant Scheme to the new zones when they are designated.

The NPA also argued that the cost assessment for the keeping of additional records should be increased. The Government is not proposing to make changes to the record-keeping component of its cost assessment, which is based on an estimate of the average cost across all farmers affected. We recognise that within this average the costs that individual farmers face will vary depending on the nature and scale of their operations.

The National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Association have also made representations to Government about the compliance costs to farmers, including pig farmers.

We will publish a revised compliance cost assessment in due course, when regulations are made to implement the Nitrates Directive.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the financial cost to farmers of the extension of nitrate-vulnerable zones. [51938]

Mr. Meacher: The Department's consultation document issued in December 2001 outlines relative costs to farmers of two options for completing implementation of the Nitrates Directive in England.

Total annual costs to English farmers are:

Option 1 (whole of England approach)—£32million.

Option 2 (targeted NVZ approach)—£23million.

We are currently considering these figures in the light of responses to our recent consultation. We will publish a revised Regulatory Impact Assessment, containing updated compliance costs, in due course when we are in a position to announce a decision on how the Directive is to be implemented.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to what extent her Department proposes to extend nitrate-vulnerable zones. [51817]

Mr. Meacher: The Department is currently considering options for completing implementation of the Nitrates Directive in the light of responses to our recent public consultation. I expect to be able to announce a decision in May.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 22 April; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [51634]

Margaret Beckett: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Agriculture Council in Luxembourg on 22 April. The Scottish Minister for Environment and Rural Development also attended.

The Presidency introduced two memoranda of its own: one on improving the contribution of women to rural development; another on the EU Veterinary Fund. Both will be discussed further at official level.

The Commission gave an update on the BSE situation and introduced a proposal to tighten controls on additives in animal feed and water.

The Council had a further discussion of a proposal on the animal health requirements that apply to the non-commercial movement of pets. Good progress was made and the Presidency hopes to secure agreement at the June Council.

Under other business, the Italians drew attention to the position of young farmers; Greece queried Argentinean measures against exports of tinned peaches; and the Netherlands sought a common approach to the treatment of Chinese imports that fail to satisfy EU import rules.

Indigenous Forest

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how the area of each of the UK's old-growth indigenous forest has changed in each decade since 1972; [51549]

(2) what steps her Department has taken to prevent illegal logging of old-growth indigenous forest within the United Kingdom; [51551]

(3) what areas of old-growth indigenous forest remain within the UK; and what levels of protection is given to each area; [51550]

(4) what logging has occurred within the UK's old-growth indigenous forest in each year since 1992; [51548]

(5) what the total area of old-growth indigenous forest is within the UK; and what the total area was at the start of each decade since 1972. [51552]

Mr. Morley: In the UK, separate statistics are not held for "old-growth indigenous forest", for which there is no agreed definition. A number of measures are in place to protect all forests in the UK, including ancient semi-natural woodlands, where the biodiversity and cultural heritage values are highest. In particular, the felling of any type of woodland is controlled through felling regulations. Additionally, many woodlands are subject to further controls because they are within designated areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Special Areas of Conservation.

Muck Storage

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the average cost to *(a)* pig farmers and *(b)* dairy farmers of muck storage in the last 12 months. [51816]

Mr. Meacher: Data from the recently published 2001 Farm Practices Survey indicates that 50 to 80 per cent of slurry stores were built before 1991. Generally, farmyard manure is usually stored in the field or on a concrete base. Therefore in most cases the annual cost of storage consists only of repair and maintenance costs that are likely to be a few hundred pounds. Further estimates could only be undertaken at disproportionate cost.

Photovoltaic Energy

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to utilise photovoltaic energy production technology on the Government Estate; and when these plans will be implemented. [51959]

Mr. Meacher: All Government departments have a target to ensure that by 31 March 2003, at least 5 per cent of their electricity comes from renewable sources, or from self-generation, provided this does not entail excessive cost. They also have a longer-term target for at least 10 per cent of their supply by 31 March 2008, which is subject to review after March 2003.

Photovoltaic energy is just one of the renewable technologies that can help departments meet this target. It will be for each to determine the extent to which self-generation is a practicable and cost-effective option.

I am not aware of any current plans to utilise photovoltaic energy production technology on any significant scale on the Government Estate, although a number of small-scale pilots are planned. There are, however, active and passive solar thermal systems in use in both this Department and Ministry of Defence and a number of other departments are considering their introduction.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on what has been done to promote energy efficiency since 1997. [51613]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 24 April 2002]:* The Government has introduced a wide range of measures, including market incentives, financial assistance, legal obligations, and guidance and information, to promote energy efficiency. These include:

The Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) on domestic energy supplies, from 2002 to 2005

The Climate Change Levy and Climate Change Agreements

The UK Emissions Trading Scheme

The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES)

Revised Building Regulations which require high energy efficiency standards

The Market Transformation Programme

A wide range of measures to support Combined Heat and Power (CHP)

The Community Energy capital grant programme

Substantial Government funding of the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust to promote and support energy efficiency in the domestic, public, industry and business sectors.

The majority of DEFRA's financial support for energy efficiency measures is channelled through the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (now marketed as Warm Front), the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme, the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust. The total funding made available by my Department and its predecessors to support and promote these efficiency programmes in each year since 1997 is set out below:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Total funding for energy efficiency	£110.5m	£109.0m	£112.0m	£163.5m	£224m*

* Includes funding for the Carbon Trust of £26.5 million from recycled Climate Change Levy receipts.

International Animal Trade

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will appoint the DTLR In House Consultancy Unit to review her Department's procedures for the licensing of international trade in animals. [52244]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* As a result of the creation of this Department in June 2001, several different licensing regimes affecting wildlife were brought into the one Department. We therefore

commissioned the DTLR In House Consultancy Unit to produce an overview, and make recommendations about improved customer service in those areas. This study is on-going and encompasses all aspects of wildlife licensing, including the international trade in wild animals.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the National Farmers Union on the subject of bovine TB. [52414]

Mr. Morley: I met the Vice President of the National Farmers Union on Wednesday 24 April to discuss ways forward on bovine TB. Topics included clearing the backlog of TB tests, possible practical measures to manage the risk of bovine TB, and how the economic impact of control measures might be reduced.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made on measures to deal with bovine TB, with specific reference to *(a)* vaccination, *(b)* husbandry and *(c)* genetic testing and evolution. [52416]

Mr. Morley: The Government has, with advice from the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG), put in place a wide-ranging research programme into bovine TB. The programme is described in the ISG's reports which are available on DEFRA's website at http://defraweb/animalh/tb/. £1.4m is being spent annually on vaccine research and although the sequencing of the *M. bovis* genome announced recently is an important step forward, the ISG has cautioned that it is likely to be 10 years or so before a successful vaccine is found. On husbandry issues, a vital element of the research programme is an epidemiological questionnaire (TB99) which will give an insight into risk factors associated with husbandry practice and biosecurity. The research programme includes projects on genome sequencing postgenomics and genotyping of *M. bovis*.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on Government advice offered to dairy farmers on the subject of bovine TB. [52415]

Mr. Morley: In October 2001 the Chief Veterinary Officer wrote to all cattle keepers enclosing copies of leaflets entitled, TB in cattle reducing the risk and Golden Rules for a healthy herd. The second contains general advice on disease risk assessment when bringing cattle into the herd. Specific advice has been given to all veterinary practices on herd health following the foot and mouth outbreak.

Graffiti

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government are taking to reduce graffiti; and if she will make a statement. [42240]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

Writing graffiti will normally constitute an offence under the Criminal Damage Act 1971. Where criminal proceedings are not appropriate, it can also be dealt with through a number of measures designed to address anti-social behaviour, including anti-social behaviour orders. Our neighbourhood wardens programme and proposals for community safety officers will help to reduce yobbish behaviour, such as graffiti writing, in our neighbourhoods. We are also providing support through the Youth Justice Board for a range of projects to combat the problem of youth crime, including graffiti.

HEALTH

Children's Diet

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in England he estimates have a poor diet. [45003]

Yvette Cooper Government surveys show that the majority of children consume diets which contain enough calories, protein, vitamins and minerals to meet their requirements. However, there are concerns about the balance and variety of foods in children's diets.

Around 14 per cent of children's average energy (calorie) intake comes from saturated fat (compared to 11 per cent recommended), around 17 per cent of children's average energy intake comes from added sugars (compared to 10 per cent recommended) and average intakes of salt are up to twice the recommended amount. The percentage of children meeting current dietary recommendations varies by age. However, only around 15 per cent of all children meet the recommendations for added sugars, around 8 per cent meet the recommendations for saturated fat and around 42 per cent meet the recommendations for total fat.

Intakes of fruit and vegetables are particularly low—average intake is only 2 portions per day and one in five 4 to 6 year olds eat no fruit at all in a week. There are also concerns about differences in diet between social groups. For example, children from the lowest social group tend to eat 50 per cent less fruit and vegetables than those from the highest social group.

Further details on food consumption patterns and levels of individual nutrient intakes can be found in the National Diet and Nutrition Survey for young people aged 4 to 18 years, which has been placed in the Library.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what baseline was established during 2000–01 for monitoring the Service Delivery Agreement target specified on Page 27 of the 2001 report of the Food Standards Agency to reduce foodborne illness by 20 per cent over the next five years. [49079]

Yvette Cooper: The baseline established for monitoring the target of reducing foodborne illness by 20 per cent by April 2006 was announce by the Food Standards Agency on 23 August 2001. It is based on UK laboratory reports of the five major foodborne bacteria, excluding cases reported to have been acquired abroad. The baseline figure for the 5-year period, starting 1 April 2001, is 65,209.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Service Delivery Agreement target of the Food Standards Agency to develop policy on the nutritional

quality of foods and diets and their effect on public health, especially amongst disadvantaged groups, has been met. [49250]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) published its strategic framework on nutrition in March 2001 and its nutrition action plan in December 2001. Copies have been placed the Library. These documents set out the work programme the FSA has in hand on diet and health issues, including that related to disadvantaged groups.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the quantitive consumer market research carried out by the Food Standards Agency to identify measures to assess changes in consumer attitudes on food safety and standards. [49069]

Yvette Cooper: As part of its commitment to putting the consumer first, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) conducts an annual survey of consumer attitudes to food safety and food standards issues. This survey provides valuable information about consumer attitudes, behaviours and preferences which is used to inform Agency priorities and activities. It also tracks awareness and confidence in the Agency itself.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Food Standards Agency has fulfilled its Service Delivery Agreement to establish a system for post hoc audits of major food incidents involving relevant services. [49081]

Yvette Cooper: A system of reviews of major food incidents is in place and in addition to internal review meetings a stakeholder workshop was held during 2001 to consider the co-ordination of food incident handling with key stakeholders.

Caffeinated Energy Drinks

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department and its agencies have consulted other Governmental health agencies on the safety of caffeinated energy drinks; and if he will make a statement. [49782]

Yvette Cooper: Following concern from a number of European countries over the possible adverse effects of energy drinks, the EU Scientific Committee on Food (SCF) assessed the available scientific information and published an initial opinion on the safety of the ingredients normally associated with these drinks in 1999. That opinion called for additional data, which the SCF is due to assess later this year. The Food Standards Agency liaises with this Committee, as do the Governmental health agencies of other EU countries.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he plans to issue a statement on the effects of caffeinated energy drinks on children; and if he will make a statement; [49778]

(2) if he plans to issue a statement on the effects of caffeinated energy drinks when combined with alcohol; and if he will make a statement; [49780]

(3) if he plans to issue a statement on the effects of caffeinated energy drinks when consumed prior to exercising; and if he will make a statement. [49779]

Yvette Cooper: The safety of high caffeine drinks, often termed "energy drinks" is currently being assessed at European level and new data, including that on possible interactions with alcohol, are being reviewed by the EU Scientific Committee on Food, which is expected to complete its assessment later this year. In the meantime, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has advised that, based on the available evidence, moderate consumption of stimulant drinks by adults is not a cause for concern.

A can of energy drink contains about the same quantity of caffeine as a cup of coffee. The FSA advises that stimulant drinks and other foods containing significant amounts of caffeine should be consumed in moderation by pregnant women and may be unsuitable for those sensitive to the effects of caffeine, including children who are not regular consumers of tea and coffee.

The FSA advises that these drinks are not suitable for use as rehydration agents following sport or other strenuous activities. Moderate consumption of these drinks prior to exercise is not a cause for concern, based on the available evidence.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what upper safe levels for daily intake of *(a)* taurine and *(b)* glucuronolactone have been established by the department; and if he will make a statement. [49781]

Yvette Cooper: The Department and the Food Standards Agency have not established upper safe levels for these substances. The European Union Scientific Committee on Food concluded in 1999 that further studies would be required in order to be able to establish upper safe levels for daily intake of taurine and glucuronolactone.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research his Department and its agencies have conducted into the effects of caffeinated energy drinks consumed prior to exercising, on the human body; what the findings of the research were; and if he will make a statement; [49786]

(2) what research his Department and its agencies have conducted into the effects of combining caffeinated energy drinks with alcohol on the human body; what the findings of the research was were; and if he will make a statement; [49784]

(3) what research his Department and its agencies have conducted into the effects of *(a)* taurine, *(b)* glucuronolactone, *(c)* caffeine and *(d)* a combination of taurine, glucuronolactone and caffeine, on the human body; what the findings of the research were; and if he will make a statement; [49783]

(4) what research his Department and its agencies have conducted into the effects of caffeine on children; what the findings of the research were; and if he will make a statement. [49785]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has published a call for research on the effects of caffeine consumption during pregnancy. The results of any research commissioned as a result of this call are not expected to be available until 2005. The Department and the FSA have not commissioned any research in the other areas mentioned above.

Marfan Syndrome

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his estimate is of the number of people suffering from Marfan syndrome; [48844]

(2) how many patients were diagnosed with Marfan syndrome in each of the last 10 years for which records are available. [48842]

Yvette Cooper: Information about the numbers suffering from, and diagnosed with, Marfan's syndrome is not available in the form requested. Our statistics show that between 1995–96 and 2000–01, there were 707 admissions to National Health Service Hospitals for Marfan's syndrome.

The UK Marfan Association estimates that the incidence of this disease is approximately 1 in 5000 of the population.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private finance initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50289]

Mr. Hutton: None of the 23 major PFI schemes which have reached financial close to date have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed.

Scanners

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has for the purchase of new CT scanners. [50593]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Cancer Plan provided details of diagnostic equipment to be purchased for the NHS. This included a commitment to 200 new Computed Tomography scanners by 2004.

Programmes to deliver this commitment are well underway and by 17 April 2002, 84 Computed Tomography scanners had already been delivered to the NHS through central programmes. This means that, in total, approximately 41 per cent of CT scanners now in use in the NHS are new since January 2000. Programmes to deliver the remaining equipment are on-target to meet the 2004 deadline.

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the capital and annual revenue costs of *(a)* a CT scanner and *(b)* an MRI scanner; what the annual repair costs are on average for each type of scanner; how much down-time following breakdowns are experienced on average by each type of scanner; and what his estimate is of the number of such scanners in the non-NHS health sector. [49801]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The capital cost of computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners will vary according to the exact specification of the equipment. Annual revenue costs will also vary dependent on age and specification of the equipment, staffing levels and workload and casemix at the particular hospital. The following costs are provided for guidance:

The current list price of a well-specified *(a)* CT scanner is approximately £0.5 million and *(b)* MRI scanner is approximately £1 million. These costs are not inclusive of value added tax or any necessary installation or building works.

Annual revenue costs will incorporate both pay and non-pay costs, such as maintenance, film, drugs or contrast agent. Total revenue costs will therefore vary according to staff numbers, scanner activity and type of maintenance contract. However, the average total annual revenue cost for both *(a)* CT and *(b)* MRI scanners could be estimated at £0.3–£0.4 million.

The majority of hospitals elect to take out a fully comprehensive maintenance contract for both CT and MRI scanners. The cost of all servicing and repairs is included within a fully comprehensive annual maintenance contract, which costs approximately *(a)* £50,000 for a CT scanner and *(b)* £70,000 for a MRI scanner.

Under a fully comprehensive maintenance contract, a supplier of CT or MRI scanners will usually quote an uptime guarantee for new equipment of 98 per cent. This means that the supplier is confident that there will be no more than 2 per cent unplanned downtime, which would roughly equate to 5–6 days per year. Older equipment may have greater servicing requirements and the cost of a maintenance contract with a 98 per cent guarantee could be significantly more expensive. In this case, other contracts, with a lesser percentage guarantee are available at reduced cost. In every case, there are financial penalties to suppliers if they do not meet their uptime guarantee.

It is estimated that there are approximately *(a)* 40 CT scanners and *(b)* 60 MRI scanners installed in the non-National Health Service sector in England. It is difficult to provide accurate figures in this respect since private healthcare providers are not required to submit details about facilities or workload to the Department.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority did not publish an annual report in 2001. [50899]

Yvette Cooper: The report is being prepared and we expect it to be published shortly.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many licences for donor insemination for *(a)* single women and *(b)* lesbians have been issued by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in each year since it was established. [50900]

Yvette Cooper: The treatment licences issued by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority do not specify who should receive treatment. Licensed centres are required in law to take account of the welfare of any child born as a result of treatment, including the need of that child for a father.

MRSA

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to tackle MRSA; and if he will make a statement. [50687]

Yvette Cooper: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) on 15 April, *Official Report*, column 792W.

Vaccinations

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the possible positive impact of pneumococcal vaccinations for the over-65s; [51131]

(2) what plans he has to introduce a 65 years and over age recommendation for pneumococcal vaccinations. [51130]

Yvette Cooper: The potential efficacy and cost effectiveness of introducing universal vaccination with pneumococcal polysaccharide for everyone over 65 years is under investigation by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). JCVI will meet to review the evidence once these studies have been completed and make their recommendations to the Government.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the last five years for which figures are available, the number of people aged *(a)* 0 to five, *(b)* six to 15, *(c)* 16 to 24, *(d)* 25 to 34, *(e)* 35 to 44, *(f)* 45 to 54, *(g)* 55 to 64, *(h)* 65 to 74, *(i)* 75 to 84 and *(j)* 85 and over, who contracted (i) pneumococcal and (ii) meningitis broken down by *(A)* region and *(B)* health authority. [47531]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* There is a statutory requirement to notify infectious diseases (listed on the Public Health Laboratory Service website www.phls.org.uk/facts/NOIDS/noidlist.htm) to the local consultant in communicable disease control. Reports received through this notification system are processed and collated by the communicable disease surveillance centre and are based on clinical symptoms only. These reports do not relate to laboratory confirmed cases.

The total number of notifications of pneumococcal and meningococcal meningitis for each of the last 5 years by age and region is shown in Tables 1 and 2. Copies of which have been placed in the library. As the number of cases of meningococcal and pneumococcal meningitis for each health authority broken down by age is very low (and zero in a large number of cases) annual totals by health authority have been provided (Table 3) copies of which are also in the Library. Please note data provided for 2001 is provisional and may change.

Food Standards (Mobile Retailers)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many checks were carried out in 2001 on the safety of food sold from mobile caravans and trailers; how many failed to meet the required standards; and if he will make a statement. [51304]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not held centrally.

Such checks would be carried out by local authorities.

Healthcare (Herefordshire)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes the Budget of 17 April will make to the provision of healthcare in Herefordshire. [51651]

Yvette Cooper: As a result of the Budget, the National Health Service in England will receive an annual average real terms growth in resources of 7.4 per cent for the five years from 2003–04 to 2007–08. Local allocations to primary care trusts will be announced later this year.

Recruitment and Retention

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to improve retention and recruitment of doctors in hospitals in rural areas, with specific reference to the West Cumberland Hospital. [51933]

Mr. Hutton: The Recruitment and Retention strategy focuses on all staff groups within the National Health Service including doctors throughout England.

In order to ensure there are sufficient doctors in place to provide the treatment and care that patients need, there are a number of initiatives in place:

Increasing the number of medical school and post graduate training plces;

Improving Working Lives for doctors—which includes the Flexible Careers for Doctors Scheme, a centrally funded shceme that enables doctors to work part time and the Flexible Retirement initiative which allows doctors to consider options to retiring often with no negative effects on their pension. These include reducing workloads, reducing hours and joining winter registers to return to the NHS at times of crisis;

The Changing Workforce Programme—has been set up to look at how to make the best use of the skills of the staff and improve job satisfaction. By doing so, it will help attract new staff into the NHS through new opportunities and will offer better career prospects for existing staff.

National Recruitment Strategy; and

International Recruitment.

In the last year the number of NHS consultants rose to 5.7 per cent—the second largest increase on record—by 1,380 to 25,690.

West Cumberland Hospital has experienced difficulties in recruiting doctors and has taken steps to alleviate the problems. These include:

examining the possibilities for international recruitment;

developing a recruitment website; and

implementing the Improving Working Lives Standard to ensure that staff have access to flexible working patterns and childcare.

Outpatient Appointments

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital outpatient appointments were missed by patients in each year since 1997; and how much this has cost the NHS. [47541]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The number of patients who did not attend consultant outpatient appointments from 1997–98 to 2000–01 are shown in the table. Information up to quarter 2 of 2001–02, is available on the Department's web site www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Year	*Total No of Outpatient Appointments*	*Total No of Outpatient Attendences*	*Total No of DNAs*	*per cent DNA*
2000–01	49,524,159	43,569,340	5,954,819	12.0
1999–00	48,923,209	43,040,699	5,882,510	12.0
1998–99	47,794,368	42,145,397	5,648,971	11.8
1997–98	47,264,698	41,635,269	5,629,429	11.9

Note:
Did Not Attends (DNAs) are counted for those patients who gave no advance warning for their non-attendance.
Source:
Department of Health form KH09

We do not centrally collect data on the cost to the NHS of patients who do not attend hospital outpatient appointments.

As part of the NHS Plan all outpatient appointments will be pre-booked by the end of 2005. Patient will be able to choose a date and time that is convenient for them, well in advance. Booking systems, where introduced, have proved to significantly reduce numbers of patients failing to turn up for appointments.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the nature, extent and timetable of his review of the workings of NICE. [50055]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry included a wide-ranging review of the role of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence. We carefully considered the inquiry team's recommendations and published our response.

We are now carrying out a consultation on a number of outstanding issues. In March of this year, the Department and the National Assembly for Wales issued a discussion paper entitled "Clinical Guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence: Timing and Selection of Topics for Appraisal". The closing date for responses is 7 June 2002.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect on the treatment of patients of the length of time taken by NICE, to assess treatments. [50054]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The treatment of patients is enhanced by authoritative guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). In order to produce authoritative guidance, NICE's processes need to be of sufficient length to allow for proper evaluation of evidence and full consultation with stakeholders and experts.

Lymphoedema

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the resources allocated to the diagnosis and treatment of lymphoedema, in *(a)* England and *(b)* Gloucestershire. [50491]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The Department does not collect figures on the cost of NHS services in a way that enables an accurate figure to be calculated for the cost of a particular disease.

Cancer

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the average length of time which patients with suspected cancerous tumours wait to be scanned following reference by a hospital consultant. [49802]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* We do not collect waiting times for scans. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) scans play an important role in the diagnosis of many cancers. The NHS Cancer Plan sets out new goals to reduce waiting times for cancer patients. The target is that by 2005 no one should wait longer than two months from urgent General Practitioner referral to beginning cancer treatment except for a good clinical reason or through patient choice. This target period includes the time for necessary scans and diagnostic tests. Data collection on the waiting times to treatment targets will be introduced as we roll out the Cancer Plan waiting times targets.

We are also encouraging hospitals to streamline their services, for example by providing multi assessment one stop clinics where several tests can be carried out at the same visit. The length of time that a patient may have to wait for any scan is dependent on their clinical condition with emergency cases needing to be seen immediately whilst other cases can be carried out as quickly as possible. To increase the capacity of diagnostic services, funding has been made available for the provision of new and replacement scanners: 29 new MRI scanners, 81 CT scanners and over 330 pieces of equipment for breast screening delivered to the NHS since April 2000. In addition workforce initiatives are underway to develop new ways of working and improve recruitment and retention of staff.

Smallpox

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures were enacted to raise tenders for the production of smallpox vaccine recently in the UK. [50790]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* In seeking to establish which vaccine-manufacturing companies might be able to provide new smallpox vaccine to meet our requirements, we took the decision that purchase would fall outside the usual open competitive tendering process in the interests of national security, in accordance with Paragraph 6(c) of the Public Supply Contracts Regulations 1995.

Detailed confidential discussions were held with 5 major pharmaceutical companies known to have vaccine manufacturing capability either in the UK or in Europe. Our requirements for the vaccine strain, timing and delivery were made clear to each of the companies, who were then given time to submit their responses.

Glivec

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement about Glivec; [51083]

(2) what advice he has received from NICE about Glivec. [50821]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answers 18 April 2002]:* My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales have asked the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) to appraise Glivec for the treatment of chronic myeloid leukaemia, and to issue guidance on its use to the National Health Service in England and Wales. It is anticipated that NICE will issue guidance in August 2002.

Health Council

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who attended the health meeting of the EU Council of Ministers on 4 June 2001 on behalf of the UK; and who led the UK delegation. [51036]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The UK delegation to the European Union Health Council, held on 6 June 2001, was led by Susan Deacon, Scottish Executive Minister for Health and Community care, with the deputy Ambassador to the UK's Permanent representation to the European Union and appropriate officials.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Voluntary Sector (Funding)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire of 25 January, *Official Report*, columns 1185–6W, on Government funding of the voluntary sector, if he will list the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which the Cabinet Office distributes funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51414]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office does not have any specific grant schemes dealing with funding to the voluntary sector.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many digital radios are owned by his Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52854]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not held centrally and can only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

My department follows the government's requirement to consider the whole life cost when making any purchasing decision. Whole life costs take account of possible future obsolescence.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost; [52843]

(2) if he will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52844]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Buckingham on 12 February 2001 (*Official Report*, column 188W).

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which of the services of his Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50314]

Mr. Leslie: Since the implementation in October 1999 of the BQS initiative (a five-year rolling programme) the Cabinet Office has reviewed approximately 50 per cent by value of its pre-2001 Election units/functions.

Following the Election the Cabinet Office has undergone a significant restructuring. The timing and nature of future BQS reviews of Cabinet Office functions/services will be considered in the light of these changes and the outcome of the current Spending Review.

Digital Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by his Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48365]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office pays one subscription for digital satellite television services in departmental buildings from which Ministers work. £82 per month is paid to Sky Digital to allow access to the full breadth of news TV channels.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 29 April 2002

DEFENCE

Harrier GR7

14. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the air defence capabilities of the Harrier GR7 are. [50953]

Mr. Ingram: The Harrier GR7 is optimised for offensive support operations, but possesses an air defence capability through its Sidewinder air to air missiles.

25. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the Indian Government concerning the sale of Royal Navy Sea Harriers; and if he will make a statement. [50964]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence's Disposal Services Agency has not entered into any talks with the Indian Government with regard to the sale of Sea Harriers. However, as part of its marketing strategy for the sale of these aircraft, the DSA will follow up all expressions of interest subject, of course, to normal export controls.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the air defence capabilities of the Harrier GR7 are. [52448]

Mr. Ingram: The Harrier GR7 is optimised for offensive support operations, but possesses an air defence capability through its Sidewinder Air to Air missiles.

Fleet Air Arm

16. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft are in service with the Fleet Air Arm. [50955]

Mr. Ingram: The total current number of aircraft in service with the Fleet Air Arm is 295. This figure includes those aircraft operated by Fleet Air Arm personnel serving in Naval Air Squadrons within both Joint Force Harrier and the Joint Helicopter Command.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

17. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his assessment is of the threat to the United Kingdom from attack by weapons of mass destruction. [50956]

Mr. Hoon: As of today we assess that there is currently no direct threat of attack by weapons of mass destruction to the United Kingdom. We do, however, continue to monitor developments very closely, particularly as they might affect British forces deployed in other parts of the world.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the type of weapons of mass destruction that are most likely to be used by countries he has defined as of concern to the UK; and if he will make a statement. [52285]

Mr. Hoon: We monitor continuously the capabilities of countries which possess, or are seeking to acquire, weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver or use them. Currently we assess that none of the countries we are monitoring has the specific intention to use them against the United Kingdom. Should a direct threat materialise, its exact nature will depend on the capabilities of the country concerned and the political and military context in which it arises.

Our assessment of the weapons of mass destruction programmes of a number of countries was included in our "Supplementary Memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee: The Ballistic Missile Threat" of 18 March 2002.

Ordnance

18. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the production of ordnance in the UK. [50957]

Dr. Moonie: Royal Ordnance Defence, the UK's major producer of munitions to the armed forces, has been operating against a background of sharp decline in the world-wide demand for defence equipment over the last 15 years. Like any other commercial company competing in world markets, it has had to take the hard decisions necessary to optimise its manufacturing capacity to remain viable and competitive in this sector. The Ministry of Defence is aware that the company is currently conducting a manufacturing review, focusing particularly on its sites at Birtley, Bridgwater and Chorley.

While the final result of this review is not yet known, I am able to inform the House that Royal Ordnance Defence has recently announced that it intends to pursue a consolidation option at the Birtley site. Although, regrettably, there will be some job losses over a period of years, the company expects that this option will secure the future of the site as part of its core business.

They have also informed MOD that they intend to invest heavily in a number of sites across the United Kingdom. Royal Ordnance Defence are retaining expertise in the crucial areas of propellant charge design at Bishopton, ordnance engineering design at Leicester, and small arms ammunition design and manufacture at Radway Green near Crewe, as well as investing substantially in its filling, assembly and packaging plant at Glascoed. There is no doubt that the company does possess and plans to retain world-class research and development personnel and production facilities in the United Kingdom.

Armed Forces (Retention)

19. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to improve retention in the armed forces; and what progress has been made in the last 12 months to address the shortfall in numbers for each of the services. [50958]

Mr. Ingram: The achievement of manning balance is being tackled as a matter of the highest priority. In particular we have introduced a number of initiatives aimed at improving retention. Although there are variations between the Services, the overall manning position is stabilising.

Our aim is to achieve higher levels of retention through policies that genuinely reflect the priorities of our people and their families.

27. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the net inflow/outflow of trained service personnel was in 2001. [50966]

Mr. Ingram: The net inflow outflow of trained service personnel in 2001 is as follows:

Number

Service	*Naval Service*	*Army*	*RAF*	*Total*
Inflow	2,844	11,535	3,005	17,384
Outflow	4,026	11,660	4,018	19,704
Net Flow	−1,182	−125	−1,013	2,320

Afghanistan

20. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the UK peacekeeping force in Kabul. [50959]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom has led, and has made a substantial contribution to, the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul since its inception. Our troops have been widely praised for their work in helping the Interim Administration to maintain security and stability in Kabul as the Afghans begin the rebuilding of their shattered country.

23. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the duties of British soldiers in Afghanistan are. [50962]

Mr. Hoon: British troops in Afghanistan have been carrying out both security assistance and combat tasks.

The United Kingdom has led, and has made a substantial contribution to, the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul since its inception. Our troops have been widely praised for their work in helping the Interim Administration to maintain security and stability in Kabul as the Afghans begin the rebuilding of their shattered country.

A battlegroup formed around 45 Commando Royal Marines has been deployed to Bagram to contribute to the international coalition's continuing operations to defeat the remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

31. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his NATO colleagues on the operations in Afghanistan. [50971]

Mr. Hoon: I continue to have regular discussions with my NATO colleagues about operations in Afghanistan. All members of the coalition are committed to the fight against international terrorism, and to supporting the Afghan Interim Administration as the Afghans begin the rebuilding of their country.

32. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many air transport sorties in support of British forces' operations in the Afghanistan theatre have been flown in chartered Antonov heavy lift aircraft. [50973]

Mr. Hoon: As at 18 April, there have been 95 direct and 23 indirect Antonov sorties in support of British forces' operations in the Afghanistan theatre.

33. **Hugh Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on British service personnel deployed in Afghanistan. [50974]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Brennan), at column 649.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are being employed in Afghanistan to minimise the risk to British troops of friendly fire incidents. [52472]

Mr. Hoon: The planning for operations in Afghanistan included detailed work to establish a number of clear, reliable measures to minimise the risks of friendly fire incidents. All coalition forces operate in accordance with strict Rules of Engagement and British forces operate in their own area of responsibility with equipment to ensure that they have accurate positioning information. Additionally, individuals and vehicles are clearly marked using indicators that are visible by day and at night through night vision aids.

There is also a close working relationship between coalition forces, with liaison officers placed at all levels in headquarters and in lower formations. Procedures to co-ordinate fire and air support have been established at the Coalition Combined Air Operations Centre and at Divisional and Brigade Headquarters and several lines of communications are also in place (including satellite-based equipment) to allow close co-ordination between headquarters, troops on the ground and aircraft to ensure deconfliction.

Regular Army

22. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the trained strength of the regular Army was in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [50961]

Mr. Ingram: It is difficult to make direct comparison between Army strength figures for 1997 and 2001 as we now provide figures for Army strength incorporating UK Trained Personnel, the Full Time Reserve Service and Gurkhas for the last two years. Prior to this strength figures based on this definition were not available. I have therefore restricted my answer to UK Trained Army Personnel only. This stood at 97,812 as at 31 December 1997 and 96,373 as at 31 December 2001.

Rules of Engagement

24. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on developing methods of distinguishing between enemy combatants and civilians in each year from 1997–98 to the latest year for which figures are available. [50963]

Dr. Moonie: Minimising non-combatant casualties is of course among our highest priorities whenever we are involved in military operations but it is not a discrete

capability. It is the product of a wide range of different activities and approaches, and equipment based solutions. For example, it ranges from the assessment of strategic level intelligence for strike missions all the way through to training for sentry duty. There is therefore no simple figure available.

Territorial Army

21. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strength of the Territorial Army is. [50960]

26. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strength of the Territorial Army is. [50965]

Dr. Moonie: As at 1 April 2002, the strength of the Territorial Army stood at 39,663 personnel, including those mobilised in support of operations.

Iraq

28. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for military action in Iraq. [50968]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), at columns 664–65.

Defence Medical Services

29. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* current numbers of serving personnel of Defence Medical Services are. [50969]

Dr. Moonie: As at 1 January 2002, there were 6,509 personnel in the regular Defence Medical Services against an operational and retained task requirement of 8,387. These figures exclude student nurses and other new entry trainees.

Strategic Defence Review

30. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish an update of the strategic defence review relating to terrorism. [50970]

Mr. Hoon: I expect to be in a position to publish some conclusions from the work on a "New Chapter" to the Strategic Defence Review in the late spring or early summer.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

34. **Syd Rapson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce the Defence Aviation Repair Agency work force. [50975]

Mr. Ingram: No forward manpower targets have been set to reduce the work force in the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA). However, DARA has reduced its work force year on year as a direct result of rationalisation initiatives and the introduction of new working practices. There has been no requirement for any compulsory redundancies as a result of any of these initiatives. In line with the assumptions made when it was established as a trading fund, the Agency will continue to pursue efficiencies and improvements across its business and these may result in changes to the size and shape of the organisation in the future.

Courts Martial

35. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the impact of the suspension of courts-martial on the workings of military discipline. [50976]

Mr. Ingram: Army and Royal Air Force courts-martial scheduled to begin in the period immediately after 26 February were postponed in the light of the judgment on that day of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Morris v. the United Kingdom. This was to enable those services to address the concern expressed in the judgment, about the potential for external influence over certain members of court martial panels. The Army and Royal Air Force have now followed the Royal Navy in including in Queen's Regulations a prohibition on reporting on court martial members for the performance of these duties. All three services have also included in Queen's Regulations a reminder that it is an offence to attempt to influence a member of a court martial.

Army and Royal Air Force courts-martial resumed on 3 and 23 April respectively. The backlog of 54 Army and nine Royal Air Force trials that had been postponed should be cleared by the end of June. We regret the inconvenience to the accused and their representatives, and to witnesses, but the postponements have had only a marginal effect on the operation of the discipline system as a whole. Moreover it has been valuable to have clarified the position regarding the very proper independence of court martial members.

MOD Guard Service

36. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the MOD Guard Service. [50977]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is committed to its in-house guard force, which has provided first class unarmed protection to the Defence Estate for almost 10 years. The organisation of the MGS has recently been reviewed, and it has been decided, subject to consultation with the trade unions, to move to a centralised structure, under the direction of the Chief Constable, MOD Police, so as to provide a more efficient and effective unarmed guarding service.

Air Defence

37. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the air defence of the United Kingdom. [50978]

Mr. Ingram: The task of air defence of the United Kingdom falls to the RAF, particularly RAF Strike Command. The UK continues to meet its commitment to NATO to preserve the integrity of our airspace using a combination of air surveillance radar and quick reaction aircraft. Those assets could also be used in a national capacity.

Service Reductions

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings will be made in each year to 2012 by the decisions *(a)* to bring forward the withdrawal of (i) 5 squadron, (ii) the RN Sea Harriers and (iii) HMS Fearless and *(b)* to reduce (1) the state of readiness of HMS Sheffield and (2) the number of Nimrod aircraft on order. [49673]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to him on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 262W, 18 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1078W, and 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 712–13W. In the case of Sea Harrier decision, further to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 823–34W, the estimated savings (net of the costs of the related upgrading of the Harrier GR7 to GR9) over the period 2002–03 to 2005–06 (the latest year for which we have accurate figures) are some £109 million. The net savings accruing from the current plan to hold HMS Sheffield at extended readiness between 2002 and 2004 are estimated to be some £28 million over the period 2002–03 to 2004–05. All savings are compared to previous plans.

Eurofighter

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Eurofighter will be operational in the strike role. [49756]

Mr. Hoon: Eurofighter will be a multi-role aircraft, conditioned primarily for air defence. It will, however, have an initial air-to-surface capability as soon as it becomes available for operational deployment, in the second half of the decade. We plan to enhance this capability during incremental upgrades.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the services of his Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50315]

Dr. Moonie: The Better Quality Services (BQS) programme was launched in 1998 and adopted by the Cabinet Office in the Modernising Government White Paper of 1999 as a means of delivering continuous improvements in the quality and effectiveness of Government activities and services. It requires all Government Departments to review every activity and service over a five year period starting in October 1999. The scheme covers all activities in Departments, agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies, and is similar in remit to the Best Value programme in local government.

The Ministry of Defence is committed to the regular and rigorous review of its business activities. BQS is one of a range of approaches we have taken to achieve this. Progress against our BQS programme has been published in our departmental performance reports. As at the end of March 2001, over 70 per cent. of the plan had been completed. The activities then outstanding were largely small-scale management reviews, possible public-private partnerships, retendering of service contracts and reviews of individual agencies. Our next departmental performance report, in the autumn, will give further information on our business improvement programme.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated cost is of the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft. [51536]

Mr. Hoon: The Joint Strike Fighter has been identified as having the best potential to meet our Future Joint Combat Aircraft requirement. The United Kingdom's procurement costs are currently estimated to be up to £10 billion, depending on the number of aircraft required and the variant selected. Subsequent costs will be determined by the through life support strategy that we decide to adopt.

Defence Employment (North-East)

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the numbers employed in the defence and defence-related industries in the north-east. [R] [51784]

Dr. Moonie: The latest available figures (1998–99) for the number of United Kingdom jobs estimated to be directly dependent on Ministry of Defence equipment expenditure is 81,000. Of these, approximately 3,000 were employed on MOD equipment contracts in the north-east. The Defence Analytical Services Agency does not provide estimates for regional employment derived from MOD non-equipment expenditure or exports.

We are currently reviewing our methodology on the estimation of employment figures dependent on UK defence expenditure and exports. On this issue, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 766W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin).

Service Accommodation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the last Stock Condition Survey was conducted of *(a)* single living accommodation and *(b)* service family accommodation; what conclusions were drawn as to the work required to meet the target of upgrading his Department's housing by 2003; if he will put the latest copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [52103]

Dr. Moonie: As part of the Ministry of Defence's commitment to improving single living accommodation a rolling condition revalidation programme commenced in April 2001 and the current status is:

	Status
Navy	Complete
Army	Ongoing, substantially complete
RAF	Complete
DLO	Complete
Central TLB	Complete

So far as service family accommodation in mainland UK is concerned, a stock condition survey was commissioned by the Defence Housing Executive (DHE) in mid-1997 and completed in early 1998. The task was complex, involving 650 data entries per property and full survey of 90 per cent. of the total stock of some 64,000 properties. Against an agreed standard for condition very few properties met the highest standard. DHE had already

embarked on a programme to refurbish all of the properties then forecast as required for the long term but, on the basis of the information contained in the survey and the amount of work required, the target date was revised from 2003 to November 2005.The survey report is now outdated, in that some 12,000 properties have since been disposed of, and significant new build and upgrade projects carried out. It would therefore be inappropriate to place a copy in the Library of the House. However, the latest information is as follows:

	Number of properties
Standard 1	20,699
Standard 2	26,007
Standard 3	4,877
Standard 4	349
Total	51,932

C3 Capabilities

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what improvements have been made to the armed forces' C3 capabilities since July 1998; and if he will make a statement. [51491]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* The introduction into service of a range of programmes has led to significant improvements to the armed forces' Command, Control and Communications (C3) capability since July 1998. Examples include the upgrade and expansion of our Joint Force Maritime and Air Operational Command Systems, and upgrades to the Skynet 4 satellite system. We have also introduced specific additional communications capabilities to improve interoperability with allies to ensure maximum operational flexibility for our deployed forces in the particular demands of the Afghanistan environment. Furthermore, the Personal Role Radio was released into service in January 2002, two months earlier than scheduled, and is currently deployed with troops in Afghanistan.

These enhancements are backed by a significant programme of investment in our future capability that, over the next few years, includes the introduction of Bowman, Skynet 5, and Falcon.

ISTAR

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what improvements have been made to the armed forces' ISTAR capabilities since July 1998; and if he will make a statement. [51490]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* The armed forces have made significant improvements to their ISTAR capabilities since 1998, introducing into service a variety of assets to improve surveillance and intelligence gathering capabilities. Examples include the introduction into service of the PHOENIX unmanned aerial vehicle in 1999, improvements to our EW capability for land and maritime forces, and improved imaging capabilities for the RAF. In addition, recent operations have led to the introduction of specific ISTAR capabilities in support of our deployed forces, including mobile weapon locating radars, improvements in our intelligence distribution networks and an increase in the provision of tactical level surveillance devices.

ISTAR remains a priority area for future investment. Among our programmes due into service over the next few years are: ASTOR, delivering significant improvements to our airborne surveillance capabilities; and the WATCHKEEPER unmanned aerial vehicle project that will greatly enhance our battlefield surveillance capabilities. As well as primarily ISTAR assets, the planned introduction of platforms with integral ISTAR systems, such as the Attack Helicopter, will further enhance our capabilities in this area.

Operation Antler

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* MOD police officers, *(b)* Royal Navy regulators, *(c)* Royal Military Police, *(d)* Royal Air Force Police and *(e)* other MOD personnel are working with Wiltshire constabulary on Operation Antler; what has been the cost in each year in each case; and if he will make a statement. [52411]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* The following table shows the numbers and costs (salary, travel and subsistence and other support costs) of MOD staff working with the Wiltshire constabulary on Operation Antler, since its commencement in August 1999:

	1999–2000		*2000–01*		*2001–02*	
	Numbers of staff	*£*	*Numbers of staff*	*£*	*Numbers of staff*	*£*
MOD police officers	2	76,097	2	87,304	[1]1	[2]83,529
RN regulators	0	0	1	[3]8,530	1	[3]5,000
Royal Military Police	0	0	2	33,597	2	44,744
Royal Air Force Police	0	0	3	63,880	[4]1	53,978
Total	2	76,097	8	193,311	5	187,251

[1] With effect from January 2002 the number of MDP officers on secondment to Wiltshire constabulary reduced from two to one.
[2] Figures include support costs up to November 2001 only.
[3] Costs approximated as officer only undertook part-time duties in respect of Operation Antler.
[4] With effect from November 2001 the number of RAF officers on secondment to Wiltshire constabulary reduced from two to one.

In addition, staff in MOD Headquarters and at Porton Down have co-operated fully with the police in pursuit of their inquiries.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many DSTL staff at Porton Down have assisted Wiltshire Constabulary with Operation Antler; what *(a)* accommodation and *(b)* other facilities have been made available in each year since the operation began; and what the cost was to the Defence budget. [52406]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* During the last two and a half years, 22 members of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) staff have

assisted the Wiltshire police with the Operation Antler inquiry. Members of the inquiry team have been provided with areas in which to work and review documentation. Additional support facilities have also been provided to copy documents and review films.

The cost of Dstl support to Operation Antler has not been gathered separately. However, the total cost of Dstl effort in addressing issues arising from the Porton Down Volunteer Scheme, including those relating to Operation Antler, for the financial year 2001–02 was approximately £485,000.

Tanker Aircraft

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress made with procurement of tanker aircraft for air-to-air refuelling. [51494]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* The Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft is planned to replace our VC10 and TriStar air to air refuelling/air transport aircraft around the end of the decade. An Invitation To Negotiate for this potential PFI contract was issued to industry in December 2000. Bids were received from two consortia in July 2001 and we are currently in discussions with both bidders.

Fluorescent Particle Trials

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what long term conclusions, with specific reference to those relating to health effects, his Department reached on the Fluorescent particle trials over south-west Britain between 1955 and 1963; what tests relating to germ warfare have taken place since 1972; and if he will make a statement. [52252]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* In 1999 the Ministry of Defence commissioned Professor Peter Lachmann, and a team of distinguished scientists, to undertake an independent review of the Fluorescent particle trials which occurred between 1955 and 1963. The MOD accepts the conclusion of this review which was that

> "Exposure to cadmium from dissemination of zinc cadmium sulphide during the "Cold War" should not have resulted in adverse health effects in the UK population".

The findings of the review are summarised in an open literature paper entitled: The risk to the UK population of zinc cadmium sulphide dispersion by the Ministry of Defence during the "Cold War" (Occup. Environ. Med. 2002, 59, 13–17). Additionally, the complete review can be found at www.mod.uk/publications/zinc-cadmium.

A review which summarises the defence trials conducted by the Porton Down establishments, entitled "BW and BW Defence Field Trials Conducted by the UK: 1940–79" can be found in the Library of the House. Subsequent to the trials detailed in this report other defence trials involving simulant organisms have been undertaken on restricted access MOD sites. These trials have assessed the threat posed by specific dissemination methods, evaluated the performance of biological detection systems, considered aspects of decontamination and provided training for operators of the in-service biodetection systems.

Malaria

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases of malaria there have been among UK forces in *(a)* Afghanistan and *(b)* Sierra Leone. [52901]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* As of 24 April, there have been 159 confirmed cases and six suspected cases of malaria among UK forces who have served on recent and on-going operations in Sierra Leone. No cases of malaria have been reported among UK service personnel deployed to Afghanistan.

Naval Vessels

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy ships are *(a)* being refitted and *(b)* preparing to be refitted; and when the refit work is due to (i) commence and (ii) finish. [52892]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* There are four Royal Navy surface warships currently in refit. These are:

HMS Invincible—aircraft carrier

HMS Liverpool—type 42 destroyer

HMS Gloucester—type 42 destroyer

HMS Monmouth—type 23 frigate.

HMS Manchester—type 42 destroyer and HMS Iron Duke—type 23 frigate are undertaking post refit activities and trials prior to returning to the fleet.

In addition to the refits listed above HMS Marlborough—type 23 frigate is currently undergoing a docking period that will complete later this summer.

There are no Royal Navy surface warships currently undertaking preparations for a refit.

The exact dates on which refits will complete will depend on progress and emergent work. However, HMS Liverpool is expected to complete her refit shortly and the other refits will complete by mid 2003.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects the first cutting of metal for *(a)* HMS Daring, *(b)* HMS Dauntless and *(c)* HMS Diamond; and when these ships will be launched; [52896]

(2) when the design work for the Type 45 destroyers will be completed. [52897]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Design and fabrication details are matters for the Type 45 prime contractor, BAE Systems Electronics. However, under current plans, design work will essentially be complete in autumn 2003 and the expected first cutting of metal and launch dates for the first three ships are as follows:

Vessel	*Cut steel*	*Launch*
HMS Daring	Spring 2003	Spring 2005
HMS Dauntless	Autumn 2004	Spring 2007
HMS Diamond	Spring 2005	Summer 2007

Naval Manpower

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Royal Navy has sufficient manpower to crew all operational surface ships; and if he will make a statement. [52893]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 April 2002]*: The Royal Navy has sufficient manpower to support the deployment of surface ships as required to meet its current commitments, including the full manning of all operational ships in times of heightened tension.

F680 Application

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are considered when determining an F680 application. [51735]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence Form F680 Process allows industry to seek preliminary Government approval for the release of classified military information, or advice on the prospects for eventual approval of an export licence application, at the marketing stage. In the case of the latter, the Government consider applications against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. It is, however, routinely made clear that preliminary advice to companies under this procedure does not constitute an export licence nor guarantee that any future export licence application would result in the issue of a licence.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 335W, who decided to give preliminary clearance to supply an air traffic control system to Tanzania under the F680 procedure. [51746]

Dr. Moonie: This was a Government decision following consideration of the application by the relevant Government Departments.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a copy of the departmental communication with Siemens Plessey Electronic Systems confirming the preliminary clearance; and what conditions were applied to the preliminary clearance. [51747]

Dr. Moonie: Access to detailed information on F680 clearances is restricted for commercial reasons. I am therefore withholding this information under Exemption 13 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* other persons are consulted following an F680 application prior to a decision being reached; and if he will place a copy of the document setting out the rules of the F680 procedure in the Library. [51748]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 336W, to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry). Ministers are not routinely involved in the assessment of F680 applications. A copy of guidance to industry on the F680 procedure is being placed in the Library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by his Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48367]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on Friday 26 April.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Kuwait on proposed military action against Iraq. [53330]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him in the House on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 331.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is in respect of the assassination of heads of state; and what recent discussions he has had with the US Administration on this policy. [52607]

The Prime Minister: Our policy is to act in accordance with UK and international law. We have had no recent discussions with the US Administration on this issue.

Party Funding

Paul Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will introduce plans for state funding for the work of political parties other than campaigning. [51279]

The Prime Minister: The Government have introduced rules on openness and transparency for political funding. There are a wide variety of different views on state funding and I welcome the debate, but at the moment there is no consensus.

The Electoral Commission have already indicated their intention to consider the arguments for a cap on political donations and state funding, and the Select Committee for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have announced that they propose to look at this area.

WALES

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what his estimate is of the cost in a full year of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to his Department; [51976]

(2) what his estimate is of the cost in the next 12 months of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to his Department. [52070]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, at column 544W.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what buildings owned by his Department have solar panels installed. [53491]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

TREASURY

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what payments have been made to individuals following findings of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of his Department in the last 12 months; and what plans he has to review the powers to increase the level of awards that can be made. [48051]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* No payments were made in 2001–02. I have no plans to review the powers to increase levels of awards.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures Customs and Excise are taking to prevent illegal imports of meat; and if he will make a statement. [48176]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 11 April 2002]:* BSE related restrictions on the export of beef from the United Kingdom are enforced through portal surveillance measures operated by DEFRA and the devolved Administrations. Customs' role is limited to providing support were necessary to the lead agencies and providing them with any relevant information coming to Customs attention. Export of meat from some endangered species is subject to the European Regulation implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. Customs action on any such exports is on an intelligence-led basis.

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions in 2001 customs officers in Newhaven carried out joint operations with environmental health officers with a view to detecting illegal meat imports. [45876]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* DEFRA and local or port health authorities are responsible for organising joint operations to target illicit meat. Customs officers participate in such operations at the request of the organising authority. No requests for participation were received at Newhaven in 2001.

Overseas Development Assistance

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of GNP has been spent on official overseas development assistance, excluding the UK's contribution to the heavily indebted poor countries scheme in each of the last five years. [51921]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The oda/GNI ratios excluding HIPC for the last five years are:

Percentage

	excluding HIPC	*oda/GNI ratio including HIPC*
1997	0.26	0.26
1998	0.27	0.27
1999	0.23	0.24
2000	0.31	0.32
2001[1]	0.30	0.32

[1] Figures for 2001 are provisional

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many digital radios are owned by his Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52855]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Treasury's asset register does not include any digital radios.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the reasons are for his projection in Budget 2002, page 217, table C7, of a 50 per cent. increase in revenue from the climate change levy in 2002–03, compared with 2001–02. [52950]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The apparent growth in climate change levy receipts between 2001–02 and 2002–03 is largely due to start-up effects reducing the cash received in 2001–02.

Climate change levy was introduced on 1 April 2001 and became liable on energy transactions from that date. Start-up effects could have been present up to September and receipts for 2001–02 were £0.6 billion.

Financial year 2002–03 will be the first full year of CCL receipts which are forecast to be £0.9 billion.

Farmers

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of farmers in receipt of public subsidies are estimated to be millionaires. [51280]

Dawn Primarolo: There were about 356,000 farmers in the United Kingdom in 1999, the latest year for which figures are available. It is not known how many of the 180,000 millionaires in that year were farmers.

Westfield Shopping Centre Company

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the dates since 1 May 1997 when *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials have met representatives of Westfield. [52165]

Ruth Kelly: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis. I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 689W, stating that as with previous Administrations it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are

conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and "Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists".

Terrorist Suspects

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additions to the list of terrorist suspects have been made by G7 Finance Ministers at the Washington summit; and if he will make a statement. [53081]

Ruth Kelly: On 20 April 2002, G7 Finance Ministers announced an assets freeze list containing the names of nine individuals and one organisation suspected of being involved in terrorism. These names have since been added to the list of organisations and individuals subject to UN sanctions against the Taliban, Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda and their associates.

Milk

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on tax treatment of milk quota. [52954]

Dawn Primarolo: Milk quota is treated for tax like other similar assets.

NHS Spending (Scotland)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his Budget report, if he will place in the Library the calculations regarding the allocation of additional spending to Scotland as a consequence of the planned increases in NHS spending in England; and if he will make a statement on the operation of the Barnett formula in these calculations. [52690]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government made substantial increased allocations to Scotland in the Budget above existing plans as a result of the increased spending announced for the NHS in England. The annual additions to Scotland's budget in 2003–04 to 2007–08 are £224 million; £858 million; £1,576 million; £2,341 million and £3,201 million. The allocation of additional spending to Scotland as a result of the planned increases in NHS spending in England was determined by applying the Barnett formula, using the latest available ONS population figures. The funding arrangements for the devolved Administrations were set out in the Statement of Funding Policy published by the Treasury in July 2000.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total yield of inheritance tax was in 2001–02; and what he estimates it will be in 2002–03. [52616]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The figures are contained in Table C7 on page 217 of the 2002 Financial Statement and Budget report, a copy of which is in the Library.

International Monetary and Financial Committee

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent meeting of the International Monetary and Financial Committee of the IMF in Washington DC. [52623]

Ruth Kelly: The International Monetary and Financial Committee met in Washington DC on 20 April 2002. The Committee had a broad agenda, covering the global economy, the IMF's policy agenda and progress in combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism. Based on the Committee's discussions, management will determine the forward work programme and priorities for the International Monetary Fund over the next six months.

In their discussion of the global economy the Committee welcomed the international community's decisive policy actions, especially following the tragic events of 11 September 2001, to maintain financial stability, restore the momentum of world economic growth, and reinvigorate the fight against poverty. The Committee also urged the Argentine authorities to co-operate with the IMF to reach agreement on a sustainable economic programme.

Going forward the Committee will continue to work together for sustained, broad based growth, creating opportunities for productive employment, reducing vulnerabilities, opening up economies for trade, providing resources for durable poverty reduction, and sustaining global action to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

The Committee also made recommendations for strengthening the IMF's surveillance, including in financial sectors, and crisis prevention and for enhancing the existing framework for crisis resolution, including consideration of innovative proposals to improve the process of sovereign debt restructuring.

The Committee fully endorsed the Monterrey consensus and encouraged the IMF to work closely with the World bank, regional development banks, the United Nations and bilateral donors in monitoring progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The Committee welcomed the outcomes of the recent reviews of the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility and of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper process and were encouraged by progress in implementation of the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative. However, they noted that debt sustainability remains an issue for a number of HIPC countries and called on the IMF and the World bank to review the situation.

Copies of the IMFC's final communiqué are available in the Library of the House and on the IMF website at www.imf.org.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of companies that will benefit from his proposed exemption from corporation tax of the gains from the sale of substantial shareholdings. [52378]

Dawn Primarolo: About 5,000 companies are expected to benefit from the exemption.

VAT Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to public funds in each of the next three years of the provision in the Budget for firms with turnovers of up to £150,000 to make flat-rate VAT payments. [52374]

Mr. Boateng: The costs of this measure will be set out in the normal way in the Government's next Financial Statement and Budget report once full and final details of the proposed change have been announced.

Duties

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when it is intended to introduce duty incentives for sulphur-free fuels; what duty incentive he plans; and on what bases EU agreement is required before any duty incentive can be implemented. [52397]

Mr. Boateng: As we announced in the Budget, the Government will introduce incentives for sulphur-free fuels in 2003. The precise incentives will be for the Chancellor to decide, taking into account economic, social and environmental factors.

Giving a duty incentive for sulphur-free fuels is likely to require a derogation from the EC mineral oils structures directive.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when a new rate of duty for biodiesel at 20 pence below the ultra-low sulphur diesel rate will be available; what the total cost to the Treasury will be at *(a)* the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years; what recent assessment has been conducted by his Department of future use of biodiesel; and what assumptions he has made about the (i) current and (ii) projected future availability of biodiesel in the UK. [52399]

Mr. Boateng: Budget 2002 confirmed that the new rate for biodiesel will take effect from Royal Assent of the Finance Bill. The revenue cost of the new rate was published in Table A2.1 of the Financial Statement and Budget report. As a result of the measure, biodiesel is assumed to take up a steadily increasing share of the diesel market, representing around two-thirds of 1 per cent. of the market by volume by 2006–07.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost to the Treasury will be at *(a)* the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of the (i) freeze in duty on (A) liquefied petroleum gas, (B) compressed natural gas and (ii) enhanced capital allowances for investments in CNG fuelling infrastructure, as announced in the Budget. [52396]

Mr. Boateng: (i) The revenue cost of the freeze in duty on gas for road fuel is negligible.

(ii) The cost for investments in CNG refuelling infrastructure is also negligible.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the total cost to the Treasury will be at *(a)* the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of the reduction in VED for motorcycles announced in Budget 2002; [52393]

(2) what the total cost to the Treasury will be at *(a)* the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of the (i) application of lower rates of air passenger duty to all EU applicant countries and Switzerland and (ii) the freeze in the duty from 1 November 2002; and if he will make a statement. [52381]

Mr. Boateng: The costs of the reforms to motorcycle vehicle excise duty, application of lower rates of air passenger duty (APD) to European Union applicant countries and Switzerland from 1 November 2002, and the freeze in APD are set out in table A.1 (page 155) of the FSBR.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost to the Treasury will be at *(a)* the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of the freeze in vehicle excise duty rates for lorries announced in Budget 2002; and if he will make a statement. [52388]

Mr. Boateng: The cost of freezing vehicle excise duty for lorries in Budget 2002 is forecast to be approximately £5 million a year for each of the three financial years 2002–03 to 2004–05.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department plans to take to reform the fuel duty rebate for buses; and if he will make a statement. [52380]

Mr. Boateng: To ensure the most effective use of funds in improving bus services and delivering the Government's transport, environment and social objectives, the Chancellor announced in the Budget that a review of the support mechanisms for buses will be carried out as part of the forthcoming spending review and the current review of the 10-year plan. In particular, the review will consider fuel duty rebate for buses to assess whether it provides effective support for buses in a way that is consistent with Government objectives.

Bad Debt Relief

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue effect in each of the next three years of his proposed rule for bad debt relief to give businesses an automatic entitlement to recover the VAT after six months. [52371]

Mr. Boateng: The main impact of the changes to VAT bad debt relief announced in the Budget is to reduce compliance costs for affected businesses. The impact on VAT revenues is negligible.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the gross cost to the Treasury in a full year of the increased employers' national insurance contributions envisaged in his Budget statement; [51936]

(2) what his estimate is of the gross cost in a full year of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* agencies thereof and *(c)* organisations sponsored by his Department. [51937]

Mr. Andrew Smith: It is estimated that the changes to employers' national insurance contributions announced in the Budget will increase pay costs on average by 0.7 per cent. next year.

Performance Targets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the aggregate proportion of PSA targets across all Departments which were *(a)* met, *(b)* on

target to be met, *(c)* not met and *(d)* not on target to be met for financial years (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [50618]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Departments publish progress against their PSA targets in their spring annual reports and, from this year, in autumn performance reports. The Treasury will provide an overall analysis of the Government's performance in future reports, as it did in its 2000 departmental report.

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* terming working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42415]

Ruth Kelly: Further to my answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1110–11W, there are 16 job sharers in HM Treasury (1.4 per cent. of total staff), one term worker (0.1 per cent. of total staff) and 55 other staff engaged in other forms of flexible working (4.8 per cent. of total staff) (all figures rounded to nearest 0.1 per cent.).

Community Development Venture Capital Fund

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer over what period the community development venture capital fund will provide the £40 million referred to in his Budget speech. [52369]

Mr. Boateng: The Government expect the Community Development Venture Fund to be launched and begin operating shortly. The first investments are likely to be made in 2002–03, and the fund is likely to be invested within three to six years, allowing a reserve for follow-on investments as portfolio companies grow. The investment profile and timing will depend on the opportunities that the fund identifies, the time taken to bring companies to the point of investment readiness, and on market conditions.

Economic Growth

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Treasury's latest forecast is of UK economic growth for the forthcoming year. [53077]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury's latest economic forecast is set out in Chapter B of the Financial Statement and Budget Report, which was published on 17 April. UK GDP is forecast to increase by between 2 and 2.5 per cent. in 2002.

Stamp Duty

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of stamp duty on commercial property on *(a)* property unit trusts and *(b)* the attractiveness of collective investment schemes investing in property for institutional pension fund investors. [52977]

Ruth Kelly: UK stamp duty rates on property compare favourably with other EU countries. We regularly review the impact of stamp duty on all aspects of the commercial property market.

Sulphur-free Fuel

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment has been undertaken by his Department of the *(a)* current and *(b)* projected future availability of sulphur-free fuel in (i) the UK and (ii) Europe; and if he will make a statement. [52398]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Under a Common Position reached at the December 2001 EU Environment Council, member states set an EU-wide maximum limit for sulphur of 10ppm (termed "sulphur-free" fuel) from 1 January 2009, this date being subject to review by the Commission with respect to diesel fuel. The Common Position would also require member states to ensure the widespread availability of these fuels from 1 January 2005 in order that it is available for the latest technology vehicles that can take best advantage of it. The European Parliament will now consider the Common Position at its Second Reading.

Almost all petrol and diesel sold in the UK is already ultra low (50ppm) sulphur. Sulphur-free petrol and diesel has now been introduced at 18 retail sites in and around Edinburgh. Current availability of sulphur free fuels in most EU member states is minimal. However, sulphur-free diesel is quite widely available in Sweden and all super unleaded petrol is sulphur-free in Germany.

In the period up to 1 January 2009, the availability of sulphur-free fuels will be influenced by the rate of investment in new refinery technology needed to produce the fuels and also the level of fiscal incentives offered by individual member states to encourage its supply. In this respect, the Chancellor, in his recent Budget statement, announced plans to introduce duty incentives favouring sulphur-free fuels in 2003, subject to European agreement. Germany has also announced similar plans. The Benelux countries are also expected to follow this UK and German lead with the result that fairly widespread availability may be expected in these countries from 2003 onwards. Under the terms of the directive, widespread availability is to be expected in all EU member states from 2005.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Tanzania

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what information she has collated with regard to the formal procedures followed by the Government of Tanzania in respect of consideration of tenders for supply of an air traffic control system; and whether such procedures met recognised international standards; [51737]

(2) what information she has collated with regard to the bidding process in respect of potential suppliers of an air traffic control system to Tanzania; and if she will make a statement. [51736]

Clare Short: DFID has not collated specific information regarding formal procedures adopted by the Government of Tanzania on the tender process in this case. However, I can confirm that DFID has been actively involved in helping the Government of Tanzania draft and

introduce a new Public Procurement Act, which came into effect on 1 July 2001. This ensures that GoT's tendering procedures meet recognised international standards.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many net additional staff her Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52423]

Clare Short: Details of the net additional staff recruited by DFID at executive officer level and administrative levels, for each month since June 2001, are as follows:

Month	Number of net additional staff recruited at executive officer level[1]			Number of net additional staff recruited at administrative level[2]			Total of net additional staff recruited at executive officer and administrative level
	Entrants	Leavers	Net position	Entrants	Leavers	Net position	
2001							
June	1	3	(2)	4	6	(2)	(4)
July	2	2	0	2	2	0	0
August	1	0	1	6	5	1	2
September	1	3	(2)	10	0	10	8
October	5	2	3	14	1	13	16
November	5	0	5	10	3	7	12
December	2	1	1	2	1	1	2
2002							
January	4	2	2	5	2	3	5
February	1	0	1	1	0	1	2
March	2	3	(1)	5	1	4	3
Total	24	16	8	59	21	38	46

[1] Grade B2
[2] Grades C1 and C2

South America

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid went to each South American country in the last 12 months; and whether it was ring-fenced for particular projects. [52146]

Clare Short: The bilateral development programmes for Latin American (central and south) countries last year were:

£ million

Country	2001–02[1]
Bolivia	13.780
Brazil	7.646
Central America[2]	5.560
Colombia	1.434
Costa Rica	0.200
Cuba	0.600
Ecuador	0.434
Mexico	0.460
Panama	0.190
Paraguay	0.160
Peru	9.184

[1] Includes provisional figures for 2001–02 and provisional figures for DFID debt relief (comprising both interest and principal foregone under retrospective terms adjustment, repayment which would have fallen due in year).
[2] A regional programme including Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador.

In addition to these figures the European Commission spent £153 million in Latin America (which includes Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela in addition to the countries listed) of which UK share is approximately over £29 million which is drawn from my Department's budget.

All our programmes are carried out in accordance with our country strategies, which are jointly agreed with our counterparts in country. Our role is to add value to the combined effort to the international community to create the right conditions necessary for poverty reduction.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of aid from the UK was spent on *(a)* education, *(b)* health and *(c)* environmental projects overseas in the last 12 months. [52147]

Clare Short: The information required on the proportion of the UK's bilateral aid programmed allocable by sector in 2000–01, the latest period for which figures are available, is:

	Percentage
Education	15
Health	17
Renewable natural resources	12

Environment is such a cross cutting issue that it is mainstreamed into many of our projects and programmes and as such we do not have a separate environment market for our projects. Therefore for the purposes of answering this question we have taken renewable natural resources as a proxy.

These figures represent expenditure on projects specific to sectors but do not capture the full extent of our efforts in each policy area because they exclude multi-sector projects, block funding to civil society organisations and budget support or balance of payments. Also excluded are activities in sectors funded through multilateral channels.

Forestry (Nigeria)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Cross River State Community Forestry Project in Nigeria. [49200]

Clare Short: The Department has been involved with Cross River communities, in the use and management of forest resources on a sustainable basis, at varying times over the last seven years. Implementation on the latest programme commenced in July 1999 and is due to complete in January 2003.

This project was last formally assessed during an Output-to-Purpose Review (OPR) in September 2001 in conjunction with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The review team observed significant achievements over the two-year period compared to the slow progress under military rule prior to 1999. Most notably, the conclusions from the OPR related to economy, efficiency and effectiveness highlighted the following:

33 forest management committees (FMCs) have been established. Strong partnerships have developed between all stakeholders in a number of these and communities are organising themselves according to a common constitution to protect their rights and forest.

Communities have shown more commitment to the sustainable management of their forest resources and to curbing illegal exploitation. This has been largely due to public awareness of the value and importance of sustainable forest management undertaken by the project.

Communities are receiving a greater share of forest royalties more promptly while changes in forest laws promoted by the project, which will strengthen communities' rights over forests, are about to be submitted.

Capacity of community based forest organisations and of the forestry commission staff have improved with training provided under the project.

An important component of the project worked on the institutional strengthening and capacity building of the Forest Commission (FC) to enable it to facilitate implementation of the forest sector strategy and action plan. The capacity of the state to play its role in joint management of forest resources is crucial to sustaining the productive capacity and biological resources and to ecological significance of the tropical high forest. Notable achievements here are:

Technical assistance initiated by the project in 1999 has been significant in introducing genuine joint management of strategic forest resources.

A new institutional change programme sponsored by the project is significantly assisting the process of institution reform and financial efficiency and accountability within the FC.

A forest sector strategy and an action plan have been drafted under the project while a community forestry support unit has been established within the forest commission.

Illegal logging and transport of timber have been reduced.

A number of short-term (international and local) consultancies have provided valuable input into the project implementation eg the Non Timber Forest Products consultancy while the Legal Framework consultancy provided groundwork for the proposed changes in the laws.

Overall, the review team concluded that the project purpose was likely to be partially achieved, which is significant given the original risk assessment rated this project as medium to high risk, later amended to high risk. This achievement rating could be changed during the next review. CIDA have agreed to continue working with the forestry commission and the communities when DFID's input completes next year. DFID's withdrawal is solely linked to our stated strategy to focus on a limited number of reforming states (four). These states are in the south-west, south-east, north and middle belt. Cross River state is in the south geo-political zone.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what are the latest estimates she has received of changes in total carbon dioxide emissions in the UK in *(a)* 2010 and *(b)* 2015; and if she will make a statement. [50432]

Mr. Meacher: The latest carbon dioxide projections are published in the UK's Third National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Projections, taking account of the policies and measures as quantified in the UK's Climate Change Programme, show estimated emissions in 2010 at about 19 per cent. below the 1990 level. Additional measures that cannot yet be quantified could increase this to a 20 per cent. reduction. Although the uncertainties are greater, current projections indicate about the same level of reduction in 2015 without further policies and measures.

Refrigerators

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the household waste and recycling fund announced by her Department on 26 March will be used to finance the cost of *(a)* collection, *(b)* storage and *(c)* recycling of waste-refrigeration units in accordance with EC Regulation No 2037/2000; and if she will make a statement. [51534]

Mr. Meacher: The £140 million Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund is a ring-fenced grant that is designed to help local authorities in England to improve in particular, their recycling and composting performance, and waste management generally.

No proportion of the Fund has been specifically allocated for the purposes of financing the cost of *(a)* collection, *(b)* storage and *(c)* recycling of waste refrigeration units.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance on the storage and disposal of waste-refrigeration units has been provided to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* consumers since 4 December 2001; and if she will make a statement. [51505]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency has now issued the final version of its guidance on the recovery and disposal (including storage) of refrigerators and freezers. In addition, a list of treatment companies has been placed on the DEFRA website to facilitate contact between local authorities and the waste management industry.

A leaflet for householders advising on how to dispose of old fridges, originally available only on the DEFRA website, has now been published in hard copy as well, and widely distributed. Guidance on the disposal of commercial refrigeration equipment has been placed on the website and we hope to issue a paper version shortly.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to utilise biomass fuelled CHP technology on the Government Estate; and when these plans will be implemented. [51964]

Mr. Meacher: All Government Departments have a target to ensure that by 31 March 2003, at least 5 per cent. of their electricity comes from renewable sources, or from self-generation, provided this does not entail excessive cost. They also have a longer-term target for at least 10 per cent. of their supply by 31 March 2008, which is subject to review after March 2003.

Biomass is just one of the renewable technologies that can help Departments meet this target. I am not aware of any current plans to utilise biomass production technology on any significant scale on the Government Estate, and it is for each Department to determine the extent to which self-generation is a practicable and cost-effective option.

However, DEFRA, PIU and the National Lottery are funding research and development into energy crops and biomass as fuel for CHP schemes, and I will encourage Government Departments to examine the scope which such technology may in future offer.

Global Warming

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the emissions figures are for each of the Kyoto protocol greenhouse gases in each year since 1997; and what different weighting is given to each gas owing to its global warming potential. [51962]

Mr. Meacher: UK emissions data for the six greenhouse gases covered by the Kyoto protocol to the year 2000 were reported to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change earlier this month.

The following table summarises the data for the years since 1997, expressed in million tonnes of carbon equivalent. The global warming potential used to arrive at these emission estimates are summarised in the final column of the table. The values are those for a 100-year time horizon published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1995. These are the weighting factors agreed for use under the Kyoto protocol during the first commitment period.

UK greenhouse gas emissions expressed as million tonnes of carbon

ses	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*Global warming potential (100 year horizon)*
CO_2	152.5	153.2	150.8	152.1	1
CH_4	16.3	15.6	14.8	13.9	21
N_2O	16.6	15.8	12.2	12.0	310
HFCs	5.0	5.5	2.4	2.5	[1]—
PFCs	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	[2]—
SF_6	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	23,900
Total[3]	190.9	190.7	180.8	181.1	—

[1] Values for specific HFCs range from 140–11700

[2] PFCs include mainly perfluoromethane (6500), perfluoroethane (9200), and perfluoropropane (7000).

[3] Totals may not correspond exactly to entries in columns due to rounding.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1340W, on greenhouse gas emissions, when the data for 2000–01 will be published. [51978]

Mr. Meacher: The process for the collection of data for the years 2000–01 and 2001–02 is under way and we plan to continue previous practice by including this data in the Greening Government Annual Report published in November of each year. Commencing this year we intend to report data on the energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions of buildings on the Government Estate about 6 months after the end of the financial year, rather than current practice of reporting 18 months in arrears.

Dr. Robert Watson

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's response to US Government action to replace Dr. Robert Watson as the Chair of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change. [52154]

Mr. Meacher: The UK supported Dr. Watson continuing in his post as Chair of the IPCC, but who the US supports is a matter for them.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total amount expended was on overnight accommodation for emergency staff working on the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001; and what proportion of this sum was spent in *(a)* guest-houses, *(b)* bed and breakfast accommodation and *(c)* small hotels. [51264]

Mr. Morley: Total payments for overnight subsistence for staff working on the Foot and Mouth crisis were as follows:

	£
2000–01	971,470
2001–02	19,808,069

DEFRA does not hold records by the categories requested (Guest Houses, Bed and Breakfast, or small Hotels).

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the compensation levels paid for *(a)* cattle and *(b)* sheep slaughtered in the foot and mouth disease outbreak were; and what percentage they represent of the current values paid for restocking. [51282]

Mr. Morley: The compensation levels paid to farmers for cattle and sheep slaughtered in the foot and mouth disease outbreak is as follows:

	£
	Average cost per animal
Cattle	1,163.33
Sheep	153.19

The percentage in relation to the current value of restocking is not available because we do not have the restocking prices.

Sustainable Development

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to promote the results of United Nations summit conferences relating to sustainable development. [44352]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

We have publicised the results of the Financing for Development (FFD) conference on DFID's internet website. We intend to do the same for other major UN conferences. Hilary Benn the Under-Secretary has spoken to a meeting of NGOs about the results of FFD. We are submitting a memorandum on FFD to the International Development Select Committee. We will continue to press in a variety of international fora for progress towards implementing the commitments made at FFD, including on aid volume, aid effectiveness and strengthening the voice of developing countries in the international financial architecture. We intend to hold a meeting with interested NGOs and MPs after the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children to discuss its results.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Rent Service

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what performance targets he has set the Rent Service for 2002–03. [53679]

Ms Keeble: Key targets have been agreed for the agency. They are included in the agency's business plan, which includes management objectives, performance indicators and key tasks. Copies of the business plan will be placed in the Libraries of the House in due course.

The Key Targets for the Rent Service are:

To process 87 per cent. of housing benefit determination without an inspection within three working days

To process 87 per cent. of housing benefit determinations with an inspection within 15 working days

To process 87 per cent. of pre-tenancy determinations within four working days

To process 87 per cent. of redeterminations within 15 working days

To process 87 per cent. of fair rent determinations within 40 working days

To increase the number of cases determined per employees by a minimum of 3 per cent. while reducing the costs per cause by a minimum of 3 per cent. in real terms, and with improvements in the quality of service provided

To improve the agency's customer satisfaction rating from 80 per cent. to 85 per cent. in 2002–03.

Travellers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many times local authorities and police forces have had to move travellers on from *(a)* public and *(b)* private land in 2001. [53255]

Ms Keeble: This information is not collected centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what extra funding has been made available to local authorities in *(a)* London and *(b)* west Sussex in their standard spending assessment budgets this year to provide for the cleaning up of public land left in an unsatisfactory state by travellers. [53254]

Dr. Whitehead: The cleaning up of public land is within the district services section of the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services block of the local government finance settlement. Sums for individual services within this section are not identified separately.

Westfield Shopping Centre Company

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations his Department and its predecessor has received from the Westfield shopping centre company since 1997. [50080]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the Planning Minister was informed of the financial arrangement in place between Lord Levy and Westfield when he agreed to meet the latter. [49884]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 776W.

Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the dates since 1 May 1997 when *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials have met representatives of Westfield. [52163]

Ms Keeble: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Planning

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he is taking to protect the Green Belt from further housing development. [53336]

Ms Keeble: Planning Policy Guidance Note 2—"Green Belts"—requires that local authorities' development plans should include a strict presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt. This includes most types of housebuilding.

Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 798W, on housing, if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance his Department issued to local authorities on the Cash Incentive Scheme in February 2000. [53017]

Ms Keeble: A copy of the guidance issued by the Department for the Environment Transport and the Regions to local authorities on the Cash Incentive Scheme in February 2000 will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what new affordable housing development schemes in each London borough are being funded by the Housing Corporation's approved development programme in 2002–03. [53019]

Ms Keeble: The Housing Corporation's allocation statement for London for 2002–03 provides information on the allocations of public money made to housing associations for the provision of new affordable housing under the approved development programme (ADP) and safer communities supported housing fund in London. This document is published on the Housing Corporation's website at www.housingcorp.gov.uk. Figure 4.5 in the London allocation statement 2002–03 lists the schemes allocated funding in each London borough. I have placed copies of this table in the Libraries of the House.

Torbay Unitary Authority

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost will be of the inspections to be conducted in the Torbay unitary authority area into *(a)* corporate governance and *(b)* first tier authorities; how many officials will be involved in undertaking each inspection; and what the cost will be of producing a report after each inspection. [52484]

Dr. Whitehead: Torbay was one of a number of authorities selected for corporate governance inspection. Corporate governance inspections have been a powerful diagnostic tool to examine the corporate capabilities and management systems of local councils. Torbay was selected in response to concerns raised by the Audit Commission and other inspectorates about the council's management capabilities for key services. The inspection is not yet complete and the report is unlikely to be published before this summer.

The inspection of Torbay was large, involving a range of representatives from different inspectorates working with the Audit Commission to examine the full range of service issues. The estimated cost of the inspection is approximately £70,000 based on a team of eleven people. Torbay council's net budget is approximately £123 million. It is hoped this inspection will result in significant improvements to the quality and efficiency of local service delivery with clear benefits for local people and the authority.

Local Government Finance

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ensure that local authorities covering the Malvern Hills receive support grants on the same basis as that received by the unitary authority of Herefordshire. [52975]

Dr. Whitehead: We are working with local government to develop options for fairer and more intelligible grant distribution formulae. In distributing grant, the new system will take into account the differing circumstances faced by local authorities, and their differing responsibilities. We cannot say now whether any particular authority or group of authorities will gain or lose from the new system. We will be consulting on options over the summer and will consider the views put to us when we come to take decisions.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that the new grant formula that will replace the SSA will *(a)* be improved and *(b)* address the needs of all classes of authority. [52469]

Dr. Whitehead: We are working with local government to develop options for fairer and more intelligible grant distribution formulae. But if there are to be winners there must also be relative losers, since the formulae will distribute the fixed pot of resources made available by the spending review. We cannot say now whether any particular class of authority will gain or lose from the new system, but we will consult on options over the summer and will consider the responses when we come to take decisions.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he will take to ensure that the new finance system for local authorities provides an effective framework within which councils can initiate new and innovative ways of delivering customer-focused services and lead their communities. [52468]

Dr. Whitehead: Our comprehensive agenda for reform of the local government finance system was set out in last December's White Paper "Strong Local leadership—Quality Public Services". Our finance reforms will give councils more space to innovate and respond in ways that are appropriate to local circumstances by providing local authorities with greater freedom to borrow, invest, trade, charge and set spending priorities. Our White Paper implementation plan is available on the DTLR website at http://www.dtlr.gov.uk/local-regions/sll/implement/plan/index.htm.

Business Rate Relief

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to propose amendments to the regulations governing transitional relief for business rates; and if he will make a statement. [52293]

Dr. Whitehead: My officials have prepared amendments to the regulations in discussion with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation and others. The amendments would allow transitional relief, backdated to 1 April 2000, to certain properties which currently do not qualify because of errors in the old 1995 rating lists. They would also, among other things, extend the period in which ratepayers can appeal against the values in certificates used to calculate rate bills.

The draft regulations were sent to local authorities and others with an interest in rating with an explanatory letter on 14 March. The draft is being finalised in the light of comments received.

Before coming into force amending regulations would first need to be approved by both Houses of Parliament.

Local Public Service Agreements

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason district councils are not directly involved in local public service agreements; and what plans he has to extend them to district councils in the future. [52470]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government is keen to involve districts in local PSAs, but believes that better outcomes can be achieved through co-operation between county and district councils than by districts acting alone. It therefore offers incentives to encourage county councils to work with their districts in drawing up and implementing their Local PSAs. Most of the county councils involved in the roll out of Local PSAs to top tier authorities have involved their districts. There are no plans to extend local PSAs to districts alone.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many digital radios are owned by his Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52860]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* DTLR neither own nor have purchased any digital radios for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52834]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Weekly newspapers and tabloid-format periodicals that have the appearance of newspapers have been classed as "periodicals" and included in this answer. The information on annual cost is given only for the aggregate of central magazine and periodical procurement in the Department since reasons of commercial confidentiality preclude the release of such information by publication. The information relates solely to central procurement in the central Department and does not include purchases made by the Department's agencies and NDPBs, nor purchases made from local budgets for which no data are collected centrally.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52833]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The information is contained in the table. Weekly newspapers and tabloid-format periodicals that have the appearance of newspapers have been classed as "periodicals" and accounted for in the answer above (52834). The information on annual cost is given only for the aggregate of central newspaper procurement in the Department since reasons of commercial confidentiality preclude the release of such information by publication. The information relates solely to central procurement in the central Department and does not include purchases made by the Department's agencies and NDPBs, nor purchases made from local budgets for which no data are collected centrally.

Newspapers titles

£

Monday to Saturday titles	*Numbers of copies*
Daily Mail (Monday to Friday)	13
Daily Mail (Saturday)	1
Daily Mirror (Monday to Friday)	13
Daily Mirror on Saturday	1
Daily Star (Monday to Friday)	4
Daily Star (Saturday)	1
Daily Telegraph (Monday to Friday)	18
Daily Telegraph (Saturday)	4
Die Welt (Monday to Saturday)	1
Evening Standard (City Prices Edition)	18
Evening Standard (Late Prices Edition)	17
Evening Standard (News Extra Edition)	21
Evening Standard (West End Final Edition)	29
Financial Times (Monday to Friday)	47
Financial Times (Thursday)	1
Financial Times (Weekend)	8
Glasgow Herald (Monday to Friday)	1
Guardian (Monday to Friday)	19
Guardian (Saturday)	4
Independent (Monday to Friday)	20
Independent (Saturday)	4
Irish Times (Monday to Friday)	1
Le Figaro (Monday to Friday)	1
Le Monde (Monday to Friday)	1
Le Monde (Monday to Saturday)	5
Le Point	1
Lloyds List	11
Scotsman (Monday to Friday)	1
Sun (Monday to Friday)	12
Sun (Saturday)	1
The Express (Monday to Friday)	11
The Express on Saturday	1
Times (Monday to Friday)	29
Times (Saturday)	4
Total cost	38,250
Sunday titles	
Express on Sunday	1
Independent on Sunday	5
Mail on Sunday	1
News of The World	1
Observer	5
Sunday Mirror	1
Sunday People	1
Sunday Telegraph	5
Sunday Times	5
The Business	5
Total cost	1,300

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 983W, on target times for correspondence, in what proportion of cases in 2001–02 letters from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public were answered within 15 working days. [50339]

Dr. Whitehead: Information is published annually by the Cabinet Office on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by Ministers and Agency Chief Executives; Departments' and Agencies' handling targets; and their performance in meeting these targets.

Performance in handling correspondence from members of the public is collated internally each quarter. For the period 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001 the Department's records show that it answered 99 per cent. of letters from the public within 15 working days. Figures for the final quarter of 2001–02 have not yet been collated.

Port Marine Safety Code

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his reply of 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 56W, on the port marine safety code, whether the Department was the originator of this correspondence; and for what reason his Department has chosen not to make the correspondence public. [53084]

Mr. Jamieson: The correspondence between Humber Pilots Ltd. and the Department was initiated by the company. As already explained, letters between the Department and its correspondents are treated in confidence unless the originator chooses to make them public.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the statutory harbour authorities in the UK broken down by *(a)* companies, *(b)* local authorities, *(c)* trusts and *(d)* other which had not completed implementation of the Port Marine Safety Code by 31 December 2001; what steps are being taken in each case to ensure compliance; and if he will make a statement. [52924]

Mr. Jamieson: The following competent harbour authorities have not yet notified my Department that they have implemented the Port Marine Safety Code:

(a) Company ports

Brighton Marina Estate Management Company Ltd.

Eastbourne (Sovereign Harbour)

Falmouth Docks & Engineering Company Ltd.

Irvine Harbour Company

Manchester Ship Canal Company

Newhaven (Seine Maritime Regional Authority)

Porthleven Harbour & Docks Company

Port of Mostyn Ltd.

Seaham Harbour Dock Company

(b) Local authority ports

Argyll and Bute council

Rothesay

Carmarthenshire county council

Llanelli

Exeter city council

Isle of Wight council

Newport

North Devon district council

Ilfracombe

Orkney Islands council

Sedgemoor district council
Bridgwater
Waveney district council
Southwold
West Dorset district council
Bridport
Worthing borough council

(c) Trust ports

Blyth Harbour Commission
Coleraine Harbour Commission
Crouch Harbour Authority
Dart Harbour & Navigation Authority
Littlehampton Harbour Board
Looe Harbour Commission
Maldon Harbour Improvement Commission
Maryport Harbour Commission
Mousehole Harbour Commission
Sandwich Port & Haven Commission

(d) Other

Duchy of Cornwall
Isles of Scilly
Environment Agency Wales
River Dee
Norfolk Broads Authority.

My officials are corresponding with, and visiting, those authorities that have significant responsibilities for marine safety if they have not reported compliance with the Code.

Civil Aviation Authority

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what responsibilities Ministers have for the safety regulation duties of the CAA; and if he will make a statement. [52408]

Mr. Jamieson: The Civil Aviation Act 1982 and the Transport Act 2000 lay on the Secretary of State and the CAA complementary duties in relation to the regulation of aviation safety.

The Secretary of State has responsibility for encouraging measures for promoting safety in the use of civil aircraft and ensuring that international obligations are fulfilled; he is also answerable to Parliament generally for the performance of the CAA. The CAA has responsibility for advising the Secretary of State on all civil aviation safety matters and for regulating air safety through various licensing, certification and approval regimes.

In practice, the Secretary of State refrains from interfering in the CAA's day to day responsibilities. This is expressed in the letter which is customarily sent to Chairmen of the CAA shortly after their appointments specifying the broad policy framework in which the Authority is to operate. The letter also states that the Chairman's primary objective is to ensure that the CAA continues to promote, in an efficient and cost effective way, high standards of safety in all aspects of civil aviation. A copy of this letter, dated 16 October 2001, is in the Libraries of the House.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Government are taking to ensure that their 49 per cent. shareholding in NATS is being administered properly. [52409]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of the structure of the public private partnership they have appointed three non-executive directors to the Board of NATS. These directors are responsible for safeguarding the Government's interests in the company. NATS is also required by the strategic partnership agreement to provide regular management information.

Pilotage

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether pilotage services operated by Humber Pilots Limited are covered by contract; and if he will make a statement. [53072]

Mr. Jamieson: Humber Pilots Ltd. no longer provide pilotage services: they gave notice on their contract with the competent harbour authority which expired in January 2002.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which the Humber Pilots Limited contract with Associated British Ports was terminated and the former pilots' authorisations revoked; and if he will make a statement. [53070]

Mr. Jamieson: The contract between Associated British Ports and Humber Pilots Ltd. is a matter for the parties and it was not appropriate for Ministers to become involved in the dispute which arose between them over it. The Pilotage Act 1987 provides for there to be a contract between authorised pilots and their competent harbour authority, and for authorisations to be revoked if there ceases to be one.

I understand that, when Humber Pilots Ltd. gave notice on their contract, expiring in January 2002, the authority responded by formally advising each authorised pilot that his authorisation would then be revoked by virtue of termination of the contract between the authority and Humber Pilots Ltd.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many Humber pilots work for Humber Pilots Limited; how many worked on 12 December 2001; and, in each case, how many were formally authorised by the competent harbour authority and what their qualifications were; and if he will make a statement. [53086]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that no pilots worked for Humber Pilots Ltd: it was established as a co-operative under the Friendly Society Act 1965 with its members treated as self-employed. I also understand that, on 12 December 2001, 136 members of Humber Pilots Ltd. were authorised as pilots by the competent harbour authority. The Department does not have detailed information on their qualifications. The paper on the new Humber pilotage service mentioned in the answer given to the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on Tuesday

16 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 803–04W states (in paragraph 4.5.) that about 20 of the 136 did not have a Class 1 Certificate of Competency.

Flight Paths (London)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes have taken place in the last 12 months in flight paths into *(a)* Gatwick and *(b)* Stansted which have affected the number of flights above Walthamstow. [52958]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The Walthamstow area is mainly affected by overflight of aircraft inbound to London Heathrow and outbound from London City. It may sometimes also be overflown by aircraft inbound to London Stansted, when that airport is operating in a north easterly direction.

Aerodromes

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what steps his Department is taking to ensure the continuance of unofficial safeguarding arrangements for *(a)* gliding sites and *(b)* other licensed and unlicensed aerodromes provided for in paragraph 9 of the annexe to Circular 2/92; and if he will make a statement; [52870]

(2) what progress his Department has made on the revision of Circular 2/92; and if he will make a statement. [52869]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department carried out a public consultation last year on a proposal to revise Department of the Environment Circular 2/92 on the official safeguarding of aerodromes, technical sites and military explosives storage areas. Following the end of the public consultation period and discussions with the main stakeholders, my Department last month issued for further comment by those stakeholders a second draft of a revised Circular. In doing so the Department has reinstated the recommendation contained in the 1992 Circular, to operators of smaller aerodromes and of sites for other aviation activities, such as gliding or parachuting, to lodge an 'unofficial' safeguarding map with local planning authorities, together with the offer by the Civil Aviation Authority of advice on a format for such maps.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made on a safeguarding publication to be issued by the Civil Aviation Authority concerning the operators of unlicensed aerodromes and gliding sites; and if he will make a statement. [52871]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand from the Civil Aviation Authority that it has undertaken to publish guidance on aerodrome safeguarding for all aerodrome operators. A complete draft of the guidance is at present being considered by an industry working group, and the intention is that the final version will be available to complement the proposed new Departmental Circular to local authorities on safeguarding consultation requirements. Notwithstanding the proposed changes to those requirements, and the proposed publication of guidance, the Civil Aviation Authority will maintain its own safeguarding expertise and will continue to provide advice to aerodrome operators as the need arises.

Roads

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what major infrastructure work has been carried out on the *(a)* A12, *(b)* A14, *(c)* A140 and *(d)* B1113 in the last 15 years, in each case giving (i) the aim and nature of the works, (ii) details of the Government body responsible, (iii) the length of time the works took and (iv) the costs of the works; [50643]

(2) what works are planned on the *(a)* A12, *(b)* A14, *(c)* A140 and *(d)* B1113; [50644]

(3) on how many days in 2001 the level of traffic on the *(a)* A12, *(b)* A14, *(c)* A140 and *(d)* B1113 was two or more times the daily average on these roads; [50646]

(4) how many *(a)* cars, motorbikes and vans, *(b)* lorries and *(c)* camper-vans and caravans use the (i) A12, (ii) A14, (iii) A140 and (iv) B1113 each day; and what the estimate is for the increase in traffic on each road over the lifetime of the Ten-Year Plan; [50645]

(5) what recent representations he has received from *(a)* the Highways Agency, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* others, with regards to the (i) A12, (ii) A14, (iii) A140 and (iv) B1113. [50648]

Mr. Byers: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 29 April 2002:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the A12, the A14, the A140 and the B1113.

During 2001, the level of traffic on the trunk road section of the A12 and the A14, at sites where traffic flows are measured, was never two or more times the daily average at those sites.

The A140 ceased to be a trunk road on 1 June 2001, when responsibility passed from the Secretary of State to the Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils. At sites where traffic flow was measured by the Highways Agency before June 2001, the traffic flow was never two or more times the daily average at the same sites during 2000.

The B1113 is not a trunk road and we do hold any traffic data for it. This road is the responsibility of Suffolk County Council.

Details of past and future improvements to those roads that are, or were, our responsibility are set out in the Annex to this letter.

The DETR publication 'National Road Traffic Forecasts (Great Britain) 1997' (NRTF) sets out the latest forecasts for growth in the volume of motor traffic (excluding motorcycles) on roads in Great Britain until the year 2031. The forecasts are based on current policies, the best available evidence of behaviour and the capacity of the current road network. The publication is available on the DTLR website www.roads.dtlr.gov.uk. The forecasts are broken down by type of road, area and vehicle. Where detailed estimates of traffic growth for a particular location are required, the Department recommends the construction of a local traffic or transport model, incorporating the Department's national trip end model forecasts. For all-purpose trunk roads, NRTF predicts growth patterns between 2001 and 2010 within the range 11.5 per cent to 18 per cent. The Highways Agency does not hold traffic data in the form requested.

We have received a number of representations recently about the A12 and the A14. Particular issues included our proposals to install lighting on the A12 Brentwood Bypass in Essex and to improve the A14 between Thrapston and Brampton and at Rookery Crossroads; about traffic queuing problems on the A14 westbound at Junction 4 of the A14 (A14/A6 North) in Northamptonshire; about the

adequacy of the slip roads at the Swavesey and Boxworth junctions in Cambridgeshire following the opening of new service area facilities and about general issues relating to both roads.

Radioactive Materials (Transportation)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on recent changes to regulations regarding the transportation by road of radioactive material. [52688]

Mr. Jamieson: I will shortly lay new regulations to align the requirements for domestic road transport of radioactive material in Great Britain with those applying in Europe and by other modes internationally.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average time in days for processing and dispatching replacement vehicle registration documents by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency was in the last 12 months. [53199]

Mr. Jamieson: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency monitor their annual performance against turnround performance targets sanctioned by the Secretary of State.

For the year 2001–02 in respect of registration documents issued in response to customers notifying changes to their own or the vehicles details, the agency processed and despatched 95 per cent. of all transactions within 11.4 days.

Vehicle Ownership

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many cars are registered to households in *(a)* Dumfries and Galloway region, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK. [52905]

Mr. Jamieson: The numbers of currently licensed cars registered to keepers with addresses in the Dumfries and Galloway unitary authority, Scotland and the United Kingdom are shown in the table. The figures for Great Britain are as at 30 September 2001; the figure for Northern Ireland (649,400) included in the United Kingdom total is as at 31 December 2001. The totals include cars registered to companies and other entities as well as to individuals.

Thousands

Area	*Number of cars*
Dumfries and Galloway unitary authority	62.0
Scotland	1,922.0
United Kingdom	25,629.4

Vehicle Accidents

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people in *(a)* mid-Essex and *(b)* the county of Essex have (i) died and (ii) been injured as a result of vehicle accidents since 1 January 2001. [52606]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not yet available.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy that persons who abandon vehicles receive penalty points on their driving licence. [52591]

Mr. Jamieson: Abandoning a vehicle is a criminal offence carrying a maximum penalty of a £2,500 fine, six months' imprisonment, or both. We have no plans to change those penalties.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many heavy goods vehicles were fitted with particulate traps in 2001; and if he will make a statement. [52587]

Mr. Jamieson: The precise number of heavy goods vehicles fitted with particulate traps in 2001 is not known as vehicle owners are not obliged to notify the Secretary of State of this modification.

However, nearly all owners of heavy goods vehicles fitted with particulate traps will request a Reduced Pollution Certificate (RPC) which, once obtained, can reduce vehicle excise duty by up to £500 per year.

In 2001 the Vehicle Inspectorate, an executive agency in my Department, issued 2,132 RPCs to owners of heavy goods vehicles that were fitted with particulate traps.

Bus Subsidies

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what improvements to services and changes in passenger numbers have resulted from bus subsidies paid in each of the past four years. [51283]

Ms Keeble: Public financial support for bus services has helped to maintain service levels and passenger numbers by reducing operators' costs and subsidising services which are not commercially viable, including some 1,800 new or enhanced rural services supported by Rural Bus Subsidy Grant introduced in 1998. Funding has also provided for concessionary fares for pensioners and a number of other groups and helped operators to achieve high levels of investment in new vehicles.

Passenger numbers on local bus services have remained relatively stable over the past four years after a long period of decline and rose by 1 per cent. in England in 2000–01. This includes some 17 million passenger journeys made on services supported by Rural Bus Subsidy Grant.

The overall position on service levels and passenger numbers in England over the past four years for which figures are available is as follows:

Million

	Operated kilometres	*Passenger numbers*
1997–98	2,142	3,773
1998–99	2,166	3,719
1999–2000	2,129	3,732
2000–01	2,147	3,761

We are setting up a review of bus subsidy mechanisms to ensure that they contribute as effectively as possible to the achievement of our objectives.

Bus subsidies in Wales are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Channel Tunnel

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is taking to assist companies that are affected by delays and cancellations in the channel tunnel. [52544]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government recognise that the disruption caused by would-be illegal immigrants is causing severe hardship to many businesses in this country who depend on reliable freight services through the channel tunnel. The Government continue to press the French Government at the highest levels to provide adequate policing resources at Fréthun to support the anti-intrusion measures already being installed by SNCF.

Mersey Rail Contract

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress he has made in transferring the awarding of the Mersey rail contract from the SRA lease to Mersey travel. [51940]

Mr. Jamieson: A draft statutory instrument to exempt the Mersey Rail Electric network from the franchising process conducted by the Strategic Rail Authority has been issued for consultation. It is intended to lay this before Parliament in June.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his latest projected completion date is for upgrading the west coast mainline *(a)* north and *(b)* south of the Scotland/England border. [52581]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is leading a review with Railtrack and other stakeholders of the outputs to be delivered from the project. An announcement on the outcome of the review will be made in due course.

Crossrail

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the completion dates are for the *(a)* consultation period and *(b)* announcement of the preferred route for the east London aspect of the Crossrail project. [53256]

Mr. Jamieson: Between May and July, Cross London Rail Links Ltd. will be consulting stakeholders on all the shortlisted Crossrail route options, east and west. They hope to make an announcement on the preferred route in October. This will be followed by a public consultation period lasting about three months.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which groups of people will be involved in the consultation period for the east London aspect of the Crossrail project; and if the findings of the consultation period will be published. [53257]

Mr. Jamieson: Cross London Rail Links will seek to consult as widely as possible. There will be a period of consultation with key stakeholders on the shortlisted route options, and a period of full public consultation after the preferred route has been identified. The findings of the consultation will be included in the environmental statement when powers are sought for the project.

SouthEast Network Railcard

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what steps are being taken by his Department and the Strategic Rail Authority to ensure that the Association of Train Operating Companies provide the Rail Passengers Council with information regarding how the decision regarding plans for the SouthEast Network Railcard was arrived at; [50908]

(2) what correspondence has been received by his Department or the Strategic Rail Authority from the Rail Passengers Council regarding the Association of Train Operating Companies' proposals for the SouthEast Network Railcard; and if he will place copies of the correspondence in the Library. [50903]

Mr. Jamieson: The Rail Passengers Council (RPC) wrote to the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) on 26 March about the changes to the SouthEast Network Card. They requested that the SRA use its powers under licence conditions to ensure that the financial information on which these decisions were based is provided to the RPC. The SRA has obtained this information from ATOC and sent this forward to the RPC on 24 April.

Rail Safety

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the last safety audit of road and rail intersections in the UK was conducted; and what action has been taken to address highlighted concerns. [52457]

Mr. Jamieson: Where safety audits are carried out they are the responsibility of the individual highway authority and are mainly applied to new works. Safety audits, as such, are not carried out on the railway, but a railway infrastructure authority is under a duty to ensure that it operates in a safe manner. Information about safety audits is not held centrally.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received on track safety issues between Kilmarnock and Dumfries. [52580]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Rail Incident (Wales)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to receive a report from the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate regarding its investigation

into the circumstances of the incident on the railway line between Abergavenny and Cwmbran on 17 January; and what preliminary findings he has received. [52282]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate have investigated the incident at Abergavenny on 18 January but will not be producing a report because the primary cause of the incident was a road traffic accident on the A40 dual carriageway. Further investigations into this incident are being led by both the Gwent police and the British Transport police.

Rail Freight

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what his policy is on the protection which will be given to rail freight operators against increases in track access charges by the Rail Regulator in future franchise agreements; [53508]

(2) when the rail freight franchises will be renewed. [53506]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no franchises for rail freight.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Early Retirement

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers have taken early retirement through ill health in each of the past five years. [52540]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of ill health retirements from the maintained schools sector in England in each of the last five financial years for which we have data were as follows:

	Number
1996–97	4,980
1997–98	3,300
1998–99	2,320
1999–2000	2,350
2000–01[1]	2,610

[1] 2000–01 data are provisional.

Note:

Changes in the statutory regulations governing ill health retirement came into force on 1 April 1997. To qualify for ill-health retirement benefits a teacher must now be regarded as permanently unfit to teach.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many members of staff at her Department are justices of the peace; and if she has a strategy for her Department to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace. [44549]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department does not hold this information centrally and could provide it only at disproportionate cost.

Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1996 requires employers to allow their staff reasonable time off for public duties. The Civil Service Management Code (paragraph 9.2.5) also requires departments to allow time off for attendance required by section 50 of the ERA 1996. My Department demonstrates its support to employees who are justices of the peace by allowing them special leave with pay to perform the duties associated with their office.

Licensed Child Minders

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many licensed child minders there were in each of the last seven years. [48221]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Numbers of registered child minders[1]—England—position at 31 March each year

	Registered child minders
1995	97,100
1996	102,600
1997	98,500
1998	94,700
1999	82,200
2000	75,600
2001	72,300

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Notes:

1. This information was provided by local authorities.
2. While the change in the number of registered child minders is of concern it has coincided with increases in alternative forms of child care over the past few years, which have offered a greater diversity in services for parents and children.
3. The Government value registered child minding and are concerned about the decline in child minder numbers. The Government's strategy to help to reverse this trend includes:

a four year national recruitment campaign to raise the status of working in the sector;

child minder start up grants;

grants to help child minders in disadvantaged areas when they have a vacancy; and

the creation of networks to support child minders.

Physical Education

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which secondary schools in England have no indoor facilities for physical education. [48750]

John Healey: Data drawn from local Asset Management Plans and sent to the Department in 2000–01 by local education authorities show that the overwhelming majority of secondary schools have indoor facilities for physical education. Appraisal of this information and data has focused on LEAs' overall assessment processes, rather than the details for each school. It is not therefore possible to list those schools which do not have such facilities. Information about individual schools can be obtained from the appropriate local education authority.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [49610]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information about the numbers employed by DfES non-departmental public bodies on new deal programmes, is not collected or held centrally by this Department.

Sixth Forms and Colleges

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is in respect of similar salaries for comparable work by teachers in further education colleges and schools with sixth forms. [52572]

Margaret Hodge: Pay and conditions for teachers in maintained schools, including those with sixth forms, is determined on a statutory basis under the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1991. The pay and terms and conditions of the lecturers who work in sixth form colleges and general further education colleges are matter for the employers to determine, in discussion with the relevant unions. A wide range of pay and conditions now exist in the FE sector, reflecting the diverse learning needs of the colleges' local communities and colleges' individual decisions on implementing the nationally recommended pay settlement each year.

Low Participation Postcodes

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will instruct the Higher Education Funding Council for England to publish its list of low participation postcodes; and if she will make a statement. [52267]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* I understand that the Chief Executive of the Funding Council has written to the hon. Member to enable him to have access to this information.

Agencies (Liaison)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the agencies that fall under her Department's remit that have a duty to liaise with secondary heads on educational matters. [52512]

Estelle Morris: There is no statutory duty placed on the Department's agencies to liaise with secondary heads on educational matters. However, agencies do consult directly and indirectly with secondary heads if it is deemed appropriate to ensure the effective delivery of both the Department's and their own remits.

National Insurance Contributions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how much money in total she estimates schools and colleges will pay in additional employers' national insurance contributions in 2003–04; [52515]

(2) whether LEAs will receive additional budget provisions for 2003–04 to cover the cost of increased employers' national insurance contributions; [52516]

(3) how much additional cost on average she expects secondary schools to incur in 2003–04 as a result of the increase in employers' national insurance contributions; [52518]

(4) what she estimates to be the total increased national insurance bill for an average primary school in England in 2003–04; [52519]

(5) how much additional funding colleges of further education will require in 2003–04 to offset the additional cost of employers' national insurance contributions. [52525]

Mr. Timms: The additional cost in employers' national insurance contributions in 2003–04 for all English colleges (including sixth form colleges) providing further education is estimated to be about £25 million. This cost will be considered alongside other priorities and pressures in the 2002 spending review. The costs to schools will be in the region of £4k for the average primary school and £20k for the average secondary school. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the question from the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 311W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what she estimates will be the total cost of employers' national insurance contributions met *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly from her Department's budget in this financial year. [52529]

Estelle Morris: The total amount of employers' national insurance contributions paid directly by the Department for Education and Skills in respect of central administration for the year 2002–03 is estimated to be £7 million.

Employers' national insurance contributions are paid indirectly by the Department for Education and Skills plus the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions through the funding of education and training providers. Data regarding the total amount of national insurance contributions paid are not held centrally. Using available data, we estimate the cost will be £3,000 million for 2002–03.

Teachers' Pensions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent estimate she has made of the funding level related to current and future liabilities of the teachers' pension scheme. [52522]

Mr. Timms: The Teachers' Pension Scheme is an unfunded scheme, with a "notional" account maintained and valued periodically by the Government Actuary. The last valuation, as at 31 March 1996, revealed that total liabilities of the scheme (pensions currently in payment and the estimated cost of future benefits) amounted to £65,670 million and total assets amounted to £61,710 million. The 1996 report is available in the House of Commons Library.

I expect to have the Government Actuary's report on the 2001 review by the end of the year.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the cost to the teachers' pension scheme of tax changes since 1997. [52538]

Mr. Timms: As the Teachers' Pension Scheme is an unfunded scheme there are no associated tax liabilities.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who the fund managers are of the teachers' pension scheme. [52539]

Mr. Timms: The Teachers' Pension Scheme is an unfunded scheme. There are, therefore, no fund managers.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements are made for the payment of a pension to a teacher who takes early retirement through ill health; and how it is funded. [52541]

Mr. Timms: Where a teacher is considered to be permanently unfit to teach as a result of illness or injury, they become entitled to receive payment of ill health retirement benefits, consisting of a pension and lump sum. Arrangements for the payment of benefits are made by the administrators of the Teachers' Pension Scheme. The cost of ill health retirement benefits, alongside the cost of all other benefits payable under the provisions of the scheme, is taken into account by the Government Actuary as part of the periodic scheme valuation. The results of the valuation determine the employer contribution rate needed to defray the costs of the scheme. Teachers pay a contribution of 6 per cent. of salary towards the cost of their pension scheme benefits; the current employer contribution rate is 8.35 per cent. of salary.

Selection

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools select more than 5 per cent. of their intake in England and Wales. [52530]

Mr. Timms: The 164 schools in England, designated by order as grammar schools, are wholly selective. My Department does not collect information on partial selection. However, a recent analysis of progress reports from specialist schools, undertaken by my Department, found that less than 6 per cent. of these schools select some pupils by aptitude.

In Wales, there are no maintained grammar schools, and only one partially selective school. The school selects more than 5 per cent. of pupils.

Specialist Schools

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of schools that will become specialist schools in each of the next three years. [52531]

Mr. Timms: By September 2002 we expect there to be at least 150 more specialist schools joining the 834 already designated. This puts us well on course to exceed our target of 1,000 by 2003 and to reach our goal of at least 1,500 specialist schools by 2005.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of current applications to establish specialist schools contain a request to select more than 5 per cent. of their intake by aptitude. [52532]

Mr. Timms: None of the specialist school applications currently being assessed by my Department include a request to select a proportion of their intake by aptitude. School admission arrangements are a matter for local determination; they do not require approval by my Department.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many maintained specialist schools there are in England. [52533]

Mr. Timms: There are currently 685 maintained specialist schools in England. A further 149 have been designated for September 2002.

Funding

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what conditions she will attach to the additional funding announced for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in the Budget. [52537]

Mr. Timms: In his Budget statement, the Chancellor announced an additional £85 million of capital funding for schools and colleges in England in 2003–04. The share of this funding going to schools will be provided as an addition to New Deal for Schools devolved formula capital for schools. The increase will add around 20 per cent. to the previously announced allocations of this programme for both primary and secondary schools in 2002–03.

Guidance on the use of New Deal for Schools devolved formula capital was issued in April 2001, and revised guidance will be issued in the near future. There is no difference between the way in which primary schools and secondary schools may use this funding.

The Chancellor also referred in his Budget statement to previously announced increases in the School Standards Grant. This direct grant can be used for any standards directed expenditure in schools.

Further Education

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her Department's policy is on ensuring that public funds made available to further education colleges are reflected in pay offers made to teachers. [52564]

Margaret Hodge: We are investing significant funding in the FE sector. In 2001–02, £527 million extra was planned for FE—a 12 per cent. real terms increase, with a further 3 per cent. increase this year. By 2003–04, annual funding for FE will have increased by £1.4 billion since 1996–97, a real terms increase of 20 per cent.

It is for each college to agree annual pay rises and conditions of employment with its staff in the context of the overall resources available to them. In 2001–02, at least 93 per cent. of colleges were able to pay the recommended 3.7 per cent. pay award in full, or in part. The substantial additional investment we are making in the sector should enable colleges to ensure that staff receive an appropriate salary increase this year.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact on forward planning by further education colleges of current funding structures and practices. [52566]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) funding arrangements aim to provide an appropriate balance between the need to move resources flexibly to meet changing student demand, and the advantages for colleges of being able to plan for the medium term.

On funding for participation, resources need to follow the learner. Colleges which attract additional students should be supported with additional funding as resources allow. Colleges which do not meet their projected student numbers must expect to adjust their plans accordingly. The LSC has arrangements in place to support colleges in financial difficulties while they make the required changes.

On funding for improving standards and institutional development, the LSC is developing funding arrangements which support the medium term planning required for such changes. The LSC, when allocating Standards Funds to colleges for 2002–03 will indicate likely funding for the following two years, subject to availability of funds and progress towards agreed improvement targets.

The Government have also given commitments to colleges about future increases in Teaching Pay Initiative allocations and an assurance that future funding arrangements will recognise the on-going commitments these represent to colleges where they consolidate these payments into lecturers' salaries.

The Government expect the LSC, in deciding future funding arrangements, to keep under review the balance between flexible resourcing and stability in college funding.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what role she plans for *(a)* further education colleges and *(b)* school sixth-forms in encouraging students to enter higher education. [52573]

Margaret Hodge: Further education colleges and school sixth forms both have a crucial role to play in encouraging young people to enter higher education. The Excellence Challenge brings schools and colleges together in partnership with higher education institutions to raise attainment and aspirations. Schools and FE colleges in Excellence Challenge areas will also benefit from the AimHigher roadshow, which was launched earlier this year to promote higher education to young people. FE colleges also have a valued role as providers of higher education.

We are working with both the Learning and Skills Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for England to strengthen ways in which progression to higher education can be supported and encouraged.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average funding per pupil in 16 to 19 education in *(a)* school sixth forms, *(b)* sixth form colleges and *(c)* further education colleges was in 2000–01 in (i) England, (ii) Hampshire, (iii) Dorset, (iv) Surrey and (v) West Sussex. [52549]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The figures for school and college funding have not been calculated on the same basis and cannot therefore be used to make comparisons. The FE unit funding figure includes total public funding allocated for further education, while the schools' figure does not. It is based only on delegated funds and excludes other funding the school receives centrally from LEAs which impacts on post-16 students.

The latest estimate of the average delegated funding per sixth form student in schools per year in England for 2001–02 is £3,330. The total funding per full-time equivalent student in FE sector colleges per year in England for 2001–02 is estimated to be £3,660.

Separate figures for sixth form colleges are not available. Separate figures for county funding levels are not available.

Graduates

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of each 10-year age cohort over the age of 25 years are graduates. [52916]

Margaret Hodge: The following table shows the percentage of people within each 10-year age group who hold a first degree or higher qualification, estimated from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The estimates relate only to people of working age, as the LFS does not collect data on the qualifications of people above this age unless they are in employment.

Estimated percentage of the working age population in each age band who hold a first degree or higher qualification

Age group	*Percentage*
25–34	21
35–44	17
45–54	16
55–64*	11
All aged 25–64[1]	17

[1] Excludes women aged 60–64

Source:
Labour Force Survey, spring 2001, GB figures

Education Funding (Cheltenham)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what effect the Budget of 17 April will have on the provision of education in Cheltenham. [52940]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in the Budget an additional £85 million investment in 2002–03 in school and college buildings in England. This means that every maintained school in England, including those in Cheltenham, will receive in 2002–03 an additional allocation of about 20 per cent. of New Deal for Schools devolved formula capital for schools. Colleges and other educational establishments will also receive their proportionate share. Details of changes to future funding for education will be announced when the Spending Review has been completed in the summer.

Golden Hellos (Teacher Shortages)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what factors underlay the decision to restrict golden hello payments to shortage-subject specialists trained for secondary teaching. [53008]

Mr. Timms: Golden hellos are available in the five subject-areas where teacher recruitment is most challenging. National statistics published by my Department on 24 April showed that, in January 2002, 70 per cent. of all vacancies for full-time secondary teachers in England were in these subjects.

Ministerial Powers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what powers she holds in relation to Scotland and Northern Ireland. [52536]

Estelle Morris: My powers are broadly for England, with some also extending to Wales. The education and training functions previously exercised by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland have transferred to the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Northern Ireland. My officials work closely with officials in the devolved Administrations on matters of mutual interest across the UK. My Department also represents the UK at international level on education, skills and youth issues, briefed, where appropriate, by the devolved Administrations. Under the Industrial Training Acts, I have levy powers across England, Scotland and Wales to fund the Industrial Training Boards.

Qualifications

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of children left school in 2001 without any qualifications. [52274]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* In 2001 the proportion of pupils reaching the end of compulsory schooling without any qualifications fell for the sixth year in a row to 5.5 per cent.

Ofsted Inspections

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to ensure Ofsted inspections and individual inspectors do not influence individual school reports by applying their religious beliefs to evidence of school performance. [53128]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for HM Chief Inspector of Schools. I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was of the Ofsted inspection conducted in the Torbay unitary authority Area in 2001; how many officials were involved in undertaking the inspection; and what the cost was of producing a report after the inspection. [52486]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for HM Chief Inspector of Schools and I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

School Funding

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much direct grant was given to *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) St Helens, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the north-west, (iv) the south-east and (v) England in (A) 1997, (B) 1998, (C) 1999, (D) 2000 and (E) 2001. [50937]

Mr. Timms: School Standards Grant (SSG) was not payable in 1997, 1998 and 1999. For the years 2000–01 and 2001–02 the total amount of SSG paid to all schools (primary, secondary, special, pupil referral unit and nursery), taking into account adjustments made as a result of reconciliations. is as shown on the table. A breakdown of the amounts of funding into primary and secondary schools cannot be supplied except at disproportionate cost.

£

	2000–01	*2001–02*
St. Helens	1,064,000	2,345,500
Merseyside	8,971,000	19,128,000
the north-west	43,743,750	94,001,000
the south-east	43,964,000	94,417,500
England	292,711,500	631,103,500

Education Expenditure

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent by *(a)* St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council, *(b)* the average council in the north-west, *(c)* the average council in the south-east and *(d)* the average council in England on education in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001. [50938]

Mr. Timms: The table sets out the information requested. The Department is due to collect data relating to the 2001–02 financial year from this September.

Cash £000

Region	*1997–98 Outturn*	*1998–99 Outturn*	*1999–2000 Outturn*	*2000–01 Outturn*[1]
St. Helens	78,961	84,024	85,584	91,093
North west councils	131,270	138,453	146,787	157,071
South east councils	142,329	150,559	171,121	183,090

[1] Provisional

Real £000

Region	*1997–98 Outturn*	*1998–99 Outturn*	*1999–2000 Outturn*	*2000–01 Outturn*[1]
St. Helens	84,628	87,604	87,158	91,093
North west councils	140,691	144,352	149,486	157,071
South east councils	152,544	156,974	174,268	183,090
England councils	135,033	138,618	150,106	158,057

[1] Provisional

Notes:

1. Source of figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are drawn from the DTLR's ROI returns.
2. Source of figures for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are drawn from the DfES's Section 52 Outturn statements.
3. 2000–01 figures are provisional and are subject to change.
4. Real terms figures are calculated using GDP deflators published by the Treasury 17 April 2002.
5. Figures reflect Net Current Expenditure which covers all education expenditure by local authorities.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough on 19 March. [53025]

Mr. Timms: I apologise to the hon. Member for the time taken in providing an answer to his question of 19 March, but it is taking some time in compiling the information which he seeks.

I anticipate being able to provide a reply by the end of the week.

Teachers' Salaries

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to award teachers in the FE and college sector pay awards equal to those teaching in secondary schools. [53122]

Margaret Hodge: It is for each college to agree annual pay rises and conditions of employment with its staff in the context of the overall resources available to them. We are, however, aware of the funding gap between schools and FE and have pledged to bring up levels of funding and allow upwards convergence over time as resources allow.

We are investing significant funding in the FE sector. In 2001- 02, £527 million extra was planned for FE—a 12 per cent. real terms increase, with a further 3 per cent. increase this year. By 2003–04, annual funding for FE will have increased by £1.4 billion compared with 1997–98, a real terms increase of 20 per cent. The substantial additional investment we are making in the sector should help colleges and the trade unions reach agreement on appropriate salary increase this year.

We are also investing more than £311 million in the teaching pay initiative during the period 2001–04 to allow colleges, including sixth form colleges, to reward high quality teaching. This is separate to any general pay rise a teacher may receive.

Teaching Assistants

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what duties and responsibilities she has determined are appropriate for teaching assistants in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary sectors. [53124]

Mr. Timms: A working party involving representatives of teachers and support staff, the local government employers and other Government bodies, is currently considering the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants in primary, secondary and special schools. Following its initial discussions, we expect to issue a consultation paper asking for comments on these and a range of other issues relating to teaching assistants and support staff. The Education Bill currently before Parliament provides for there to be regulations specifying the duties which may be carried out by teaching assistants and others who are not qualified as school teachers.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to provide a career structure for teaching assistants. [53125]

Mr. Timms: The question of a career structure and associated training and development for teaching assistants is being considered by a working party which includes representatives of teachers and support staff, the local government employers and other Government bodies. This group's discussions are being used to inform the production of a consultation paper which will address a range of issues relating to teaching assistants and other support staff. National vocational qualifications, based on the new national occupational standards for teaching assistants, are expected to be in place later this year and will form part of the proposed career structure.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to provide schools and local education authorities with model role descriptions for teaching assistants. [53126]

Mr. Timms: Possible roles for teaching assistants in schools are being considered by a working party which includes representatives of teachers and support staff, the local government employers and other Government bodies. We expect to issue a consultation paper later this term, which will ask for comments on enhanced roles and responsibilities and will address the need for the provision of guidance to schools and local education authorities.

Emmanuel College, Gateshead

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to ask Ofsted to carry out a full inspection of Emmanuel College Gateshead. [53127]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend has no plans to ask HM Chief Inspector to inspect Emmanuel City Technology College.

Medical Degrees

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many medical degree places were offered by higher education institutions in each year since 1997. [53259]

Margaret Hodge: The available information is given in the table.

Planned intake of pre-clinical medical students to HE institutions in the UK

Year of entry	*Planned intake*
1997	5,020
1998	5,062
1999	5,165
2000	5,595
2001	5,928

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Equal Opportunities

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the women's organisations which have been consulted over proposed legislation by her Department during *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2000–02 sessions; and if their responses have been published. [44387]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO consulted widely on the draft International Criminal Court Bill in 2000. Among others, the consultation document was sent to the Coalition for an ICC (which includes the Women's Caucus for Gender Issues and Sisterhood International) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. There were no other cases in the years in question when women's organisations were consulted.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many special advisers were employed by him *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was in each of those years. [41250]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information is as follows:

(a) Two, at a cost of £51,647 in salary and pension contributions.

(b) Two.

1998: £79,090

1999: £93,259

2000: £132,733

Special adviser pay for 2001–02 is under review. Figures for 2001 will not be available until the work of the review has been completed.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are part-time employees. [47190]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 49W.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [49599]

Mr. Bradshaw: None of our non-departmental public bodies has employed anyone under the New Deal for Young People over the last four years.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and if the target was met. [49634]

Mr. MacShane: HM Treasury requires executive non-departmental public bodies to include this information in their annual reports. The annual reports for the British Association for Central and Eastern Europe, the Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission, the British Council, the Great Britain-Russia Centre and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy are available in the House Library. The annual report for the Great Britain-China Centre will be placed in the Library shortly.

Intervention

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on intervention in matters within the sovereign responsibility of foreign states. [50695]

Mr. MacShane: The Government believe that sovereignty entails responsibility. The international community has a shared responsibility to intervene when confronted with massive violations of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity. Any such action should be carried out in accordance with international law.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the services of his Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50317]

Mr. MacShane: My noble Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster informed Departments on 6 February that he had decided to discontinue the Better Quality Services (BQS) scheme.

Three BQS reviews, of consular services, security and training are still in progress. All are expected to be completed by this summer. In addition the following BQS reviews remained in the programme agreed between the FCO and the Cabinet Office:

Review	*Scheduled*
Personnel Management and Assessment Units	2002
Resource Management Group, FCO Services	2002
Personnel Services (excluding Superannuation) Personnel Command	2002
Personnel Policy, Personnel Command	2002
Prosper (Retirement Service)	2002
Crystal Print Services, FCO Services	2002
Conference & Visits Group, FCO Services	2002–03
Library & Information Services, FCO Services	2002
Logistical Services/Airfreight Contract	2003
Protocol (including Honours & Royal Matters)	2003
Information Services (Overseas & Home)	2003–04
Procurement (Purchasing, Global Procurement—including the Logistics contract, Workshops) FCO Services, Purchasing Directorate and small purchasing units	2003
Medical & Welfare, Personnel Command	2004
Information Technology (IT Strategy Unit/Information Systems Services/ IT Projects/IT Support/ Comcen/IT Training/ Engineering Services)	2004–05

The FCO is currently considering how best to conduct internal reviews of effectiveness in future, to provide assurance that high standards of performance, particularly in areas of customer focus and service delivery are achieved and maintained. Reviews of personnel and public diplomacy are already in hand.

Madagascar

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Madagascar with regard to the prospects of avoiding conflict in that country. [52321]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* We welcome the signature of the Dakar Accord on 18 April 2002 by President Didier Ratsiraka and presidential candidate Marc Ravalomanana. Both parties have agreed to form a transitional government of national unity, to work together through dialogue to find a sustainable solution and to bring to an end to the violence and the various blockades which have brought Madagascar to a virtual standstill. Both parties need to live up to this undertaking. We will continue, with our EU and international partners, to monitor developments.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52839]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* A list giving the requested information will be deposited in the Library of the House. The annual cost of newspapers supplied to the FCO is estimated at £78,147. This does not include the cost of newspapers supplied to overseas posts, which could be calculated only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52840]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* A complete list of magazines and periodicals supplied to the FCO as a whole could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. The total annual cost under the FCO's main contracts is estimated at £392,509.

No-fly Zones

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the no fly-zones in preventing Saddam Hussein from repressing the Iraqi people. [50972]

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the continuing need for the no-fly zones over Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [50939]

Mr. Bradshaw: The no-fly zones were established in support of UNSCR 688. This called on Iraq to end its brutal repression of Kurds and other minority groups in the north and of the Shia community in the south. The no-fly zones were set up in response to a grave humanitarian crisis and they prevent Saddam Hussein from once again using his air power against the civilian population in those areas.

Terrorism

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to ensure greater consistency in the Government's treatment of terrorism in regard to *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Afghanistan, *(c)* Iraq and *(d)* Israel; and if he will make a statement. [49824]

Mr. Bradshaw: Government policy towards terrorism is entirely consistent. We condemn all acts of terrorism wherever they occur.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the US Administration regarding military action against terrorism in the Middle East. [50967]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regularly discuss all aspects of the campaign against terrorism with the US administration. The Prime Minister spoke to President Bush about this when they met earlier this month.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Savidge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will publish the Green Paper on strengthening the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention and countering the threat from biological weapons. [53246]

Mr. Straw: I am today publishing the Green Paper. Copies will be placed in the Library and it can also be accessed on the FCO website at www.fco.gov.uk.

The Green Paper sets out the work that has been undertaken over many years to develop measures to make the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention more effective. The Foreign Affairs Committee, and Parliament in general, have supported these efforts, for which the Government are grateful.

The paper expresses our disappointment at the failure of the States Parties to agree on the text of a Protocol to the Convention last year, despite all our efforts. It also explains why, despite this disappointment, it is still essential that efforts continue to find ways in which the convention can be strengthened and to counter the threat from biological weapons.

The Green Paper identifies possible measures that States Parties might now consider to strengthen the convention. It discusses UK priorities and the next steps ahead of the reconvened BTWC Fifth Review Conference, in Geneva, on 11 November. It also invites comments on these proposals and seeks views from hon. Members, NGOs and other organisations and individuals with an interest in this subject.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Staff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out for each civil service grade within her *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39176]

Ms Hewitt: I am placing the details requested for staff within DTI headquarters and the Department's executive agencies (Radiocommunications Agency, Insolvency Service, National Weights and Measures Laboratory, Employment Tribunal Service, Small Business Service, Patent Office and British Trade International) in the Libraries of the House.

I have asked the chief executive of Companies House which do not use our database to write with similar information.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Paul Burstow:

In response to your PQ2001/3055 on numbers employed by age range, the following are the figures for Companies House.

(i) Total employed: 1,186

(ii)

A. Age 16–25: 192

B. Age 26–35: 265

C. Age 36–45: 411

D. Age 46–60: 284

E. Over 60: 34

(iii) Registered disabled: 48

(iv) Ethnic minorities: 46

Sizewell B Inquiry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost of the Sizewell B Inquiry was. [48028]

Mr. Wilson: The costs of the public inquiry completed in 1985 and attributed to the then Department of Energy, or recoverable from the Central Electricity Generating Board, totalled some £2.5 million. However the full costs of the inquiry would be several times that amount and would include the costs of CEGB applying for consent for the power station and the costs of other parties that participated in the inquiry. As the information is not held centrally within my Department, and the length of time since the inquiry, an estimate of the full costs cannot now be obtained without disproportionate costs.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible in each of the last five years. [50303]

Ms Hewitt: Following is the information requested:

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service	16,170	17,156	18,627	21,442	24,819
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	82,800	85,600	82,100	84,600	86,700
Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils	45,700	47,900	48,400	49,900	53,100
Economic and Social Research Council	2,100	2,300	2,200	2,200	2,500
Engineering and Physical Science Research Council	7,100	7,100	7,000	7,300	7,900
Medical Research Council	76,000	78,000	82,000	87,000	92,000
Natural Environment Research Council	76,300	79,300	78,300	77,600	80,200
Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council	12,300	10,900	8,300	8,600	9,500
Advantage West Midland	—	—	4,058	5,493	6,714
East of England Development Agency[1]	—	—	2,284	3,289	4,028
East Midlands Development Agency[1]	—	—	3,771	4,284	4,814
North West Development Agency[1]	—	—	6,317	7,742	8,538
One North East[1]	—	—	6,273	7,135	7,344
South East England Development Agency[1]	—	—	3,438	4,680	5,649
South West of England Development Agency[1]	—	—	4,737	5,637	6,337
Yorkshire Forward[1]	—	—	5,645	6,278	7,708
Coal Authority	2,544	2,535	2,693	2,811	3,098
Competition Commission	3,837	3,767	4,302	5,032	5,355
Consumer Council for Postal Services (Postwatch)[2]	—	—	—	—	1,744
Design Council	1,333	1,324	1,601	1,856	1,978
Gas and Electricity Consumer Council (Energywatch)[3]	—	—	—	—	5,800
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority	62,800	66,100	73,000	76,300	84,600

[1] The Regional Development Agencies were established in 1999
[2] The Consumer Council for Postal Services was established on 1 January 2001
[3] The Gas and Electricity Consumer Council was established on 1 November 2000

Notes:
1. The figures include ERNIC and superannuation costs
2. The 2001–02 figures are provisional

The information in respect of the National Consumer Council and SITPRO Ltd. can be found in their respective annual reports. Copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Voluntary Sector

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) of

25 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1183–85W, on Government funding of the voluntary sector, if she will list the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which her Department distributes funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51410]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Information on my Department's funding sources and initiatives can be found in table C1 and in the text of my Department's 2001 expenditure plans report (Cm 5112), a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

Many of my Department's programmes are not sector specific and providing further information on take-up of these programmes by the voluntary sector would entail disproportionate cost. However, my Department directly funded the following voluntary organisations in 2000–01:

Organisation	*Funding*
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (£ million)	16.9
Citizens Advice, Scotland (£ million)	2.225
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (£)	180,000
Child Accident Prevention Trust (£)	25,000
Business Volunteer Mentoring Association (£ million)	1
Other (£)	25,015

Alternative Fuels

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what degree energy production from *(a)* renewable sources, *(b)* wind and *(c)* CHP have changed since the introduction of NETA. [51961]

Mr. Wilson: The most recent data on the electricity output from renewable, wind and CHP sources were published on 31 August 2001 by Ofgem in its "Report to the DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators", covering the first two months of NETA operation. It found that, for those two months, compared with the corresponding two-month period a year earlier, output had decreased as follows:

(a) for renewables (excluding hydro and wind), by 7 per cent;

(b) for hydro, by 14 per cent;

(c) for wind, by 13 per cent; and

(d) for CHP, by 61 per cent.

A significant rise in gas prices that occurred in the same months may have contributed to the very large fall in CHP output recorded in the survey period.

Ofgem has committed in its corporate plan to carry out a review of NETA covering the first year of operation, to be published in the second quarter of 2002. Ofgem has indicated it intends to include as part of its one year review a chapter on the impact of NETA on smaller generators during the first year of NETA operation. In addition, further data on the output of electricity from renewables (including wind) and CHP sources are expected to be published in July 2002 in the DTI's annual "Digest of UK Energy Statistics".

Following the Ofgem report of 31 August 2001, the Government set up a consultation on NETA and smaller generators, and on 4 April 2002 published their response. This identifies action to help smaller generators operate more effectively within NETA. It is available on the DTI website at www.dti.gov.uk/industries_energy.html#markets.

The introduction of the Renewables Obligation on 1 April this year provides a substantial impetus to the use of renewable electricity. On CHP, DEFRA are working to produce a draft strategy that will be out to consultation shortly. In the recent Budget, several measures were announced that would benefit CHP, including extending the exemption of CHP from the climate change levy.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of claimants represented by each of the top 10 claims handlers have been refused any settlement for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [52308]

Mr. Wilson: The percentage of claims denied for compensation under the chronic bronchitis and emphysema Claims Handling Agreement, as a percentage of total claims received, for each of the top 10 claims handlers is as follows:—

Top 10 claims handlers	*Percentage Ineligible*
Thompsons	4.8
Hugh James Ford Simey	6.3
Union of Democratic Mineworkers	4.9
Raleys	2.8
Mark Gilbert Morse	0.8
Browell Smith & Co.	1.3
Graysons	3.9
Watson Burton	1.0
Irwin Mitchells	3.6
Randell Saunders	3.5

The percentage of claims denied for compensation under the vibration white finger Claims Handling Agreement, as a percentage of total claims received, for each of the top 10 claims handlers is as follows:

Top 10 claims handlers	*Percentage Denied*
Thompsons	24.5
Browell Smith & Co.	21.6
Union of Democratic Mineworkers	11.0
Raleys	16.0
Hugh James Ford Simey	23.8
Graysons	17.6
Moss	31.2
Watson Burton	20.0
AMS Law	30.8
Towells	15.8

Some of these claimants will be submitting further evidence of vibration exposure which may allow these claims to be reconsidered. The procedure for this has been agreed with the claimants' solicitors.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the probable total compensation payout to claimants for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [52311]

Mr. Wilson: It is difficult to provide an accurate estimate of costs of British Coal health claims due to the number of new claims being registered each week. Almost 700 new respiratory disease and 300 vibration white finger claims continue to be registered each week. Presently the Department estimates that the total cost of both compensation schemes will be around £6 billion.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average level of final settlement for claimants represented by each of the top 10 claims handlers for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coal miners has been. [52310]

Mr. Wilson: The average full and final settlement for each of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claims for chronic bronchitis and emphysema is as follows:

£

Top 10 claims handlers	*Average full and final settlement*
Thompsons	6,267
Hugh James Ford Simey	8,713
Union of Democratic Mineworkers	4,281
Raleys	4,416
Mark Gilbert Morse	5,251
Browell Smith and Co.	6,719
Graysons	4,624
Watson Burton	4,936
Irwin Mitchells	6,088
Randell Saunders	6,329

The average full and final settlement for each of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claims for vibration white finger is as follows:

£

Top 10 claims handlers	*Average full and final settlement*
Thompsons	7,283
Browell Smith and Co.	9,011
Union of Democratic Mineworkers	8,052
Raleys	6,923
Hugh James Ford Simey	7,220
Graysons	5,978
Moss	6,891
Watson Burton	8,697
AMS Law	8,455
Towells	8,310

Air Traffic Control System (Tanzania)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what account was taken of the effect on jobs at BAe Systems in deciding to grant an export licence for the sale of an air traffic control system to Tanzania. [51749]

Nigel Griffiths: All relevant export licence applications are considered on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. The effect of proposed exports on the economic, social, commercial and industrial interest of the producer country will not affect the application of the criteria in the EU code of conduct.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria were taken into account in deciding to grant an export licence for BAE Systems in respect of its sale of an air traffic control system to Tanzania. [51750]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 869.

Export Licences

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the decision in 1997 to give preliminary clearance to Siemens Plessey Electronic Systems under the F680 procedure was taken into account in determining the application for an export licence. [51751]

Nigel Griffiths: The Form 680 process is administered by the Ministry of Defence and provides advice on the prospects for approval at the marketing stage. When the Government provides Form 680 advice it is always made clear to companies that such advice does not constitute an export licence, nor does it guarantee that an export licence will be approved for the future export of goods and technology.

All relevant export licence applications are considered on a case by case basis against the Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time of the application. Export licensing decisions do not take into account previous advice provided under the Form 680 process.

BP (Secondments)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total cost to her Department for the secondment of BP employees since January 2000 has been. [52162]

Ms Hewitt: Records held centrally show the total cost of reimbursement to BP for provision of secondees into DTI in the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 March 2002 as £80,334.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what expenses and travel costs BP employees on secondment to her Department are allowed to claim. [52160]

Ms Hewitt: Terms and conditions of secondments into the Department are set out in contractual agreements. The standard terms for all secondees in relation to travel and subsistence costs are that the Department reimburses direct to secondees the cost of any travel, subsistence and other expenditure that they may incur in the course of their work while on secondment. Reimbursement is at DTI rates and is made in accordance with departmental rules. The only exception to this arrangement is where any secondee has the use of a company car and uses it on DTI business. In these instances the secondee is not paid a DTI mileage rate but is reimbursed actual costs of petrol used.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date the secondment of Mr. Bob Saunders from BP to her Department began; what the duration of the secondment will be; what the terms and conditions of the secondment are; and if she will make a statement. [52158]

Ms Hewitt: The secondment of Robert Saunders is due to start on 1 May 2002. The secondment will be for two years and will be subject to standard contractual terms and conditions applied to all secondments into the Department.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if employees from BP have to sign the Official Secrets Act when they are accepted on secondment to her Department; and if she will make a statement. [52161]

Ms Hewitt: While neither permanent staff nor secondees have to sign the Official Secrets Act all secondments into the Department are subject to specific contractual terms. The contracts, which are signed by the secondee, make it clear that they are subject to the provisions of the Official Secrets Act 1989 and to certain other Acts which prohibit unauthorised disclosure of various categories of information and that they are therefore required to conform to the Department's security procedures. An explanatory booklet summarising the provisions of the Official Secrets Act 1989 is sent to each secondee with their contract. Additionally the contract makes clear that secondees, like civil servants, are also required to exercise care in handling information that they acquire in the course of their official duties and to protect information that is held in confidence.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the President of the Council how many net additional staff his Office has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52436]

Mr. Robin Cook: Since June 2001, my Office has recruited three net additional staff, one at executive officer level in October 2001 and two at administrative level, one in January 2002 and one in February 2002.

It has also in the same period been reduced in size by one senior civil servant.

Young People

Dr. Starkey: To ask the President of the Council on what subjects and on which dates his Department has consulted organisations representing young people; and if he will list such organisations. [52495]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department has not yet consulted any organisations representing young people. However, my colleague the Parliamentary Secretary is extremely concerned about voter apathy in the young. He is working with the National Council of Voluntary Organisations and the Children and Young People's Unit to arrange some discussion sessions with young people.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many special advisers were employed by the Cabinet Office *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was for each of those years. [41263]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 552W.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46809]

Mr. Leslie: The total cost of running the Department's press office in 1996–97 was £933,000.00 and £1,430,000.00 in 2000–01.

The figure has risen steadily over the years largely due to the increased range of Cabinet Office activity and responsibilities related to increases in ministerial posts and setting up new units. This in turn has resulted in increased communication activity.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [49602]

Mr. Leslie: The non-departmental public bodies for which the Deputy Prime Minister has responsibility have employed no people under the New Deal for Young People scheme in each of the last four years.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, regarding publicity expenditure, how many additional staff have been recruited as a result of the additional £326,000 advertising expenditure between 1998–99 and 2000–01, in which posts; and at what cost to public funds. [50551]

Mr. Leslie: The costs referred to in the response dated 25 March (36166) were identified from the financial accounting system which uses one account code for press advertising (including recruitment adverts). To attribute these costs to individual recruitment campaigns or other publicity could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

For details of advertising expenditure on recruitment of staff in the calendar year of 2001 I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 294W.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Churchill's Bunker (Neasden)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was of refurbishing Winston Churchill's bunker in Neasden; and if he will make a statement. [51245]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

Winston Churchill's bunker in Neasden is owned by Network Housing Association, a registered social landlord. It is situated on a site purchased in April 1997 Network Housing Association, from the London Borough of Brent.

The planning permission granted for affordable housing development on the site included an obligation that the bunker, a listed building, be opened under the 'London Open House Scheme' to the public, on two days a year for three years after completion of remedial works to satisfy health and safety requirements.

The remedial works carried out on the bunker cost £40,000 and were paid for from Network Housing Association's own resources.

New Millennium Experience Company

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 391W, on NMEC, what will happen to the £25 million that is not required; and where it is at the moment. [47124]

Dr. Howells: The funds currently lie with the Millennium Commission's share of the National Lottery Distribution Fund. The Millennium Commission has not made a decision about how these funds might be used.

Correspondence

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will investigate the reasons that *(a)* the letter of the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge to the Under-Secretary of State at her Department of 6 November 2001 remained unanswered until 16 April 2002 and *(b)* the reason for the delay in her Department determining that the question posed in the original letter falls outside its remit. [52401]

Dr. Howells: I apologise for the delay in replying to the hon. Member. His letter was transferred to the Department of Trade and Industry as that Department is responsible for advertising and advertising campaigns. Unfortunately there was a breakdown in communications during this process and action has now been taken to ensure this does not happen again. In 2001, the Department answered 90 per cent. of Members' correspondence within 18 working days and I am satisfied that this was an isolated incident.

Museums and Galleries (Free Entry)

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made in providing free entry to museums and galleries. [52223]

Dr. Howells: Entry to the permanent collections at all the main museums and galleries sponsored by my Department is now free to everyone. This policy took effect from 1 December 2001 and represents the delivery of a key element of our manifesto commitment. In the first four months since the introduction of free admission at those museums and galleries that previously charged visitor numbers have increased by an average of seventy five per cent. This means that an extra 1.7 million people have been able to enjoy admission to these priceless collections free of charge, no matter what their income or background.

ITV Digital

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment she had made of the implications of the collapse of ITV Digital for the provision of ITV franchise licence fees under the digital dividend of *(a)* Granada plc and *(b)* Carlton Communications plc; [50712]

(2) if she will review the terms of the digital dividend rebate offered to ITV companies for the promotion of digital television. [50711]

Dr. Howells: Under the provisions of the Broadcasting Act 1996, the percentage of qualifying multiplex revenue payable to the Independent Television Commission by the digital terrestrial licencees has been set by order at nil for the duration of the licences. The purpose of this is to promote the availability of free-to-view digital television by offsetting related costs. The ITV companies therefore do not make payments to the Treasury on the proportion of their advertising revenue attributed to viewing in homes that are digital. There are no plans to review or alter this framework.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how much has been spent by her Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years; [52742]

(2) how much has been spent by her Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years; [52709]

(3) how much has been spent by her Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52733]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Department has recently introduced a leadership programme which includes a module covering the use of the voice. In the financial year 2001–02 £20,531 was spent on leadership training.

Our records indicate that no official has received training from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in the last three years. Retrieving the information prior to that date would incur disproportionate cost.

The Department does not provide training for Ministers.

Warship Preservation

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy that *(a)* HMS Whimbrel and *(b)* HMS Zenith be preserved in Chatham Dockyard. [52876]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust have no knowledge of any plans to seek the preservation of either HMS Whimbrel or HMS Zenith at Chatham. Neither were built at Chatham—HMS Whimbrel was a sloop built at Yarrow in 1942 and HMS Zenith a destroyer built by Denny's in 1944. Both were sold after the war to the Egyptian Navy. The trust's research suggests that neither ship served with the Chatham Division of the Royal Navy during the Second World War.

The trust's current museum collecting policy does not foresee the acquisition of further ships. Not only would there be difficulty in locating them (the trust's three dry docks are occupied with their existing ships) but the trust does not have the financial resources available to support further major vessels.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Egyptian ambassador to London on *(a)* HMS Whimbrel and *(b)* HMS Zenith. [52877]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such discussions with the Egyptian ambassador to London.

Announcements (Timing)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the process by which she decides whether an announcement is too controversial to be made in a pre-election period. [52890]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Prime Minister publishes standard guidance on this matter before each election. The guidance published on 21 March 2002, referring to the English local elections to be held on 2 May 2002, made it clear that

> "particular care should be exercised in relation to the announcement of sensitive decisions with a local dimension".

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State considers each case on its merits in the light of this.

Portable Antiquities

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the portable antiquities scheme. [52891]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The trustees of the Heritage Lottery Fund met on Tuesday 23 April to consider a bid for the three-year funding of an extension of the portable antiquities scheme to the whole of England and Wales. The fund will make a full, public announcement of its decision following next week's local elections.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent steps she has taken to communicate to *(a)* ministerial colleagues and *(b)* hon. Members, the importance of digital switchover. [52883]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I frequently draw the attention of hon. Members and ministerial colleagues to the digital television action plan in correspondence and in responses to parliamentary questions. The action plan sets out the Government's proposals to encourage the switchover to digital television for the benefits it can bring to consumers and to the economy.

Tourism

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the impact on tourism in England of the distribution by the Welsh Tourist Board of its marketing leaflet "Wales–The Big Country"; and what plans she has to enable the English Tourism Council to publish and distribute a similar leaflet in support of tourism in England. [52756]

Dr. Howells: The Wales Tourist Board launched their marketing campaign in December 2001. The devolved administrations now make their own decisions on how best to promote tourism, taking into account local conditions and needs and the extent to which financial support is needed to address market failure in different parts of the country.

A booklet "Hidden England" has already been produced, and is available in Tourist Information Centres in England. I have allocated a further £20 million, matched by £20 million from the industry, for marketing to the overseas markets. The domestic market is already recovering strongly.

We are committed to improving the competitiveness of the English tourism market through an agenda of modernisation and long term strategic reform. We are currently considering how to provide better co-ordination of the marketing of England's tourism assets and will announce plans soon.

Lord Chancellor's Breakfast

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what special traffic arrangements were made for the Lord Chancellor's guests attending his most recent official breakfast, with special reference to obeying traffic lights and parking in bus lanes. [48795]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor holds an Annual Breakfast Reception. This last occurred not recently but on 1 October 2001, and takes place as part of the ceremonies to mark the Opening of the Legal Year, in Westminster Hall immediately following the Judges' Service held in Westminster Abbey.

That is the only official Breakfast which the Lord Chancellor holds.

The most recent formal legal occasion was the annual Silk Ceremony on 10 April, when 113 new Queen's Counsel attended in Royal Gallery to make their formal declaration of Office before the Lord Chancellor upon taking Silk.

There was traffic disruption in front of the Houses of Parliament on 10 April, caused by a demonstration unrelated to the Ceremony.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Crown Courts

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost in 2000–01 was of *(a)* the maintenance of each of the Crown courts in England and *(b)* administering each of the Crown courts in England; and what the average cost per case heard was of each of the Crown courts in 2000–01. [50693]

Mr. Wills: *(a)* The table provides the cost of maintenance of each of the Crown (and combined) courts in England for the financial year 2000–01. The figures reflect gross cash expenditure and are based on routine maintenance works only. They do not include figures for any major maintenance/building enhancement works. Figures for the combined courts reflect the total costs of the buildings including non-Crown court areas. For information purposes, the average cost of maintenance per square metre of each court centre is also included.

(b) A significant proportion of the cost of administering the Crown court is paid for as central overheads and is not held in a format which can identify the individual costs of each court centre. To do so otherwise would incur disproportionate costs to the Department. For information purposes, however, the total cost of administering the Crown court in 2000–01 across England and Wales was £281 million. This figure excludes legal aid costs. The total number of cases disposed of during the same period across England and Wales was:

Committals for trials—71,330

Cases for sentence—27,018

Appeals cases—13,698.

Based on the total number of disposals (112,046) the indicative average cost figure per case is £2,544. However this does not take into account the relative weighting of each of the different types of cases.

Circuit/Combined court centre	*Expenditure (£)*
Midland circuit	
Coventry	91,019
Derby	80,341
Lincoln	31,884
Northampton	84,883
Nottingham	136,815
Stafford	92,347
Stoke on Trent	83,409
Warwick	5,632
Warwick Office	12,147
Wolverhampton	86,925
North Eastern circuit	
Bradford	129,062
Great Grimsby	58,462
Kingston upon Hull	87,632
Leeds	172,813
Newcastle upon Tyne	174,700
Sheffield	125,097
Teesside	106,031
Northern circuit	
Bolton	55,192
Burnley	31,733
Carlisle	49,576
Liverpool	280,152
Manchester Crown and County courts	259,674
Preston	216,270
South Eastern circuit	
Basildon	76,932
Canterbury	59,738
Chichester	64,512
Croydon	99,755
Hove Trial centre	64,397
Lewes	87,338
Maidstone	143,436
Norwich	88,303
Oxford	93,153
Peterborough	54,431
Wales and Chester circuit	
Warrington	70,505
Western circuit	
Bournemouth	119,860
Exeter	55,543
Gloucester	24,645
Newport (IOW)	39,190
Plymouth	79,320
Portsmouth	214,395
Salisbury	32,708
Southampton	108,349
Swindon	39,873
Taunton	66,342
Truro	55,646
Weymouth and Dorchester	8,772
Weymouth and Dorchester Offices	4,192
Winchester	38,488
Total expenditure	4,241,618

Circuit/Crown court centre	*Expenditure (£)*
Midland circuit	
Birmingham	122,407
Hereford	11,681
Leicester	94,067
Lincoln (Castle)	25,413
Shrewsbury	26,783
Worcester	81,511
North Eastern circuit	
Doncaster	68,025
Durham	21,105
Newcastle upon Tyne Offices	21,405
York	35,788
Northern circuit	
Lancaster	5,745
Manchester	185,145
Preston	27,627
South Eastern circuit	
Aylesbury	10,145
Aylesbury Offices	—
Blackfriars	127,207
Bury St. Edmunds	2,285
Cambridge	10,304
Central Criminal court	39,321
Chelmsford	106,293
Guildford	45,461
Harrow	100,506
Ipswich	25,195
Isleworth	50,101
Kings Lynn	9,704

Circuit/Crown court centre	Expenditure (£)
Kingston upon Thames	153,011
Luton	77,083
Middlesex Guildhall	93,660
Reading	90,753
Snaresbrook	253,546
Southend	8,257
Southwark	137,407
St. Albans	33,402
Wood Green	115,554
Woolwich	160,975
Wales and Chester circuit	
Chester	61,469
Knutsford	17,444
Western circuit	
Bristol	201,600
Gloucester	28,607
Total expenditure	2,685,992

Immigration Appellate Authority

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the backlog of cases in the IAA is; and what estimate she has made of how long it will take to clear the backlog. [50699]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There is currently no backlog of asylum cases within the IAA. At the end of March the IAA was dealing with 20,626 outstanding adjudicator appeals, 1,883 outstanding leave to appeal applications and 1,753 outstanding substantive tribunal appeals. This level of work in progress for asylum cases is necessary to ensure the proper functioning of the IAA and is based on the SDA target of clearing 65 per cent. of all cases through both tiers within 17 weeks.

The IAA is also currently dealing with 4,114 adjudicator appeals, 36 leave to appeal applications and 39 substantive tribunal appeals in immigration cases. In each instance, this is within or in line with expectation. These immigration figures do not cover family visit visas.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what Government buildings owned by the Lord Chancellor's Department have solar panels installed. [51190]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department does not own any buildings with solar panels.

Personal Injury Pre-action Protocol

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice the Lord Chancellor's Department has given to solicitors and the Law Society on the operation of the personal injury pre-action protocol. [51003]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* None. The Law Society was instrumental in the development of this protocol. The pre-action protocols are designed to be self explanatory. Each protocol contains notes for guidance on the operation of the protocol.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to allow parents to appeal against the decision of reports prepared for family courts by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. [52342]

Ms Rosie Winterton: None. The purpose of the report is to advise the court. The court must take account of the Children and Family Reporter's recommendation but is not bound to follow it. If a party to proceedings has concerns about the report written by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) or alternate proposals to put before the court, it is possible for all parties to the case to put forward their proposals, or raise concerns, at or before the hearing where the CAFCASS officer can be questioned on the content of the report.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what training she provides to staff working for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service; and what qualifications they require. [52343]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All practitioners from the Family Court Welfare Service and Guardian Ad Litem Service who transferred to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) on 1 April 2001 have the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) awarded by Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW), now the Training Organisation for the Personal Social Services (TOPSS), or an equivalent qualification. This is still a requirement for all staff appointed as of 1 April 2001.

All staff are encouraged to undertake post-qualifying training approved by TOPSS, such as the Post Qualification award in child care (PQCCA) or in some instances the Advanced Award in Social Work. The PQCCA is at post graduate diploma level, being specific to social work with children and the PQAA is at Masters level.

Most CAFCASS officers also have many years of experience working in the Family Courts—supported by a programme of induction, and training and development relevant to their work.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Cox: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what the estimated waiting time is for an immigration appeal to be heard. [50591]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The average time to hearing for immigration cases received by the IAA between 1 October 2001 and 31 October 2001 was 5.2 weeks to first hearing and 12.5 weeks to substantive hearing at the adjudicator stage.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 6 February from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. J. B. Cooper. [42798]

Mr. Darling: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 11 March.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many members his Department employs in its Regulatory Impact Unit; and if he will make a statement. [42932]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: One member of staff works full time in the Department's Regulatory Impact Unit. This is a dedicated resource which co-ordinates activity relating to all better regulation issues in the Department.

It is the job of the Department's Regulatory Impact Unit to establish and promote in the Department, the principles of good regulation, so that all officials within it may contribute effectively to the Government's regulatory reform initiative. The unit also works closely with the Regulatory Impact Unit in the Cabinet Office, and with the Small Business Service. A key element of the unit's work is to help minimise the impact on business, charities, and the voluntary sector, of those departmental regulations which are necessary.

Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information he collates on the cumulative value of employers' contributions to a pension scheme *(a)* on a defined benefit basis and *(b)* on a defined contribution basis; and if he will make a statement on current trends in what is offered under each of these structures. [43132]

Maria Eagle: The cumulative value of occupational pension funds depends on a number of factors including investment growth, employer and employee contributions, tax relief, national insurance rebates, pension payments and transfers. It is not possible to calculate the cumulative value of employer contributions separately.

However this Department does collect information on private sector contribution rates to defined benefit and defined contribution pension schemes as a proportion of employee salary, through the Employer Pension Provision (EPP) Report. The EPP Report 2000 was published on 18 March 2002, and shows that the median employer contribution rate in 'salary related' (defined benefit) schemes was 6 per cent. of pay, and the rate in 'money purchase' (defined contribution) schemes was 5 per cent. of pay. A copy of the report is available in the Library.

The Government Actuary's Department produces its Occupational Pension Schemes survey every five years. The most recent survey, for 1995, is in the House of Commons Library. It collects data on employers' contribution rates for defined contribution occupational schemes as a proportion of employee salary (note: this does not include payments to personal pensions or group personal pensions).

The Office for National Statistics collects data on the total amounts contributed to non-state pensions in its MQ5 series, produced quarterly. These figures have been withdrawn due to errors in the publication; and are being investigated.

For information about current trends, I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 660–68.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39082]

Mr. McCartney: Most equipment used by the Department is not leased but obtained via service contracts. Most office equipment is provided under serviced accommodation arrangements under the 20-year PRIME PFI deal for estates management services or under other facilities management contracts. IS/IT and telephony equipment is not leased but provided or sourced under long-term service contracts. The Department does enter into leasing agreements for some other equipment, principally photocopiers, but these arrangements are made at local level. The information on these arrangements required to answer the question is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39071]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are part-time employees. [47155]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 553W.

Hospitalisation (Benefit Downrating)

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners have their attendance allowance withdrawn because they have been in hospital for four weeks or longer. [51574]

Maria Eagle: When attendance allowance recipients have been in hospital for 28 days, payments are suspended pending their discharge because the needs arising from their disability are being met free of charge. Information is not available on the annual number of suspensions resulting from these circumstances. The latest available information is that, at 30 November 2001, about 15,600 claims were at that time recorded as suspended as a result of a stay in hospital.

This figure is based on 5 per cent. data and rounded to the nearest hundred.

HOME DEPARTMENT

European Committee for the Prevention of Torture

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the most recent report on the UK by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture. [52141]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

Under Article 11 of the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, it is for the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture to publish reports of its visits together with any comments of the state party concerned. Formally, publication is at the request of the state party.

We have made that request and I understand that the report on the Committee's visit to the United Kingdom in February 2001 is now available on the Committee's website www.cpt.coe.int with the UK's observations.

I am placing a copy of the report in the Library.

Emergency Services

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much revenue was generated through the sale of radio frequencies used by emergency services. [50508]

Mr. Denham: There has been no sale of radio frequencies used by the emergency services, and therefore no revenue generated by this means.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the revenue generated by the sale of radio frequencies used by emergency services in the UK has been allocated for reinvestment into the refitting of vehicles and control rooms in the *(a)* police forces and *(b)* fire services. [50511]

Mr. Denham: There has been no sale of radio frequencies used by the emergency services in the United Kingdom.

Sex Abuse

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* complaints and *(b)* items of correspondence have been received by *(a)* the Home Office, *(b)* Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, *(c)* the Police Complaints Authority and *(d)* the Criminal Cases Review Commission in relation to historical sex abuse investigations in the UK in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [49834]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office does not officially record complaints received in writing or over the telephone—these are incorporated in overall correspondence figures. Complaints and correspondence can be individually addressed to policy units. There is no current way of tracking these accurately. Records for 1999 in relation to this question do not exist. The figures compiled for 2000 and 2001 combine both public and ministerial correspondence on the subject of violent crime/sexual offences.

Figures for the individual areas in each year are shown in the table.

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
Home Office[1]	n/a	83	134
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)[2]	—	—	—
Police Complaints Authority[3]	61	64	70
Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC)[4]	1	2	6

[1] Figures are based on correspondence relating to violent crime/sexual offences

[2] The subject nature of HMIC correspondence is not officially recorded, hence no figures exist

[3] Figures are based on correspondence relating to allegations of sexual assault

[4] Figures are based on applications for case review that involved sex abuse in care homes

Criminal Records Bureau

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the names of organisations which have registered as umbrella bodies with the Criminal Records Bureau. [48758]

Mr. Denham: A list of those registered bodies that have consented to having their details made available for the purpose of countersigning applications on behalf of non-registered organisations is available from the Criminal Records Bureau on request and information is also available on the website www.disclosure.gov.uk.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to ensure that smaller voluntary and community organisations can access criminal record checks. [50624]

Mr. Denham: We have been determined that employers and organisations wishing to use the new service provided by the new Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) will have a ready means of access. To meet the needs of those employers and organisations which do not wish to register with the bureau in their own right, we have encouraged others to consider acting on their behalf, as umbrella bodies, and we shall continue to do so. Up to 16 April 2002, 707 bodies had registered with the CRB as umbrella bodies, including 419 which have indicated that they are prepared to act on behalf of others outside their own circle or sector.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average charge made by umbrella bodies registered with the Criminal Records Bureau for processing applications for disclosure is. [50625]

Mr. Denham: This information is not requested by the Criminal Records Bureau. In guidance for umbrella bodies, the bureau urges that any such charges should be kept to a minimum. Those wishing to use the services of an umbrella body would be well advised to ask whether charges are made and, if so, compare charges.

Offence Statistics

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the number of recorded offences for *(a)* begging, *(b)* breaching an antisocial behaviour order, *(c)* vagrancy, *(d)* noise, *(e)* drunkenness, *(f)* drunkenness with aggravation, *(g)* aggravated vehicle

taking, *(h)* rowdy and disorderly group behaviour in public and *(i)* driving while having a breath/urine/blood alcohol concentration in excess of the prescribed limit, broken down by police force area, in each year since 1997. [49787]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* With the exception of aggravated vehicle taking, the categories mentioned are not collected centrally, or not collected separately, for recorded crime figures. The details for aggravated vehicle taking are given in the table.

Recorded crime—offences of aggravated vehicle taking by police force area since 1997[1]

Police force	*1997*[2]	*1998–99*[3]	*1999–2000*[3]	*2000–01*[3]
Avon and Somerset	61	30	40	19
Bedfordshire	31	53	67	59
Cambridgeshire	32	100	170	158
Cheshire	126	149	170	141
Cleveland	205	197	165	163
Cumbria	63	128	139	124
Derbyshire	215	226	225	189
Devon and Cornwall	138	174	262	269
Dorset	124	148	184	206
Durham	118	114	116	94
Essex[4]	167	111	21	54
Gloucestershire	133	77	71	64
Greater Manchester	626	1,122	1,190	1,312
Hampshire	120	188	229	244
Hertfordshire[4]	8	52	104	142
Humberside	270	338	276	276
Kent	157	191	187	158
Lancashire	220	265	301	318
Leicestershire	87	119	85	71
Lincolnshire	71	77	73	44
City of London	2	8	10	10
Merseyside	136	184	251	352
Metropolitan police district[4]	1,016	983	1,100	1,130
Norfolk	38	53	49	80
Northamptonshire	120	161	154	137
Northumbria	158	270	280	316
North Yorkshire	76	109	69	93
Nottinghamshire	76	118	81	91
South Yorkshire	412	394	357	448
Staffordshire	171	241	174	159
Suffolk	65	67	82	104
Surrey[4]	27	60	131	149
Sussex	170	288	318	343
Thames Valley	203	148	175	171
Warwickshire	76	50	58	70
West Mercia	121	242	250	264
West Midlands	299	674	770	850
West Yorkshire	892	1,029	913	798
Wiltshire	73	89	128	114
Dyfed-Powys	90	129	109	110
Gwent	140	144	143	140
North Wales	109	182	135	151
South Wales	589	616	604	574
England and Wales	8,031	10,098	10,416	10,759

[1] 1997 is the calendar year, with the other years ending in March.
[2] The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the coverage and rules in use until 31 March 1998.
[3] The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the expanded offence coverage and revised counting rules which came into effect on 1 April 1998.
[4] There was a boundary change on 1 April 2000 in which parts of the Metropolitan police area were transferred to Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey, so that these police force areas followed county boundaries thereafter.

Annual Report 2000–01

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what activities are covered by *(a)* constitutional and community, *(b)* criminal policing and programmes, *(c)* central services, *(d)* firearms compensation and *(e)* police and crime reduction as referred to in Table 11 on page 112 of the Home Office annual report 2000–01. [48858]

Mr. Denham: *(a)* In 2000–01, constitutional and community work included the following issues, responsibility for which transferred to other Government Departments in the machinery of Government changes which took place on 8 June 2001: human rights, freedom of information, data protection, constitutional issues, elections, byelaws, gambling, liquor licensing, animal welfare, hunting, and planting and planning for the Golden Jubilee.

Issues which remain the responsibility of the Home Department, and which currently fall under this heading, are:

(1) Race equality issues, including implementation of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and publication of race equality performance indicators across public services;

(2) Leading cross-Government work to promote civil renewal, and to promote and support active citizenship, including a flourishing voluntary and community sector;

(3) Developing the Government's community cohesion agenda;

(4) Supporting the continuing development of strong and stable families;

(5) Regulation of burial and cremation services and arrangements for the investigation of deaths;

(6) Regulation of the use of animals for experimental and other scientific purposes;

(7) Consultation concerning the introduction of an entitlement card scheme.

(b) Criminal policy and programmes are led primarily in the Criminal Policy Group although clearly there are links with the work of the Policing and Crime Reduction Group (see (e). The Criminal Policy Group is responsible for Home Office Aims 3 and 4. Aim 3 is "to ensure the effective delivery of justice, avoiding unnecessary delay, through efficient investigation, detection, prosecution and court procedures. To minimise the threat to and intimidation of witnesses and to engage with and support victims". Aim 4 is "to deliver effective custodial and community sentences to reduce re-offending and protect the public, through the prison and probation services, in partnership with the Youth Justice Board". Current activities include:

(1) Drafting a Criminal Justice White Paper which will introduce fundamental reforms that will enable faster, more efficient delivery of justice, with effective punishment of offenders, and fully joined up services that can rehabilitate offenders and resettle them into the community when they finish their sentence. The White Paper will include reforms following the

recommendations of both the Auld report on criminal court reform and the Halliday report on sentencing, and improved consideration of the needs of the victims of crime, including restorative justice. The formulation of policy across the criminal justice system involves close working within the Home Office group and with other Government Departments and interested bodies;

(2) Ensuring the effectiveness of work to reduce levels of re-conviction. This includes the development of improved ways of working, drawing on the work the Social Exclusion Unit has undertaken on reducing the level of re-offending among ex-prisoners, such as case management of offenders through the system and greater involvement of other agencies;

(3) Providing a strategic framework within which the Prison Service, probation service and Youth Justice Board operate. This will be achieved in part through a Correctional Services Board which will be chaired by my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Angela Eagle) and supported by the development of a Standards Unit to make sure best practice is shared effectively;

(4) The Criminal Policy Group has an ongoing role in overseeing both the general effectiveness of the criminal law as it applies to both adult and juvenile offenders, and work across the criminal justice system to monitor and improve performance. This includes work to increase the number of offenders brought to justice through the development of operational guidelines and support, in particular in relation to tackling persistent offending;

(5) Ongoing case management of serious mentally disordered offenders and the introduction and appraisal of pilot schemes for more effective treatment of dangerous people with severe personality disorders.

(c) Central services are those areas of the Home Office which support delivery of the Home Office's aims. The activities of these central services areas are as follows: financial planning and management, accounting and audit, personnel, accommodation planning and provision, internal and external communication, information technology planning and provision, security (physical, staff and information technology), research and development (including statistical studies and Home Office publications), pay and pensions, records management, health and safety, health and welfare, Ministers' and officials' private offices, and the legal advisers' branch.

(d) The Home Office introduced a compensation scheme for surrender of small firearms (handguns) following events in Dunblane in March 1996. The Firearms (Amendment) Acts 1997 prohibited possession of handguns; compensation was paid for their surrender together with surrender of ammunition and related ancillary equipment (holsters etc.). Although the majority of weapons were surrendered during 1997–98, some residual cases continue to be administered by the Department.

(e) The activities of the Policing and Crime Reduction Group centre around the provision of an efficient, effective police service and reduction in crime. Policing policy activity covers legislation and implementation of the police reform programme; personnel and resource measures to support the police, including recruitment and pay arrangements and work on police leadership, powers and procedures. The crime reduction focus of the group is achieved through developing and implementing strategies to address particular types of crime and disorder, by encouraging and providing a framework for partnership working and by developing and administering area-based initiatives such as the Crime Reduction Programme, Communities Against Drugs and Safer Communities.

A significant part of the group's work lies in ensuring that there is scientific and technological support for the police and crime reduction. The group sponsors a number of agencies and non-departmental public bodies in this and other areas. Through the Police Standards Unit and support for the independent inspectorate (Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary), the group has a major commitment to the achievement of high standards and performance in the police service.

Correspondence

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden dated 29 January concerning funding for the Humberside police authority. [50610]

Mr. Denham: A reply to the hon. Member was despatched on Tuesday 16 April 2002.

Pistols

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many instances single shot .22 pistols of the type used in the Commonwealth and Olympic games have been used in indictable offences within the Metropolitan police area in the past 10 years. [51465]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by date and by authority the HMIC reports since 1993 which cover the detailed force inspections which include arrangements for child abuse and major crime investigations. [51630]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) reports are public documents and copies are placed in the Library. Additionally, they can be accessed on the HMIC internet web-site: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic.

A list of the force inspection conducted since 1995 is attached. Thematic reports have been published on matters associated with the investigation of child abuse and major crime investigation, these include: Policing London "Winning Consent (although this report relates only to the Metropolitan Police Service) 2000; Child Protection, 1999". Also, HMIC are currently part of a joint inspection into Children's Safeguards being led by the Social Services Inspectorate. Her Majesty Inspectorate (HMI) Inspections of individual forces do not, however, examine specific police investigations or detail them in their Reports.

A chronological list of all HMIC Inspections since 1993 is not available and it would involve the disproportionate use of resources to compile one.

Child Protection

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of

21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W, if he will list the terms of reference of the thematic inspection into child protection. [51629]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary conducted a Thematic Inspection entitled "Child Protection" in 1999. The terms of reference were as follows: "To examine the role of the police service in protecting children, within a multi-agency context, and with particular reference to strategic direction, effectiveness, efficiency, innovation and good practice". Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary are currently part of an Inter-Agency inspection of safeguards for children. The lead inspectorate of this inspection is the Social Services Inspectorate. Attached is a copy of the objectives for this inspection which has been placed in the Library. Any further information on the inspection should be obtained from the Department of Health.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received from chief constables on the way in which police authorities investigate historic allegations of child abuse. [51633]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) has not received any recent representations from chief constables on this matter. However, I have met with the Association of Chief Police Officers' lead officer on child abuse, Mr. Terence Grange, to discuss these issues. It is of course for police forces and not police authorities to investigate allegations of child abuse.

Police National Computer

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many, and what types, of errors were generated by the Police National Computer in each year since 1 January 1997. [51818]

Mr. Denham: This information is not available.

Operation Antler

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress on Operation Antler by Wiltshire Constabulary. [52412]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1102W.

The Attorney-General has granted Her Majesty's Coroner for Wiltshire and Swindon permission to apply to the High Court to quash the findings of the Inquest into the death of Ronald Maddison at Porton Down in 1953. The Wiltshire Coroner will be preparing and lodging the application for an order that a new Inquest be held. Wiltshire Constabulary will continue inquiries on behalf of the Wiltshire Coroner in order to facilitate the High Court application.

Red Cross

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial support his Department has given since 1 April 2000 to projects run by the British Red Cross. [52945]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* As the Minister responsible for the voluntary and community sector, I am answering on behalf of central Government Departments.

The latest, estimated figures for central Government support to the British Red Cross, available for the 2000–01 financial year only, are as follows:

	£
Department for Education and Skills	98,500
Department for International Development	32,011,423
Northern Ireland	5,591
Scottish Executive	20,220
Total	32,135,734

Note:
These estimated figures do not include potential funding from the Welsh Assembly, which is not currently held centrally.

Young Prisoners

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juvenile prisoners were held in segregation units for longer than seven days in each prison since April 2000. [52139]

Beverley Hughes: As this information needs to be collated, I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Race Monitor

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce the appointment of the Race Monitor under section 19E of the Race Relations Act 1976, as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. [53680]

Mr. Blunkett: I am very pleased to announce that Ms Mary Coussey has been appointed as the Race Monitor and that she has taken up post. I have asked Ms Coussey to make an interim report to me in September 2002, which I will make publicly available, and to make her first annual report to Parliament in March 2003.

Visas

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the current average time taken to process a written application for a visa under the au pair scheme in the last 12 months. [50034]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

There are no average times for processing applications received specifically from au pairs.

There is a target of processing 90 per cent. of straightforward applications within 24 hours. The percentage of straightforward applications processed in financial year 2001–02 was 92 per cent.

Where an interview is required the target time is 10 working days. In the last financial year 76 per cent. of posts met this target.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been employed

by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the new deal for young people, *(b)* the new deal for the over 50s and *(c)* the new deal for lone parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44928]

Angela Eagle: Information follows on the number of people who have been employed by the Home Department and its agencies under the new deal programmes for *(a)* young people; *(b)* the over 50s; and *(c)* lone parents:

(a) 63

(b) 0

(c) 0.

New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs to public funds are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

Data on the number of starts on the new deal for young people (18–24) in the civil service has been recorded by the Cabinet Office since the commencement of the programme in January 1998 until 1 October 2001.

In addition to the figure, the United Kingdom Passport Service reported that a further 185 people have been employed via the new deal initiative by the Criminal Records Bureau's business partner, Capita. The specified categories (i.e. young people, lone parents and over 50s) has not been recorded.

We continue to remain open to the potential advantages of employing people through the new deal for the over 50s and lone parents.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to deal with the problem of antisocial behaviour. [47429]

Mr. Denham: Action to tackle antisocial behaviour is being taken across Government Departments. Among the many actions we are taking are the introduction of community safety officers, the proposals to enhance the effectiveness of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs), and measures to speed up court procedures for evictions for antisocial behaviour. We are consulting on further measures to deal with the problems of antisocial tenants and of abandoned vehicles.

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the review of antisocial behaviour orders will be published; and if he plans to introduce new guidelines. [47600]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office review of antisocial behaviour orders was published on 2 April 2002. We are proposing legislative changes to improve the take-up and effectiveness of antisocial behaviour orders in the Police Reform Bill, and will produce clear and practical guidance on antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs), including relevant case studies, to accompany these changes.

PSA Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the PSA target to reduce the economic costs of crime *(a)* was met in 2000–01 and *(b)* will be met in 2001–02. [47447]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The public service agreement for the economic cost of crime commits the criminal justice system departments to "reduce the cost of crime by March 2004 to be measured by an indicator to be developed by March 2001".

Estimates of the economic and social cost of crime were published in a report in December 2000, "The economic and social costs of crime" (Home Office Research Study 217). This sets out clearly how the figures have been derived. There are particular problems in providing accurate figures for some types of crime (especially commercial victimisation). The Criminal Justice Departments and Her Majesty's Treasury have not yet agreed how best to measure progress.

There are no cost of crime targets for 2000–01 or 2001–02. Although there are no interim targets until 2004, we are making every effort to ensure that we reduce crimes with a high economic cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the PSA target to reduce the fear of crime will be met in 2001–02. [47448]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* As stated in my reply to the hon. Member on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 701W, the target is to reduce the fear of violent crime, burglary, and vehicle crime by 2004 from their 2001 baselines. During the baseline year, 22.3 per cent. of people were very concerned about violent crime, 16.5 per cent. about burglary, and 18.5 per cent. about vehicle crime. Data for the following year have not yet been published.

Street Crime

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how police areas not included in the initial pilot scheme will benefit from the cross-Government working of the anti-street crime initiative. [48576]

Mr. Denham: The street crime initiative is targeted at the 10 forces which account for 82 per cent. of robbery in England and Wales, but the effect of the initiative will have benefits for all police force areas. Good practice in partnership working across the criminal justice system and between other agencies will be disseminated to all areas. The 10 force initiative should serve to identify and remove any systemic blockages which may currently hinder the tackling of street crime not only in those 10 areas, but across the country. By setting up this initiative we are sending out a clear signal that we will not tolerate crime on our streets, wherever they occur.

Car Crime

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the conviction rate was for car crime offences in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [48299]

Mr. Denham: The information requested, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, and relating to England and Wales, is shown in the table.

Conviction rate[1] for persons proceeded against for certain motor vehicle offences[2], England and Wales, 1991 to 2000

Percentage

	Conviction rate
1991	68.9
1992	61.7
1993	59.1
1994	59.1
1995	59.7
1996	60.4
1997	61.7
1998	63.0
1999	63.2
2000	62.0

[1] Number of defendants convicted at all courts as a percentage of those proceeded against in magistrates courts.

[2] Theft of motor vehicle, unauthorised taking of motor vehicle (including being carried knowing vehicle to have been taken or driven away), aggravated vehicle taking and theft from motor vehicle.

Information on court proceedings for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action he is taking to increase prosecutions of those committing car crime; and if he will make a statement; [48298]

(2) what action he is taking to reduce car crime; and if he will make a statement. [48297]

Mr. Denham: The Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team (VCRAT) was set up in September 1998 to develop and oversee the implementation of initiatives to meet the Government's target to reduce vehicle crime by 30 per cent. over five years from 1998–99. They published their strategy for achieving the target on 22 September 1999.

The main lines of action in the VCRAT strategy include improved security on new and used cars; improved car park security; better policing and community responses which target prolific offenders and crime hotspots; and new procedures for the detection of stolen cars at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. The Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 took forward VCRAT recommendations for regulation of the motor salvage industry and controls on the supply of vehicle number plates, and we expect to implement these provisions between July 2002 and April 2003.

We expect these and other initiatives—such as the introduction of best value targets for forces in England and Wales; the introduction of a vehicle crime toolkit to enable forces to exchange good practice and the provision of better information to the police at the roadside—to impact on the number of apprehensions leading to an increase in the number of prosecutions for car crimes. The latest published figures show that recorded vehicle crime reduced by 10.1 per cent. in 2000-01 compared with 1998–99.

Police

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of West Mercia police officers in Telford are from a black minority ethnic background; [45133]

(2) what proportion of officers employed by West Mercia police are from a black minority ethnic background. [45132]

Mr. Denham: I am told by the chief constable (Peter Heimpson) that West Mercia constabulary has seven officers who have classified themselves as black, which is 0.34 per cent. of force strength. Of this number three are deployed to the Telford division, which is 0.86 per cent. divisional strength.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the future pension costs of English police authorities; if he will list the total costs for the three financial years up to 2000–01; what he estimates those costs to be in each of the three succeeding years; and what proportion of the total police authority budget in each authority was represented by pension costs in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* is estimated for 2001–02. [40550]

Mr. Denham: Detailed estimates of police service costs are made annually by individual police authorities and forces. Each makes its own projection of pensions' costs. In formulating projections of grant, careful account is taken of advice from the Association of Police Authorities and the Association of Chief Police Officers on estimated increases in pensions costs.

Total net pensions' costs for English Police Authorities were £840.9 million in 1998–99, £897.7 million in 1999–00 and are estimated at £973.5 million in 2000–01 and £1,055.6 million in 2001–02 (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police statistics).

Police estimated spending on net pensions in England as a proportion of net expenditure in 2000–01 and 2001–02 is set out in the table.

Proportion of English police authorities net expenditure spent on net pensions costs

Percentage

Police authority	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Avon and Somerset Police	16.16	16.65
Bedfordshire Police	12.48	12.84
Cambridgeshire Police	12.98	12.69
Cheshire Police	11.25	13.63
City of London	15.36	16.05
Cleveland Police	15.18	14.85
Cumbria Police	15.37	15.25
Derbyshire Police	13.41	12.37
Devon and Cornwall Police	13.96	14.81
Dorset Police	14.00	15.05
Durham Police	12.04	12.54
Essex Police	11.30	12.94
Gloucestershire Police	14.20	14.26
Greater Manchester Police	15.21	16.25
Hampshire Police	10.84	11.35
Hertfordshire Police	9.80	9.51
Humberside Police	14.15	14.49
Kent Police	12.50	12.94
Lancashire Police	13.54	14.35
Leicestershire Police	12.11	12.63
Lincolnshire Police	16.25	16.86
Merseyside Police	15.65	16.43
Metropolitan Police (GLA)	13.25	12.87
Norfolk Police	12.64	12.55
North Yorkshire Police	16.31	17.19
Northamptonshire Police	11.91	10.83
Northumbria Police	14.27	14.41
Nottinghamshire Police	13.66	15.30
South Yorkshire Police	10.59	12.18

Proportion of English police authorities net expenditure spent on net pensions costs

Percentage

Police authority	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Staffordshire Police	14.84	17.03
Suffolk Police	13.54	14.34
Surrey Police	9.32	9.48
Sussex Police	15.99	15.94
Thames Valley Police	9.78	9.90
Warwickshire Police	15.25	16.51
West Mercia Police	13.26	13.65
West Midlands Police	11.89	12.45
West Yorkshire Police	14.18	14.98
Wiltshire Police	11.11	12.26
Total	13.26	13.63

Source:
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police statistics (Estimates)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the figures, by police force, of those individuals who successfully applied to join the constabulary from the ranks of the specials for each year since 1997. [47405]

Mr. Denham: Figures for recruits from the specials have not been collected consistently by forces. The figures that are available for the numbers of specials accepted to join the regular service have been collated by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and are set out in the table.

Force	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	22	28	9	14
Bedfordshire	9	7	0	11
Cambridgeshire	9	2	14	30
Cheshire	9	8	4	16
City of London	4	8	0	0
Cleveland	5	0	6	5
Cumbria	1	4	0	3
Derbyshire	22	18	22	[1]—
Devon and Cornwall	28	13	10	22
Dorset	24	6	5	16
Durham	10	12	8	13
Dyfed-Powys	[1]—	0	[1]—	10
Essex	13	30	18	38
Gloucestershire	3	6	8	5
Greater Manchester	38	16	23	32
Gwent	3	5	4	9
Hampshire	26	18	27	[1]—
Hertfordshire	3	18	10	12
Humberside	10	4	4	0
Kent	9	18	23	25
Lancashire	27	15	13	18
Leicestershire	16	13	11	19
Lincolnshire	3	0	0	8
Merseyside	25	27	6	6
Metropolitan Police	0	19	0	[1]—
Norfolk	4	0	5	17
Northamptonshire	4	5	1	18
Northumbria	10	15	10	36
North Wales	19	13	15	8
North Yorkshire	1	4	[1]—	0
Nottinghamshire	1	8	6	0
South Wales	11	15	7	10
South Yorkshire	17	9	13	[1]—
Staffordshire	35	[1]—	2	37
Suffolk	14	8	8	6
Surrey	0	8	16	9
Sussex	16	17	15	16
Thames Valley	28	16	12	16
Warwickshire	8	15	2	[1]—
West Mercia	1	2	10	8
West Midlands	2	25	11	[1]—
West Yorkshire	25	3	10	40
Wiltshire	6	2	5	13
England and Wales	521	460	373	546

[1] Not known

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to issue guidance on policing of demonstrations; and if he will make a statement. [48534]

Mr. Denham: Guidance has been issued to police forces on this subject by the Association of Chief Police Officer. For operational reasons, this has not been made publicly available.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* chief constables and *(b)* others concerning freemasonry in the police service. [46912]

Mr. Denham: I consulted the Association of Chief Police Officers earlier this year on ways to improve the level of registration of freemasonry membership by police officers. I will take their views into account before deciding what further measures might be necessary.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many funded police officers there have been in each year in the Bury St. Edmunds parliamentary constituency since 1998. [50583]

Mr. Denham: The information has been provided by the Chief constable (Paul Scott-Lee) Queens Police Medal (QPM). I am informed that the Bury St. Edmunds rural sector has only existed since 1999. It is therefore only possible to provide strength information from 1999. Information for actual strength in the financial years 1999–2000 to 2001–02 in the Bury St. Edmunds rural sector is set out in the table.

Bury St. Edmunds rural sector

Year[1]	*Number of officers*[2]
1999–2000	21
2000–01	21
2001–02	22

[1] As at 31 March of each financial year.
[2] Actual officer headcount.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is being given to police officers to improve autism awareness. [51203]

Mr. Denham: The basic training received by all recruits to the police service includes an element designed to raise awareness of mental disorder and to highlight the importance of communicating effectively and sensitively with people suffering from a mental disorder (including autism). Individual forces also provide further training for their officers on these issues. Details are not held centrally of such local provision.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance police officers receive about interviewing witnesses who may have an autistic spectrum disorder. [51204]

Mr. Denham: Training for police officers on interviewing witnesses takes place in forces, sometimes carried out jointly with local authorities.

Centrex will shortly publish an aide memoire for police officers, based on "Achieving Best Evidence", which includes guidance on best practice in interviewing witnesses who suffer from mental disorder or learning disability (including autistic spectrum disorder).

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to police forces on the *(a)* detention and *(b)* destruction of police notes taken during murder investigations, with special reference to the time limit for retaining notes. [47442]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* Police forces in England and Wales act in accordance with the Code of Practice issued under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996. This sets out the procedures for the retention and destruction of material obtained in a criminal investigation which may be relevant to the investigation. All material which may be relevant to the investigation must be retained until a decision is taken whether to institute proceedings against a person for an offence.

If a criminal investigation results in proceedings being instituted, all material which may be relevant must be retained at least until the accused is acquitted or convicted or the prosecutor decides not to proceed with the case. Where the accused is convicted, all material which may be relevant must be retained at least until:

the convicted person is released from custody, or discharged from hospital, in cases where the court imposes a custodial sentence or a hospital order;

six months from the date of conviction, in all other cases.

If an appeal against conviction is in progress when the release or discharge occurs, or at the end of the period of six months specified above, all material which may be relevant must be retained until the appeal is determined.

It is for each police force to determine their policy in relation to retention of material for certain criminal offences. For example, the Metropolitan police service retain all material relevant to a murder investigation for 25 years following a conviction.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recorded crimes of *(a)* violence against persons, *(b)* sexual offences, *(c)* robbery, *(d)* burglary, *(e)* total theft and handling stolen goods, *(f)* theft of and from vehicles, *(g)* fraud and forgery, *(h)* criminal damage, *(i)* drug offences and *(j)* other notifiable offences there were in (i) St. Helens police area and (ii) Merseyside police area in the years to (A) March 1999, (B) March 2000 and (C) March 2001. [51618]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* The requested information for Merseyside, and the available information for the St. Helens police Basic Command Unit, are given in the tables.

	Year ending		
Offence Group	*March 1999*	*March 2000*	*March 2001*
Recorded crimes for Merseyside			
Violence against the person	12,208	14,639	15,855
Sexual offences	1,019	935	982
Robbery	2,484	2,663	2,405
Burglary in a dwelling	14,177	13,606	12,514
Burglary in other building	12,321	12,032	11,424
Theft and handling stolen goods including:	59,044	62,230	57,844
Theft from vehicle	15,031	16,960	14,220
Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	15,306	16,775	16,157
Fraud and Forgery	4,884	4,794	5,021
Criminal damage	27,465	30,822	30,593
Drug Offences	5,620	4,838	4,421
Other Offences	1,652	1,613	1,748
Grand Total	140,874	148,172	142,807
Recorded crimes for the St. Helens Basic Command Unit[1]			
Violence against the person	n/a	1,693	1,795
Sexual offences	n/a	109	153
Robbery	n/a	171	168
Burglary in a dwelling	n/a	1,550	1,669
Theft from vehicle	n/a	2,000	1,923
Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	n/a	1,680	1,725

[1] A subset of recorded crime has been collected since 1 April 1999.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been *(a)* sick and *(b)* on light duties for (i) two to eight weeks, (ii) eight to 26 weeks and (iii) 26 weeks to one year in the last year for which information is available. [47123]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not collected centrally. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), however, collect data on the number of officers on long term sick leave (i.e. more than 28 days), the working days lost due to long term sickness and the number of days spent by officers on recuperative or restricted duties. 2000–01 is the last full year for which data is available.

Not all forces have systems in place to provide the full information requested by HMIC on sick leave. The data for 2000–01 is therefore incomplete but shows that at 31 March 2001, 2,591 officers were on long term sick leave. In the 12 month period ending 31 March 2001, 760,533 police officer working days were lost due to long-term sickness. Additionally the number of days spent by officers on recuperative duties in 2000–01 was 241,159.

The way in which police forces record sick leave duties is currently under review. This work will establish common standards to make data more comparable between forces.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what number and percentage of police officers in England and Wales who are entitled to retire early on grounds of ill health *(a)* chose to stay on in the police service in another role and *(b)* were offered and accepted a desk job in the last year for which figures are available; [50681]

(2) what number and percentage of police officers in England and Wales retired early for reasons of ill health in each year since 1996; what pension entitlements apply in these circumstances; and if he will make a statement. [50686]

Mr. Denham: Figures are not centrally available for the number of police officers medically certified as permanently disabled, and therefore eligible to be considered for medical retirement, but who are retained in their force. The figures relating to the number of ill health retirements are given in the table.

	Medical retirements	*Percentage of police strength*
1996–97	2,012	1.6
1997–98	1,827	1.4
1998–99	1,642	1.3
1999–2000	1,232	1.0
2000–01	1,209	1.0

An officer's pension entitlements on being compulsorily retired on ill health grounds depend on his or her length of pensionable service in the police pension scheme. An ill health pension, which is payable immediately on retirement, is calculated in a similar way to an ordinary pension but is subject to enhancement where an officer has at least five years' pensionable service. This is to compensate the officer at least in part for the lost opportunity of serving until normal retirement.

An ill health pension is subject to the limit of 40/60ths of average pensionable pay (app), which is the maximum ordinary pension, and is also subject to the qualification that pensionable service may not be enhanced to exceed what the officer could have completed by the age of compulsory retirement. The scale of benefits applicable is shown in the table.

Pensionable service	*Pension*
Less than 2 years	An ill health gratuity—no pension
2 to less than 5 years	Pension with no enhancement—1/60 of app per year
5 to 10 years	2/60 of app per year
More than 10 to 13 years	20/60 of app
More than 13 years	7/60 of app plus 1/60 for each year up to 20 2/60 for each year over 20

The Police Negotiating Board (PNB) are considering ways to deliver a fair and more consistent approach towards early retirement due to ill health. This should enable forces to reduce the level of ill-health retirement and match the performance of the best quartile of forces in 2000–01 by 2005. The measures under consideration include amendments to the Police Pensions Regulations and joint guidance being issued by the PNB to police authorities and senior management to ensure that wherever possible officers continue in employment where they are capable of performing sufficient duties to make their retention operationally justifiable.

In the White Paper on police reform the Government also announced that it will establish a national occupational health strategy for the police service, which should assist forces to manage cases of ill health more effectively at the outset.

HEALTH

General Social Care Council Codes of Practice

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the General Social Care Council Codes of Practice for *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees; and if he will place copies in the Library. [45629]

Jacqui Smith: Publication of the Codes of Practice is a matter for the General Social Care Council. The council is currently carrying out a major consultation exercise on draft codes. It expects to publish the codes in the summer. Copies will be placed in the Library.

RSV

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which section of the Government's proposed National Service Framework the issue of RSV immunisation falls. [41480]

Yvette Cooper: One of the external working groups driving forward work on the Children's National Service Framework has been set up to look at services needed by all children in order to maintain and promote good health. This will include issues such as childhood immunisation.

Hospital Planning

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors are taken into account when planning the future location and size of *(a)* hospital maternity services and *(b)* hospital paediatric services. [41402]

Yvette Cooper: The national health service provides care for women during pregnancy and childbirth in various types, sizes and locations of maternity units, including units within general hospitals or stand-alone units. The Department expects this choice to continue. It is for area strategic health authorities, trusts and local health communities to decide on the best pattern of service provision, taking into account the needs of local people, evidence of effectiveness and available resources. The Department has also set up a maternity and neonatal work force group to consider work force issues for various models for maternity care. Its findings will feed into the development of the maternity module of the Children's National Service Framework, which will be published at a later date.

The acute module of the new National Service Framework for Children will among other issues consider access to appropriate hospital paediatric services. It will be published later this year.

Variant-CJD

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has estimated the number of patients exposed to surgical instruments possibly contaminated with vCJD in each of the last five years. [41804]

Yvette Cooper: No. Because of the many uncertainties surrounding this issue—including the incubation period of vCJD and the difficulties of tracking individual instruments—we do not consider it feasible to make such an estimate. The risk assessment therefore did not predict the scale of any secondary epidemic of vCJD, instead, it developed different scenarios to address the various uncertainties—including the standard of decontamination—and gaps in our knowledge about vCJD.

The advice we had from the spongiform encephalopathology advisory committee was that good decontamination is key in reducing the risk of person to person transmission of vCJD via surgical instruments. This was confirmed by the risk assessment. As a result of the work we did last year on improving decontamination, all national health service hospitals in England have access to decontamination services of an acceptable standard.

Prescriptions

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were charged to patients in Shrewsbury and Atcham in each year since 1997. [41812]

Yvette Cooper: Information at a constituency level is not held centrally. The table shows the amount of prescriptions charged to patients in the Shropshire area.

Prescription items dispensed in Shropshire health authority by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only by charged prescriptions and those categories where no prescription charge is made, 1997–2000

	Charged total		Free	
	Number (thousand)	Percentage of total	Number (thousand)	Percentage of total
1997	517.1	16	2,763.8	84
1998	532.2	16	2,847.5	84
1999	566.5	16	2,978.5	84
2000	593.5	16	3,095.5	84

Note:
The analysis is based on a 1 in 20 sample of all prescriptions submitted to the PPA by community pharmacists and appliance contractors. Items dispensed by dispensing doctors and personal administration prescriptions are excluded.

Mental Health

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve access to mental health services for women from Asian, black and ethnic minority communities. [42391]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is introducing a range of initiatives to address issues of inequalities in access to mental health services for people from Asian, black and minority ethnic groups, including:

The development of a strategy for women's mental health which highlights the needs of women from black and minority ethnic groups.

A strategy on black and minority ethnic mental health, to promote more accessible and appropriate services for people from these groups.

Emergency Care

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what cash allocations have been made under the reforming emergency care accident and emergency nurse allocation for 2002–03 to each NHS trust in the northern region; upon what basis the allocations have been made; and which trusts are involved in PFI programmes. [43882]

Jacqui Smith: Cash allocations to national health service acute trusts in the Department's northern and Yorkshire region, under the reforming emergency care accident and emergency nurse allocation for 2002–03 are shown in the table. All trusts received funding for two additional nurse posts for each accident and emergency department. Trusts at which more than 25 per cent. of their accident and emergency attendees were spending over four hours in the Department received funding for a further six extra nurse posts in each accident and emergency department. The table also indicates those trusts that are involved in private finance initiative programmes.

NHS trust	Allocation (£)	PFI
Airedale	73,561	Yes
Bradford hospitals	73,561	Yes
Calderdale and Huddersfield	147,122	Yes
City hospitals Sunderland	73,561	No
Dewsbury health care	73,561	No
Gateshead health	73,561	No
Harrogate health care	73,561	No
Hull and East Yorkshire hospitals	73,561	Yes
Leeds teaching hospitals	588,488	Yes
Newcastle upon Tyne hospitals	73,561	Yes

NHS trust	Allocation (£)	PFI
North Cumbria acute	147,122	Yes
North Durham health care	588,488	Yes
North Tees and Hartlepool	147,122	No
Northallerton health services	73,561	Yes
Northumbria healthcare	147,122	Yes
Pinderfields and Pontefract	73,561	Yes
Scarborough and north-east Yorkshire health care	73,561	No
South Durham health care	73,561	Yes
South Tees acute hospitals	73,561	Yes
South Tyneside health care	73,561	No
York health services	73,561	No

National Institute for Technical Excellence

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time a *(a)* technology and *(b)* medicine appraisal has taken place under the auspices of the National Institute for Technical Excellence. [47862]

Yvette Cooper: The appraisal process of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence takes about one year from initial scoping work to the issue of final guidance. The timetable can be longer for appraisals which are particularly complex or where the determination is subject to appeal.

Diagnostic and Treatment Centres

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many diagnostic and treatment centres have been developed; how many are operational; and how many patients they have treated in the last 12 months. [47825]

Mr. Hutton: A "first wave" of eight diagnostic and treatment centres (DTCs) is due to be operational by the end of 2002. When these DTCs are up and running they will provide an extra 20,000 treatments a year.

The NHS is on course to meet the NHS plan commitment to have eight DTCs open by 2004 with a further 12 in development.

CT Scanner Procedures

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many extra CT scanner procedures have been carried out since the publication of the NHS National Plan. [47013]

Yvette Cooper: For the financial year 2000–01, there were a total of 1,488,752 computed tomography (CT) scans carried out by national health service trusts in England. This compares to 1,359,852 CT scans in the previous financial year.

Medical Records

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients have access to electronic personal medical records. [47001]

Yvette Cooper: At present no official figures are available on the proportion of patients who have been given direct on-line, secure access to their electronic medical records. However, we are aware of a number of sites who have taken forward work in this area. These include the Bury Knowle Health Centre (Oxford) and the Hadfield Medical Centre (Derbyshire) funded by the electronic record development and implementation programme (ERDIP). These sites, as well as the work being taken forward by the ERDIP site in south Staffordshire (how to satisfy requirement of law, ethic and policy), will inform policy development and any future national rollout.

School Fruit

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will specify the countries of origin of the fruit supplied as part of the National School Fruit Scheme. [47032]

Yvette Cooper: The countries of origin of fruit supplied to schools as part of the national school fruit scheme are the UK, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, New Zealand, Cameroon, South Africa, Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guadaloupe, Martinique, Surinam, Uruguay, USA and Windward Islands. The choice at any one time depends on season and crop in supplying countries.

MRI Procedures

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many MRI procedures have been carried out since the publication of the NHS National Plan. [47014]

Yvette Cooper: For the financial year 2000–01, there were a total of 632,594 magnetic resonance imaging scans carried out by national health service trusts in England.

Selenium

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on article 5 of the European Union food supplements directive and the potential banning of selenium. [48217]

Yvette Cooper: Article 5 of the proposed food supplements directive would establish the approach to setting maximum limits for vitamins and minerals present in food supplements. The Food Standards Agency, which has taken the lead on negotiating this directive on the Government's behalf, is now directing its energies towards arguing the case for these limits to be based on thorough scientific risk assessments and forging strong links between the scientific committee on foods and an expert group it has set up to advise on acceptable levels.

The positive list in annexe II of the directive, which lists permitted sources of vitamins and minerals, already includes three sources of selenium; additional sources may be added during the seven-year transitional period allowed under the directive.

Folic Acid

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of folic acid. [47419]

Yvette Cooper: A Medical Research Council trial in 1991 showed that supplementation with folic acid significantly reduced the risk of neural tube defects

(NTD) in women who had already been through a pregnancy affected by NTD. Following this, in 1992, the then Government issued guidance on supplementation. All women planning a pregnancy are advised to take a daily 400 milligramme supplement from before conception until the twelfth week of pregnancy. They are also advised to eat folate-rich foods.

In 2000, the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA) advised that fortification of wheat flour with folic acid would help to reduce the number of births affected by NTDs. However, COMA also recognised the potential for increased folic acid intake to mask vitamin B12 deficiency, particularly in older people. The level of fortification recommended by COMA aimed to minimise the number of people having intakes of folic acid which may mask B12 deficiency.

A consultation document on COMA's conclusions was issued in July 2000 jointly by the Health Departments and the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The majority of residents were in favour of fortification although this was not overwhelming (59 per cent.). The most common concerns were over the potential risks of fortification and the possible restriction of consumer choice.

Meat Products

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what outbreaks of disease in humans in Britain have been linked to the import of illegal meat products in the past five years. [46775]

Yvette Cooper: The UK organisations involved in the collection of foodborne disease data are not aware of any links of illegal imported meat products to outbreaks of foodborne disease in humans in the last five years.

Overseas Treatment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 27 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1412W, on overseas treatment, how many patients have travelled overseas to receive treatment in continental hospitals since 15 February; and from which health authorities. [47523]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Between 15 February and 22 April a total of 138 patients travelled overseas to receive treatment in continental hospitals. 57 of these patients were from East Kent, 36 from West Sussex and 45 from Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Richmond Friary Community Hospital for the Northallerton Health Services NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49511]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Withernsea Community Hospital for the Hull and East Riding Community Health NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49509]

(3) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Leeds Road Hospital-Horton Park Centre for Bradford Community Health NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49547]

Jacqui Smith: The business case justifying the individual schemes estimated the net savings in present value terms (ie all future costs and benefits discounted to their present values) compared with publicly funding the scheme is set out in the table.

Net present costs of PSC v. PFI option

Trust	*PFI £000*	*Public £000*	*Savings in net present value terms £000*	*Difference percentage*
Northallerton Health Services National Health Service Trust—Richmond Friary Community Hospital	2,457	3,722	1,265	0.05
Bradford Community Health National Health Service Trust—Horton Park Centre	7,136	8,350	1,214	0.17
Hull and East Riding Community Health National Health Service Trust—Withernsea Hospital	[1]729,926	[1]734,667	[1]4,741	[1]0.064

[1] Equivalent annual cost.

Research (Maternity and Paediatric Care)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* published on the relationship between maternity and paediatric care. [41405]

Yvette Cooper: The Department has not commissioned any such research. The maternity and neonatal work force group (MNWG) that was set up last year is considering the best models for providing maternity and neonatal care based on existing evidence.

Paediatrics

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paediatric intensive care beds have been *(a)* funded, *(b)* established and *(c)* staffed by quarter in the last five years for which figures are available. [41478]

Yvette Cooper: The number of paediatric intensive care beds that are funded, established and staffed for each quarter for the last five years is not collected centrally.

The number of available paediatric intensive care beds is collected in an annual census. Available beds are those beds available to be used/or being used by patients. The information is given in the following table.

Paediatric intensive care beds available at 31 March, England

	Available number of paediatric intensive care beds
31 March 2001	291
31 March 2000	280
31 March 1999	278
31 March 1998	289
31 March 1997	235

Source:
Department of Health form KH03

NHS Efficiency Savings

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the level of *(a)* waste, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* inefficiency in the NHS in each of the last five years; and what measures he has introduced to reduce the level. [46730]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department monitors and manages the performance of the NHS in the delivery of the key targets set out in the "NHS Plan". In addition, the NHS is subject to external independent audit by the Audit Commission and the National Audit Office. They publish a number of studies each year on the value for money of aspects of the NHS. The Department considers each of these reports, and implements their recommendations where appropriate.

Analysis using data from November 1998 identified £117 million of pharmaceutical patient fraud. Further analysis showed that this had been reduced to £48 million by 1999 (41 per cent.). A range of measures have been introduced to reduce fraud, including patient exemption checks and a penalty charge where a person fails to pay appropriate NHS charges.

In addition, we have set about improving governance arrangements to ensure the necessary standards of accountability, probity and openness through the introduction in 1999 of the controls assurance standards.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what total sum was achieved for efficiency and other value for money gains in the NHS in 2000–01. [47729]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Allocations to health authorities (HAs) in 2000–01 were made net of 3 per cent. efficiency savings. This means that HAs needed to achieve the efficiency target to fully fund delivery of national targets.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the draft scheme for the Food Standards Agency to comply with Welsh language obligations has been finalised; and when it will be implemented. [49227]

Yvette Cooper: Following a period of public consultation, the draft Welsh Language Scheme was approved by the Welsh Language Board on 5 March 2002. The scheme will be officially launched shortly. Many aspects of the scheme have already been adopted by the food Standards Agency.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the service delivery agreement target of the Food Standards Agency to ensure effective enforcement of animal feed legislation has been met. [49247]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is carrying out a number of initiatives to ensure effective enforcement of animal feed legislation. In particular, the FSA is making available over £7 million to local authorities to help them increase enforcement of food legislation.

Feed law enforcement is part of the FSA's Framework Agreement with Local Authorities on Food Law Enforcement. Returns being provided under that agreement will help the FSA to check the use of resources and ensure feed controls are being properly enforced. The initial results are not yet available.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the service delivery agreement target of the Food Standards Agency to undertake additional research into new techniques for assessing the safety of genetically modified foods has been met. [49246]

Yvette Cooper: A three year research programme looking at the applicability of new and emerging techniques to the safety assessment of genetically modified foods began in September 2001.

Hospices

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 536W, on hospices, what assessment he has made of the proportion of patients who died from cancer in hospital who could have received terminal palliative care in hospices had there been sufficient capacity in the last five years. [47131]

Yvette Cooper: No such assessment has been made. Palliative care should involve a combination of services including hospital, hospice, community and day care. We know that, given the choice and the right circumstances, many people with cancer would prefer to die at home. Cancer networks have been asked to draw up service delivery plans on palliative care, including a review of the level of services offered in their area. These plans will aim to ensure that each network has a range of palliative care services available to suit the local population. They will be supported by the extra funding for palliative care pledged in the NHS Cancer Plan.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contribution the Government makes to the independent hospice sector towards the cost of *(a)* employment of doctors and nurses and *(b)* drugs, provision of ambulances and other medical services. [48721]

Yvette Cooper: Funding for hospices is a matter for local decision, based on a strategic view of palliative care services. In the NHS Cancer Plan we pledged an additional £50 million per year nationally for specialist palliative care by 2004. We are monitoring progress in providing this extra investment.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in state funding of independent charitable hospices in the last five years. [48723]

Yvette Cooper: There are wide variations both in the range of funding from the national health service and in the provision of specialist palliative care services across the country. We are committed to improving palliative care. That is why we have pledged to make available an additional £50 million by 2004 for palliative care so that the NHS can make an adequate contribution to the costs hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service. The additional funding will mean that for the first time, NHS investment in specialist palliative care services as a whole will match that of the voluntary sector. We are monitoring progress in providing this increased investment.

Mount Vernon Hospital

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the review of cancer services at Mount Vernon Hospital is expected to be published; and if he will make a statement. [48902]

Yvette Cooper: The long-term review of the Mount Vernon Cancer Network and Centre includes stakeholders from the London and south-east regions and has been looking at the long-term options for the provision of high quality cancer services to the two million people who currently use Mount Vernon hospital. The review is scheduled to be published in June 2002.

Butchers' Licensing Regulations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated annual cost *(a)* to butchers and *(b)* to public funds is of the implementation and enforcement of the Butchers' Licensing Regulations. [49255]

Yvette Cooper: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) was published in April 2000 to coincide with the introduction of the Butchers' Licensing Regulations in England.

The RIA estimated the annual cost per butcher's shop would be approximately £490, comprising £100 payable by the butcher on receipt of a licence from the local authority and an average cost of £390 per shop for staff hygiene training necessary to satisfy one of the licensing conditions. The total recurring compliance costs for the butchery sector were estimated at £3.3 million per annum.

The annual costs to public funds stem from the issue of licences by the local authorities. The RIA estimated the £100 licence fee, which is retained in full by the issuing local authority, would offset these costs.

A copy of the RIA is available in the Library.

Separate butchers' licensing schemes have been introduced in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and are the responsibility of the devolved administrations in those parts of the United Kingdom.

Doctors

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of doctors is per 100 beds in the Suffolk health authority. [50585]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is in the table.

Hospital medical staff per 100 beds in Suffolk health authority

	Number
Hospital medical staff	580
Average daily available beds	1,660
Doctors per 100 beds[1]	34.8

[1] Calculation based on unrounded figures

Sources:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census at 30 September 2000

Department of Health form KH03 2000–01

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times the Suffolk health authority has reached its bed blocking targets since February. [50580]

Jacqui Smith: Suffolk health economy is working hard to reduce the number of delayed transfers of care, and has more than met its target for the end of March. This is in line with the overall national trend.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time between a child on the Register of Special Educational Needs being referred to a speech therapist and the first consultation taking place has been in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [51052]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Data on waiting times for children accessing speech therapy services following referral are not collected centrally. However, we are aware that children make up more than 70 per cent. of the work load of speech and language therapists (SLTs) and it is important that appropriate treatment and interventions are accessed as soon as a problem is identified.

The NHS Plan sets a target to reduce the maximum wait for any stage of treatment to three months. Provided we can recruit and retain the extra staff, and the national health service makes the necessary reforms, we hope to achieve this objective by the end of 2008.

We also announced in the NHS Plan an increase in the number of training places for therapists and other health professionals including SLTs. By 2004 there will be 4,450 more training places. Current initiatives including the grading exercise under way in all speech and language therapy services in England will result in improved pay and career opportunities for SLTs. We firmly believe that this initiative will help in the recruitment and retention of SLTs currently working, the return of therapists who have left the profession, and an increase of applicants for training places.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 6 December 2001 from Mrs. Linda Greatorex, and subsequent correspondence of 27 March. [51398]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* A reply was sent on 22 April.

Walton *v.* Independent Living Organisation

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the possible implications of the Employment Appeals Tribunal case Walton *v.* Independent Living Organisation (EAT/0731/01); and if he will make a statement. [51509]

Jacqui Smith: The Employment Appeals Tribunal in this case is still considering the judgment. It is therefore not appropriate for me to comment.

East Riding and Hull Health Authority

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects a decision to be made on how many posts will be made redundant following the termination of the East Riding and Hull health authority. [51814]

Jacqui Smith: It is too early to assess how many redundancies may be made following the replacement of the East Riding and Hull health authority. Following "Shifting the Balance of Power" every effort is being made to minimise redundancies and ensure that valuable skills and experience are retained to support the national health service.

Pneumococcal Disease

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money is available in the NHS budget in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04 for the immunisation of all children under two years against pneumococcal disease; and if he will make a statement. [51927]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 24 April 2002]:* No decision on immunisation of all children under two years can be taken until the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has reviewed all available evidence and given advice to Ministers. Studies on the use of the vaccine within the UK schedule will not be complete until later in the financial year 2002–03.

The national health service budget for 2003–04 will increase by 7.6 per cent. in real growth terms. Decisions have not yet been taken regarding the allocation of funding.

Elderly People (Health Care)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into the general practitioner service needs of elderly people. [53329]

Jacqui Smith: The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in health and social care.

The Department's policy research programme is funding three relevant projects. These are:

an evaluation of inequalities in influenza vaccination coverage in the elderly;

a prospective study of health inequalities and informal care; and

a randomised controlled trial to evaluate the health effects of welfare advice in primary health care.

The Department's policy research programme is also co-funding the Medical Research Council's study of assessment and management of elderly people in the community.

The Department's health technology assessment programme is funding four relevant projects. These are:

the community provision of hearing aids—a systematic review of the evidence;

the use of laxatives in the elderly;

the effectiveness of health visitor domiciliary visiting—a systematic review of the literature; and,

an economic evaluation of a primary care based patient education programme for osteoarthritis of the knee.

In addition, the Department allocates funds to the national health service to support research commissioned by the research councils and charities. Management of the research supported by NHS research and development funding is devolved. This research activity is reported to the National Research Register, which may be consulted at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

NHS Patients (Treatment Abroad)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether *(a)* the local health authorities or *(b)* the private health care companies involved in sending NHS patients for treatment abroad have the final decision in selecting individual patients for the project. [53323]

Mr. Hutton: The local health authorities involved in sending patients overseas have been responsible for identifying groups of patients to whom the opportunity of treatment overseas should be offered. The final decision on whether a patient should be treated in an overseas hospital rests with the receiving clinician. The essential clinical criteria are that patients are fit to undergo the journey and that in the clinician's opinion they require treatment.

St. Thomas's Hospital

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what budget is available for cancer treatment at St. Thomas's Hospital; and what the budget was in each of the last five years. [53296]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not held centrally.

Residential/Nursing Home Beds

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average occupancy rates are for *(a)* residential home beds and *(b)* nursing home beds in the last 12 months; and whether the figures he collates for capacity in those homes are based on (i) actual occupancy and (ii) availability for use; [53272]

(2) what assessment he has made of the number of *(a)* residential home beds and *(b)* nursing home beds which are unoccupied and likely to de-register for use in the next 12 months. [53268]

Jacqui Smith: In March 2001 (the most recent date for which figures are available) the occupancy rate for private residential homes was 90.4 per cent. In March 2000 the respective figures were 88.3 per cent. and 88.4 per cent. These figures were collated by care consultants, Laing and Buisson, and are based on occupied beds as a percentage of registered beds. Comparative figures for local authority owned homes are not available.

As announced on 17 April by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we are increasing the resources for personal social services by an annual average of 6 per cent. in real terms from 2003–04 to 2005–06. Local authorities will be able to use these substantial extra resources to stabilise the care home market.

Kidney Disease

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding his Department is making

available for research into kidney disease in 2002; and of this how much is to go to *(a)* companies and *(b)* charities. [53319]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes and treatments for disease in the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC's expenditure on kidney disease in 2001–02 was £1.9 million.

The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in health and social care. The Department's policy research programme is spending £87,380 on kidney disease projects in 2002–03. The Department's health technology assessment programme is spending £71,210 on kidney disease projects in 2002–03.

In addition, the Department allocates funds to the national health service to support research commissioned by the research councils and charities. Management of the research supported by NHS research and development (R and D) funding is devolved, and details of the NHS expenditure related to this research are not held centrally. NHS R and D funding does not support companies' research.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* African-Caribbean and *(b)* Asian people in the United Kingdom have suffered from kidney disease in each year since 1997; and what the survival rate is. [53318]

Jacqui Smith: The source of information on the ethnicity of kidney patients is the UK renal registry. Submission of data is voluntary and coverage by all units in England is not yet universal. In those units that submitted data in 2000 an average 3.3 per cent. of all new adult patients were from the African-Caribbean minority ethnic group and 9.7 per cent. were Asian people. A breakdown of adult patients continuing to receive renal replacement therapy shows that 3.7 per cent. were from the African-Caribbean minority ethnic group and 10.1 per cent. were from the Asian community. Information on survival broken down into ethnic groups is not yet available.

NHS Finance

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) on 26 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 945W, on NHS finance, when he will publish the annual audited accounts for NHS trusts, health authorities and PCTs. [53299]

Mr. Hutton: Individual national health service bodies are required to publish their own accounts so that they are available in advance of the public meeting which should be held on 30 September.

Provisional 2001–02 data will normally be available once validation checks have been completed by the Department in November. 2002.

Liver Transplants

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS was of liver transplants in the last 12 months. [53290]

Jacqui Smith: The liver transplant service is a national service commissioned by the national specialist commissioning group (NSCAG) on behalf of the national health service. In the last financial year (2001–02) NSCAG allocated £33,549,549 to the service.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many liver transplants he estimates will be required in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* in five years' time. [53288]

Jacqui Smith: It is difficult to estimate the total potential demand for liver transplants. However, the median waiting time for a transplant for adults is only 60 days. At the end of March this year there were only 131 English residents on the waiting list and each year some 550 to 600 transplants are performed on English residents depending on the availability of suitable organs. The number of transplants performed in the current year should fall within the same range.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many liver transplants have taken place in each of the last five years. [53291]

Jacqui Smith: The total number of liver transplants (adults and children) performed by the designated units in England in each of the last five years is:

	Number
1997–98	547
1998–99	568
1999–2000	590
2000–01	549
2001–02	555

Private Sector (Statistics)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many day cases have been carried out in the private sector since November 2000; [47861]

(2) how many out-patient appointments have been carried out in the private sector since November 2000; [47860]

(3) how many in-patient treatments have been carried out in the private sector since November 2000. [47868]

Mr. Hutton: We do not collect information on the total number of appointments and treatments provided by the private health care providers. We do, however, have information on services provided for national health service patients. Since November 2000 the Independent Healthcare Association (IHA) has collected monthly data from independent health care providers (which includes both private and voluntary sector providers) about the number of NHS patients treated by them. According to data made available to the Department by the IHA, between November 2000 and January 2002 (the latest month for which figures are available) at least 25,000 day cases, 34,500 out-patient appointments and 28,500 in-patient treatments were carried out in the independent sector for NHS patients.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 30 April 2002

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Sentence Review

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Solicitor-General how many applications he has received in the last 12 months via *(a)* the CPS, *(b)* members of the public and *(c)* hon. Members for the review of unduly lenient sentences; and how many in each category have (i) been rejected as out of time, (ii) been reviewed resulting in referral to the CPS, (iii) been reviewed resulting in referral to the courts and (iv) resulted in increased sentences. [51992]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General have the power (under sections 35 and 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1998) to refer a sentence for certain categories of offences to the Court of Appeal for review, if it appears to be not merely lenient but unduly so.

The law requires a reference to be lodged with the Court of Appeal within 28 days of the date of sentence. This period cannot be extended.

During the last year (from 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002) the Crown Prosecution Service sent 191 cases to the Law Officers for a review of the sentence as an unduly lenient sentence.

In addition the Law Officers received similar applications in 17 cases from members of the public, and a further five cases from Members of Parliament. The Law Officers have also received three ULS referral cases from HM Customs and Excise.

In all, during the relevant period, the Law Officers have received applications for a referral in 216 cases.

Two (out of the 17) cases referred by members of the public were received beyond the 28-day time limit for referral and therefore could not be considered for a reference to the Court of Appeal.

Of the 216 cases sent to the Law Officers, 110 were referred by the Law Officers to the Court of Appeal for a review of the sentence.

According to our records, of these, to date, the Court of Appeal has heard 49 cases. Of the 49 cases heard, the results known to date indicate that the Court of Appeal granted leave in 45 cases and found the sentence to be unduly lenient in 44 cases. Despite concluding that a sentence is unduly lenient, the Court of Appeal can, in the circumstances of a particular case, apply its discretion and decide not to increase the sentence. In eight of the cases the Court of Appeal, applying its discretion decided not to increase the sentence. However it increased the sentence in 36 cases.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Free School Meals

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will rank each constituency in England by the percentage of school children eligible for free school meals. [51288]

John Healey: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost to his Department of litigation was in each year. [41115]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), and its predecessor the Department for Education and Employment and the Employment Service, defended the following Employment Tribunals in the years from 1997:

	Cases	*Concluded in Department's favour*
1997	3	2
1998	4	4
1999	1	1
2000	—	—
2001	—	—
2002	—	—

The total cost to the Department of defending Employment Tribunal cases each year is not available.

The DfES has no agencies.

Relocation

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of her Department to Scotland. [47949]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* This Department does not have any executive agencies. It has twelve non-executive non-departmental public bodies, one of which, the Student Loans Company, is located in Scotland. There are no plans to relocate any others.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the ILA providers against whom complaints which remain unresolved were *(a)* received by Capita and *(b)* passed to her Department, showing the number of complaints. [49880]

John Healey *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Capita notified the Department of some 8,600 complaints relating to non-compliance with the ILA programme rules and ILA accounts being accessed without the ILA account holder's consent. Following a data cleansing exercise some 1,400 complaints have been removed relating to complaints cleared, correction of duplicate complaints

received by, for example, telephone and letter and correction of other anomalies. The remaining 7,200 unresolved complaints relate to 658 registered learning providers. It is not possible to list the 656 Individual Learning Account (ILA) providers as this information is treated as commercially sensitive.

The revised total complaints figure is some 17,100.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what responsibility her Department had to put the learndirect database into a form in which it could be used to accredit ILA providers; and when, and what, action has been taken to give effect to that responsibility. [49881]

John Healey *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The learndirect database holds details of over 500,000 learning opportunities. The intention is to work towards a comprehensive coverage of all UK learning opportunities. To have their course included on the database providers simply apply via the learndirect website. There is no charge for this service. Inclusion on the database does not imply endorsement, quality assurance or accreditation of providers or their provision and there are no plans to change this approach.

ILA providers were encouraged to list their courses on the learning opportunities website to ensure that Individual Learning Account holders could get information and advice about the learning that was available through learndirect. However, this did not constitute an ILA accreditation process. Full integration of the ILA and learndirect databases was not pursued because of the technical difficulties surrounding data incompatibility.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money was claimed in total for individual learning account payments of more than £200 in the period from September 2000 to 20 October 2000; how many claims for ILAs in that period were for amounts *(a)* less than £200, *(b)* in the range £201 to £500, *(c)* in the range £501 to £1,000 and *(d)* above £1,000; how many providers submitted individual claims for more than £1,000; and if she will make a statement. [51960]

John Healey: Between September 2000 and 20 October 2000, Individual Learning Account discounts totalling £18,389,766.66 were paid to learning providers who had claimed a discount of more than £200 for a single account holder. A further breakdown is provided that, in addition, includes the number of payments made to learning providers who had claimed a discount of less than £200 for a single account holder.

Range	*Number of learning episodes*
Less than £200	30,590
£200 to £500	1,390
£501 to £1,000	2,300
More than £1,000	6,558

During the same period 164 learning providers submitted at least one claim of more than £1,000 for a single account holder.

Following 20 October 2000 a number of appeals made in relation to the introduction of the cap on the per cent. discount were upheld. As a result, a further £3,459,209 was paid to learning providers.

Asylum Seekers (Education)

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the availability of appropriate teaching staff in the proposed accommodation centres. [52101]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: No such assessment has yet been made as the sites of the proposed accommodation centres have not been decided by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Rural Bus Routes

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will examine the case for subsidising councils to fund rural bus routes to schools and to help families furthest from schools. [50922]

John Healey: I am aware of the increasing costs for home to school transport faced by councils in rural areas. We are considering these costs in working up a new local education authority funding system which will be introduced in 2003–04.

Pay Gap

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress the Government have made in closing the pay gap between teachers in schools and colleges. [51303]

Mr. Timms: Teachers in maintained schools are subject to national school teachers' pay and conditions. Further education sector colleges are run by independent corporations established under the Further Education and Higher Education Act 1992 and there is no national pay structure in place. Colleges are free to establish pay scales that meet their needs and can be agreed with their staff. This Government have acknowledged the historic funding gap between schools and FE and we have pledged to bring up levels of funding and ensure upward convergence over time. The Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI) budget is £311 million over the period 2001–04. This is to reward excellent teaching and is over and above any general pay rise. The additional investment we are making in the FE sector through normal core funding will also make an important contribution.

Education Act

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which children are excluded from the exercise of a local authority's functions under section 14 of the Education Act 1996. [51800]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 (the 1996 Act) sets out the duty of the local education authority (LEA) to provide sufficient primary and secondary schools for its area. Schools must be sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide education for all pupils, suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and the different periods for which they may remain at school, including appropriate practical instruction and training.

Section 14 does not impose any duty in respect of children under five. It allows an LEA to provide education for people over compulsory school age and under 19, including those from other areas.

In exercising its functions under section 14, an LEA must have regard to the need to provide primary and secondary education in different schools, the need to secure special educational provision for pupils with special educational needs, and the expediency of securing boarding provision where necessary.

The duty is general and does not give rise to a specific duty for an individual child or for a class of children.

None of the LEA's duties under the 1996 Act applies in respect of any person who is in custody because of a court order or an order of recall made by the Secretary of State.

Further Education (Incomplete Courses)

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of further education college students failed to complete their courses in the last two years. [52280]

John Healey: 17 per cent. in both 1999–2000 and 1998–99.

Students may take more than one qualification and complete a proportion of them, so the completion rate is calculated on the basis of qualifications. The figures relate to qualifications due for completion in these years in further education colleges in England.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will make a statement on the criteria that were used to decide on the recent allocations of PFI/PPP to local authorities; [52325]

(2) what bids were received from Gloucestershire local education authority for access to PFI/PPP funds in the recent round; and what discussions took place between her officials and local authority officers as a result, including debriefing on the bid. [52326]

John Healey *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Department issued guidance to all local education authorities on 31 July 2001 setting out the criteria against which all bids for capital allocations, including PFI credits, would be assessed. Paragraph 2.5.12 of that guidance sets out in some detail the specific criteria for PFI bids.

Gloucestershire local education authority submitted a bid for PFI funding in the recent round to replace three secondary schools. A meeting has been arranged between local authority officers and a senior official from the Schools Private Finance Team on 26 April 2002, at which debriefing on the unsuccessful bid will be given.

School Funding

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by what means she will ensure that the additional payments to primary and secondary schools, referred to in the Chancellor's Budget, reach the schools. [52363]

John Healey: All the direct funding for schools of which the Chancellor gave examples in his recent Budget speech goes to schools. It is for schools themselves to decide how this money is used within the context of standard guidance.

The Chancellor announced additional capital funding of £85 million for schools and colleges in England in 2002–03, which will be delivered to schools as an additional allocation of the existing New Deal for Schools devolved formula capital programme. This money is allocated by formula with a fixed amount per school plus a fixed amount per pupil. It is channelled through local education authorities, which must allocate it to schools using the standard national formula, and may not retain any part of the grant. Schools can hold this grant in their own suitable bank accounts, on request.

The Chancellor also included school standards grant in his examples of what typical schools will receive in 2002–03. This recurrent funding is again passported to schools through local education authorities, which must pass on 100 per cent. of the grant. Schools can use this grant for their priorities to improve educational attainment.

Salaries

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent on salaries in schools in England in 2001–02. [52514]

Mr. Timms: The total teachers' pay bill for the financial year 2001–02 was £13,585 million and covered 421,300 qualified and unqualified full-time equivalent teachers in maintained schools in England. My Department does not record the cost of salaries of non-teaching staff in schools.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average annual salary is for *(a)* a newly qualified teacher in mainstream secondary schools in England and *(b)* a newly qualified lecturer in colleges and further education in England. [52586]

Mr. Timms: In the financial year 2001–02 the average pay of newly qualified teachers in maintained secondary schools in England and Wales was estimated to be £17,480.

The Department does not collect data on average pay of new entrants to lecturing in Further Education colleges in England and Wales.

Compensation Awards

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the total amount of compensation awards against schools and colleges in each of the past five years. [52527]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not collect central records of compensation claims against schools and colleges.

Teacher Training

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher training places have been available in each of the past 10 years. [52524]

Mr. Timms: The number of available places on courses of initial teacher training (ITT) at institutions in England is shown in the table.

Number of available places to ITT in England, 1992–93 to 2001–02.

Academic year	*Number of available places*
1992–93	24,370
1993–94	27,905
1994–95	29,590
1995–96	29,115
1996–97	30,400
1997–98	30,550
1998–99	30,600
1999–2000	28,610
2000–01	29,715
2001–02	29,890

Source: DfES

The figures do not include places available through employment-based teacher training schemes.

Sixth Forms and Colleges

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment her Department has made of the value to teachers *(a)* in further education colleges and *(b)* in schools with sixth forms of this year's pay proposals. [52563]

Mr. Timms: Sixth form teachers in schools have received a pay award of 3.5 per cent. with effect from 1 April, together with a new allowance of £33 in respect of the cost of the fee payable to the General Teaching Councils for England or Wales. Teachers below the maximum of the main pay scale may also receive assimilation increases when the scale is shortened from nine to six points on 1 September. The 2002–03 pay negotiations between the Association of Colleges and representative further education unions started on 16 April and are currently ongoing. I am unable to make an assessment of the value to further education teachers and lecturers at this time.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on teacher morale in *(a)* further education colleges and *(b)* schools with sixth forms. [52567]

Mr. Timms: We are taking action together with the School Teachers' Review Body and the school teacher employers and unions to address the problem of teacher workload; and pay for a good experienced classroom teacher who has passed the performance threshold has increased by nearly 30 per cent. since 1997. We take very seriously the need to raise the status and morale of the teaching profession. The assessment of further education staff morale is a matter for further education colleges, as independent employers, to address in consultation with the relevant unions, just as the terms and conditions for staff are a matter for colleges to determine in discussion with relevant unions. We acknowledge that colleges need help to ensure that they have the right arrangements to recruit, reward and retain excellent teachers. Over the period 2001–04, significant extra resources amounting to an additional £311 million have been made available to the further education sector to reward high calibre staff through our Teaching Pay Initiative.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate her Department has made of the average number of hours per week worked by teachers in *(a)* further education colleges and *(b)* schools with sixth forms over the last 12 months. [52568]

John Healey: Information about hours worked is collected for the School Teachers Review Body by the Office for Manpower Economics. The latest information relates to March 2000. It showed average weekly hours as follows:

	Average weekly hours
Head teachers	60.8
Deputy head teachers	58.6
Heads of department	52.9
Other teachers	51.3

These figures are based on diaries kept by teachers in a survey undertaken during a typical term-time week. Averages have not been estimated over 12 months, i.e. including school holidays.

Comparable information is not available for teachers in further education.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of average class sizes in *(a)* further education colleges and *(b)* schools with sixth forms. [52569]

John Healey: In January 2001 in maintained secondary schools the average class sizes for National Curriculum Year Groups 12 and 13, for classes taught by one teacher, were 11.9 and 9.4 respectively.

Information on class sizes in FE colleges is not available.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on *(a)* pay scales for teachers and *(b)* the allocation of funds per A-level student in (i) further education colleges and (ii) secondary schools with sixth forms. [52571]

Mr. Timms: Pay scales for schools teachers have increased by 3.5 per cent. with effect from 1 April, and a new allowance of £33 created in respect of the cost of the fee payable to the General Teaching Councils for England or Wales. The main pay scale now has nine points from £16,599 to £25,713. This will reduce to six points from £17,595 to £25,713 with effect from 1 September. The upper pay scale for post-threshold teachers has five points from £27,861 to £32,217. The pay spine for advanced skills teachers runs from £28,917 to £46,131. The pay spine for the leadership group runs from £30,531 to £85,671. Further education sector colleges are run by independent corporations established under the Further Education and Higher Education Act 1992 and there is no national pay structure in place. Colleges are free to establish pay scales that meet their needs and can be agreed with their staff. We continue to encourage employers and unions to work together to ensure that further education staff receive reasonable pay given the substantial extra funding that has been made available for the further education sector.

The figures for school and college funding have not been calculated on the same basis and cannot therefore be used to make comparisons. The further education unit

funding figure includes total public funding allocated for further education, while the schools' figure does not. It is based only on delegated funds and excludes other funding the school receives centrally from LEAs which impacts on post-16 students. The latest estimate of the average delegated funding per sixth form student in schools per year in England for 2001–02 is £3,330. The total funding per full-time equivalent student in further education sector colleges per year in England for 2001–02 is estimated to be £3,660.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by her Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost; [52817]

(2) if she will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by her Department, stating for each subscription the *(a)* number of copies taken and *(b)* annual cost. [52818]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many digital radios are owned by her Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52850]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The information requested could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Productivity Growth

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what performance indicators and targets she has established by which to assess her Department's contribution to the Government's objective of raising the UK's sustainable rate of productivity growth. [52933]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Education and Skills policy is central to achieving the Government's objective of raising the UK's sustainable rate of productivity growth. The Department's objectives and targets have a crucial role to play in achieving this.

The DTI UK Competitiveness Indicators Report suggests that economic performance has been held back by poor basic skills and a shortage of intermediate-level qualifications. Our targets to raise the proportion of 19-year-olds achieving level 2 and level 3 qualifications will help to address this.

By 2010, it is forecast that 80 per cent. of new jobs will be in higher level occupations, which are the ones graduates are most likely to fill. This illustrates the importance of our target to increase participation in higher education to 50 per cent. of 18 to 30-year-olds by 2010.

Isolating the effect of education and skills policy on productivity is not straightforward, but productivity is strongly linked to earnings. We are committed to reducing the number of adults who have poor literacy or numeracy skills by 750,000 by 2004. The returns to better numeracy skills are estimated to be between 6 per cent. and 10 per cent. of earnings, and the returns to better literacy skills up to 6 per cent.

In addition, there are significant social returns to post-compulsory academic and vocational qualifications. For example, the social rates of return to A levels and first degrees are estimated to be in the range of 14–21 per cent. and 8–10 per cent. respectively.

Further Education (Achievement)

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of students in further education achieved the qualification for which they were studying in the last two years. [53060]

John Healey: Achievement rates for Further Education colleges in England are defined as the number of qualifications achieved as a proportion of the number of completed qualifications. The achievement rate in 1999–2000 was 73 per cent. of completed qualifications and the figure for 1998–99 was 71 per cent. Individual learners may be taking more than one qualification.

Qualifications

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made in achieving national targets for Level 2 qualifications. [53088]

John Healey: We have already achieved our target for 2002 for 50 per cent. of pupils to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C (or equivalent). On current trends the target of 85 per cent. of 19-year- olds achieving a Level 2 qualification by 2002, set in 1998 with advice from the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets, is unlikely to be reached. We are working closely with the Learning and Skills Council to ensure maximum progress is being made by implementing specific local and innovative approaches to improving level 2 attainment. The Government are introducing a range of new initiatives which will increase participation in learning and attainment by young people post 16 including Education Maintenance Allowances, Connexions and the reforms to the 14–19 curriculum published in the Green Paper (14–19—Extending Opportunities; Raising Standards) though these will not impact by 2002.

Jobcentre Plus

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of Jobcentre Plus's capacity to support her Department's policies to improve adult literacy and numeracy skills; and what steps she is taking in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions to increase the number of referrals from Jobcentre Plus to providers of basic learning skills. [53092]

John Healey: The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is working with us to implement "Skills for Life": our national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. DWP has developed and increased Jobcentre Plus's capacity to do this, including, from April 2001, national screening for basic skills need of jobseekers and those on voluntary New Deals at the six month stage of unemployment. The impact of these

changes is now being evaluated. In addition, we are examining the early results of six pilots, testing the effect of new approaches to improving the basic skills of those on jobseeker's allowance, which ran from September 2001 to March 2002. These measures, together with the continued training of Jobcentre Plus staff, will ensure that the number of referrals from Jobcentre Plus to providers of basic learning skills will continue to increase and that by working effectively across Government, we can together achieve our target of 750,000 adults with better basic skills by 2004.

Sector Skills Development Agency

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to announce the location for the Sector Skills Development Agency. [53337]

John Healey: I announced on 25 April that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has chosen the Callflex business park in the Dearne valley, south Yorkshire as the location for the Sector Skills Development Agency. The business park is a new office development in the Dearne valley enterprise zone that was developed as part of the Dearne valley regeneration strategy, in the wake of coal mine closures in the 1980s.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what buildings owned by her Department have solar panels installed. [53497]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Buildings owned by my Department have no solar panels installed.

Teachers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many supply teachers are working in each local education authority area; and what percentage supply teachers comprise of the total number of teachers in each case; [53664]

(2) pursuant to the publication of Teachers in Service and Teacher Vacancies, January 2002 (Provisional), if she will provide a breakdown by local education authority of each of the 12 tables. [53670]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not yet available for every local education authority.

Information on teachers and vacancies by local education authority will be published in the Teachers in England statistical volume in December 2002.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers have passed through the performance threshold, expressed as *(a)* a total and *(b)* a percentage of these eligible to do so. [53666]

Mr. Timms: About 194,000 maintained sector teachers in England were assessed as meeting the threshold standards in the first (2000) round of assessment. This is equivalent to about three quarters of those estimated to have been eligible to apply. The outcomes of the second (2001) round are still being analysed.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers in each local education authority were teaching a subject for which they had no relevant subject qualifications on the date of the 2002 Teacher Census; and what percentage this was of the total number of teachers in post in that LEA area. [53668]

Mr. Timms: The information requested was not collected in the 2002 Teacher Census. It will be collected at national level as part of the Secondary Schools Curriculum and Staffing Survey. Preparations for the next survey are in hand.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will provide a breakdown, by country of origin, of teachers in maintained schools in England without qualified teacher status and not on routes to QTS, giving the number of teachers from each country; [53669]

(2) how many teachers without qualified teacher status in maintained schools in England came from *(a)* outside and *(b)* within the European economic area. [53671]

Mr. Timms: Information is not collected on country of origin of teachers.

Maintained Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will place *(a)* documents, *(b)* circulars, *(c)* questionnaires and *(d)* consultation papers which DfEE or DES have circulated to maintained schools in the last five years in the Library. [53672]

Mr. Timms: The Department already places all legal documents and key policy documents in the Library, but not ephemeral items such as questionnaires. The Library has a full list of titles sent to schools following an answer given to the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) on 6 March 2002.

Electronic copies of all communications sent to schools since September 2001 are on the internet at http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/Mailing, and most documents sent in the two years before then on the DfES website: http://www.dfes.gov.uk.

Apprenticeships

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many modern apprenticeships were completed in the last 12 months, broken down by local learning and skill council area. [53091]

John Healey: The latest available information about numbers starting, and in-learning, on modern apprenticeships was published in a statistical first release, SFR 03/2002, on 22 March 2002. Numbers of completions by local learning and skills councils are not available.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many vacant *(a)* deputy head teacher, *(b)* head teacher and *(c)* teacher posts existed in (i) primary schools, (ii) secondary schools and (iii) special schools in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47505]

Mr. Timms: [pursuant to his reply, *10 April 2002, c. 217W*] The published figures were incorrect in that the figures for head teacher and classroom teacher vacancies in special schools were transposed for the years 1997 to 2000. The revised answer and tables have been placed in the Libraries.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Government buildings owned by his Department in the United Kingdom have solar panels installed. [51191]

Mr. MacShane: At present there are no solar panels installed on any of the buildings managed by the FCO in the United Kingdom. However their use is being investigated with other measures to reduce carbon emissions, as part of the FCO's energy strategy.

Iraq

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the action taken by the Iraqi Government via the International Court against the UK for the use of depleted uranium by the UK forces in Southern Iraq. [51637]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government are not aware of any legal case brought by Iraq against the UK for the use of depleted uranium during the Gulf War.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Iraqi Government concerning the attempted assassination of Dr. Baham Salih. [51636]

Mr. Bradshaw: None. It is not clear who was responsible for the assassination attempt on Dr. Barham Salih.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the stability of the *(a)* PUK and *(b)* KDP in Northern Iraq. [51635]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) have had de facto control of the three northern Iraqi governorates since the Iraqi administration withdrew in October 1991. There are no indications of instability within either of these two political parties. In recent years there has been increasing cooperation between the PUK and KDP, particularly in dealing with humanitarian issues such as the implementation of the "oil for food" programme and the return of internally displaced people to their home towns.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has collated about the attack sites and the weapons used by the Iraqi Government on northern Iraq. [51572]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 26 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 486W.

Burma

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Burma about the persecution of Christians. [51757]

Mr. Bradshaw: Respect for human rights, including freedom of religion, is a central part of UK and EU policy towards Burma. It is a consistent theme in all our activity, both bilaterally and in multilateral fora.

The EU is currently working on a resolution on human rights in Burma at the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. As in previous years, it will cover instances of infringements and abuses of the right to practice religion freely.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage the Government of Burma to improve their human rights record. [53601]

Mr. Bradshaw: Respect for the rule of law is the only long-term guarantee for human rights in Burma. That is why we have been pressing so consistently for the return of constitutional rule in Burma. In the meantime, we continue to work with EU colleagues and through the United Nations to focus attention on Burma's human rights record. On 25 April the UN Commission on Human Rights adopted an EU sponsored resolution on the human rights situation in Burma.

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the establishment of a human rights commission in Afghanistan; and if he will name those appointed to the commission and their terms of reference. [51462]

Mr. Bradshaw: Four standing working groups were established at the Afghan National Workshop on Human Rights held in Kabul on 9 March. These working groups will take forward the human rights provisions of the Bonn agreement, including the establishment of the independent Human Rights Commission, the investigation and monitoring of human rights abuses, and the provision of human rights education.

The UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan will continue to support the Interim Authority and the Human Rights Commission in their work. According to the UN Secretary General, a senior Human Rights Co-ordinator in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General will serve as the principal contact for the independent Human Rights Commission. Staff, including Afghan nationals, will be equipped to perform the human rights aspects of their work, including the integration of rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches in the mission's relief and reconstruction activities.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements have been put in place to ensure women's participation in the regional ballot of the emergency loya jirga, which began on 15 April. [51464]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 31 March, the Special Commission for Convening the Emergency Loya Jirga announced the criteria for the selection of delegates for the Loya Jirga, including the arrangements for selection of candidates by regional ballot. These include a quota of seats reserved for women (100 out of the 1,051 seats being decided by regional ballot). A further 60 seats will be reserved for women out of the quotas reserved for members of the Interim Authority, refugees, members of civil society, internally displaced persons and professionals. This will give a total allocation of 160 out of 1,450 seats.

The Loya Jirga process has received wide publicity in Afghanistan via radio and print media. The commission, whose 21 members include three women, are also travelling to the regions to explain the process and to encourage women to take part.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what part women will play in the new police force and national army being established in Afghanistan. [51463]

Mr. Bradshaw: Reform of the security sector will be crucial in establishing security across Afghanistan. The process is at an early stage. While Afghan women are not members of the recently established First Battalion of the Afghan National Guard (trained by ISAF), we hope that Afghan women will play an important role in the security sector, including in the police, the judiciary and the armed forces.

Tanzania

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the explanatory statement in the case of Mrs. L. Odedra, a constituent, was dispatched from Dar-es-Salaam Ref: ECR/419/00 104792. [51523]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not our practice to disclose details of individual entry clearance cases in a public forum. I will write to my hon. Friend about this case in the next few days.

Middle East

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received from hon. Members concerning the situation in the middle east. [51553]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have received representations in recent weeks from many hon. Members on the situation in the middle east. 35 Members spoke in the debate on the middle east on 16 April alone. All expressed concern about the perilous situation in the region, and a desire to see a just and lasting political settlement between the parties.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost has been of criminal damage to his Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44845]

Mr. MacShane: It is not possible to provide figures for the cost of criminal damage to FCO buildings in each of the last four years for the following reasons:

(a) Repairs to buildings following such incidents are funded from many different sources among them local budgets, command budgets, estates budgets and occasionally from Estate Strategy Unit's (SSU) budget. They would be in most cases identified as routine maintenance charges, rather than specifically connected to an incident of criminal damage in the accounts.

(b) Many posts do not report minor incidents of criminal damage, but simply get on with the job of repair required, funding them from their local budget. Centrally held records within SSU are, therefore, only indicative of reported incidents, and do not accurately reflect the true picture.

(c) Records of damage caused by criminal activity to HQ buildings in the UK are kept, but logged only as an incident in the normal incident logs. To identify the cost involved, after the fact, would involve trawling through all the incident logs, then checking jobs logged to the Facilities Management Helpdesk during the same period and finally comparing any related jobs with invoices, presented by the relevant service provider, from the same period. This is a highly labour intensive process, far in excess of the cost where it becomes disproportionate to the answer.

Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when consulate officials last met *(a)* Mr. Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and *(b)* members of his family; and if he will make a statement on recent developments in this case. [51795]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have sought information on Mr. Sheikh's detention, and are awaiting a response from the Pakistani authorities. If Mr. Sheikh is a dual UK/Pakistani national, the Pakistani authorities are not obliged to give us consular access or information. Mr. Sheikh's family have not made contact with our consular officials, although they are welcome to do so in either Pakistan or London.

The case is currently before a Pakistani court and is still sub judice.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 15 March from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Tanveer Bibi. [51791]

Mr. Bradshaw: I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, on 16 April.

Ascension Island

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received about democratic rights for those living on Ascension Island; and if he will make a statement. [52059]

Mr. Bradshaw: A petition on taxation without representation was received by the FCO on 23 March. A response, indicating that there would be full consultation with the residents of Ascension Island over the form of democratic representation to be introduced, was sent by officials on 26 March.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to introduce a democratically elected Government for those living on Ascension Island; and if he will make a statement. [52096]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Overseas Territories Constitutional Adviser visited Ascension in October last year. A summary of his recommendations appeared in the island's newspaper on 7 March. A further consultation document was issued by the Governor at a public meeting on 10 April. This outlined two options: a county/district model of government, or an Advisory Island Council with provision for regular consultation with St. Helena representatives on areas of mutual interest. We hope that a decision on the form of democratic representation, based on the preferred choice of the residents of Ascension Island, will be taken shortly.

Gibraltar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account he will take of British public opinion before reaching decisions on the future of Gibraltar. [52151]

Peter Hain: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in the House on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 29, it is manifestly in the interests of the people of Britain, Spain and Gibraltar to find a proper modus vivendi for the future. We have repeatedly made clear that it would be for the people of Gibraltar to decide in a referendum whether any proposals that emerge from the current Brussels Process talks should be implemented.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the heads of agreement reached between the UK and Spain on the issue of Gibraltar. [52594]

Peter Hain: No agreement has been reached with Spain. Talks under the Brussels Process are continuing. Our aim remains, if possible, to reach agreement by the summer. As I said in the House on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 452, over the past months, the Government have kept Parliament fully informed. We will continue to do so.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on *(a)* the terms of reference and *(b)* the outcome of the meeting which took place on 23 April in Madrid between the Foreign Secretary, the Minister for Europe and representatives of the Spanish Government regarding the future status of Gibraltar. [53123]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 294–95W, regarding the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial meeting held in Valencia on 22 and 23 April.

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will visit Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [54008]

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he or his Ministers will next meet the Spanish Foreign Minister to discuss Gibraltar. [53239]

Mr. Straw: I will visit Gibraltar on 3 May. Talks with the Spanish Government under the Brussels Process are continuing. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe will be meeting his Spanish counterpart in London on 2 May.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he or his Ministers last met the Spanish Foreign Minister and his Ministers to discuss Gibraltar; where this meeting took place; how much advance notice was given of it; what was discussed; and what conclusions were reached; [53241]

(2) whether he estimates that he and his Spanish counterpart will meet their target of concluding a comprehensive agreement before the summer, as stated in paragraph 56 of the Barcelona Conclusions, in relation to shared sovereignty with Spain over Gibraltar. [53240]

Mr. Straw: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 295–96W.

Colombia

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding the UK *(a)* bilaterally and *(b)* through the European Union, (i) has contributed in the last five years and (ii) plans to contribute to (A) Plan Colombia and (B) the Andean Regional Initiative. [53674]

Mr. MacShane: The UK has not contributed to either Plan Colombia or the Andean Regional Initiative, either bilaterally or through the European Union. There are no plans to do so.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what training the UK has *(a)* provided in the last five years and *(b)* plans to provide for Colombia's (i) customs officers, (ii) anti-narcotics police and (iii) other law enforcement personnel; and if he will make a statement. [53673]

Mr. MacShane: Colombia remains the world's principal source of cocaine. Its Government is committed to tackling the illicit drugs trade and the problems of crime and violence with which it is linked. We support the Colombian Government's commitment to tackling these areas and continue to provide assistance where we can.

The British Government has provided a range of training to the Colombian Anti-Narcotics police, the Colombian Customs Department as well as other law enforcement personnel over the last five years. We have also provided funding for a Colombian NGO to train the police in areas such as community relations, conflict resolution and peace strategies.

Wine

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much *(a)* UK produced wine and *(b)* wine produced by the rest of the world, broken down by value and volume, UK embassies world wide have provided in the last year. [R] [52613]

Mr. MacShane: Our Posts overseas are not required to keep such information and it could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much *(a)* UK produced wine and *(b)* wine produced by the rest of the world, broken down by value and volume, Government hospitality departments have provided in the last 12 months. [R] [52611]

Mr. MacShane: Government Hospitality Section of Conference and Visits Group provides hospitality services to all Government departments. In the financial year 2001–02 Government Hospitality used approximately 1,100 bottles of English and Welsh wines at a cost of around £4, 600.

During the same period Government Hospitality used approximately 6,850 bottles of wine from other countries. It is not possible to give a meaningful breakdown by value of these wines.

Council of the European Union

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for May; and if he will list the major European Union events for the period between 31 May and October. [54007]

Peter Hain: The information is as follows:

May 2002

7 May—ECOFIN—Brussels

1. Adoption of the Agenda
2. Approval of the list of "A" items
3. Broad economic policy guidelines
   Commission recommendation
4. Directives and reports in the financial services area
   Market Abuse
   Political agreement
   Financial holdings
   Political agreement
5. (poss.) Taxation of energy
   Council conclusions
6. Preliminary draft Community budget for 2003
7. (poss.) Recasting of the Financial Regulation
8. Other business

2—Washington—EU/US Summit

3–4—Brussels—Tourism Council (Ministerial Informal)

6—Brussels—Eurogroup (Evening)

8—Toledo—EU/Canada Summit

13—Brussels—General Affairs Council and Defence Ministers Meeting

17–18—Madrid—EU/Latin America and Caribbean Summit

21—Brussels—Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council

23—Brussels—Culture and Audio-visual Council

23–24—Brussels—Convention on the Future of Europe—Plenary Session

24–26—Palma de Mallorca—Environment Council (Ministerial Informal)

27–28—Brussels—Agriculture Council

30—Brussels—Development Council

30—Brussels—Education and Youth Council

31–1—Brussels—Transport Council (Ministerial Informal)

The following are the principal events in the EU between 1 June and October 2002 (certain relevant events are also included: the list is based on the information available at the date of issue).

Month	*Venue*	*Event*
June		
3	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
3	Brussels	Eurogroup (Evening)
4	Luxembourg	ECOFIN
6–8	Brussels	Foreign Affairs Council (ASEM Ministers)
6–7	Brussels	Convention on the Future of Europe—Plenary Session
6–7	Brussels	Industry and Energy Council
10–11	Brussels	General Affairs Council
10–11	Brussels	Agriculture Council
11	Brussels	Fisheries Council
13–14	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
17–18	Brussels	Transport and Telecoms Council
17–18	Brussels	General Affairs Council
21–22	Seville	European Council
24	Brussels	General Affairs Council (Evening)
24–25	Brussels	Convention on the Future of Europe—Plenary Session
24–25	Brussels	Environment Council
25	Luxembourg	ECOFIN
26	Brussels	Health Council
July		
6	Copenhagen	ASEM Ministers for Finance
11–12	Brussels	Convention on the Future of Europe—Plenary Session
12	Brussels	ECOFIN
12–13	Kolding	Meeting of Employment and Social Policy Ministers (Informal)
15–16	Brussels	Agriculture Council
19	Brussels	Budget Meeting
19–21	Århus	Environment Ministers meeting (Informal)
22–23	Brussels	General Affairs Council

Month	Venue	Event
August		
31–1	Elsinore	Gymnich (Ministerial Informal)
September		
6	Brussels	ASEM Economic Ministers Meeting
6–8	Copenhagen	ECOFIN (Ministerial Informal)
8–10	Nyborg	Agriculture Council (Ministerial Informal)
12–13	Copenhagen	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Ministerial Informal)
22–23	Copenhagen	ASEM Meeting
23–24	Brussels	Agriculture Council
26	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council
27	Tent	ACP-EU Ministers Meeting
30	Brussels	Research Council
30–1	Brussels	General Affairs Council
October		
3–4	Brussels	Transport and Telecommunications Council
8	Brussels	ECOFIN
8	Brussels	Employment and Social Policy Council
14	Brussels	Fisheries Council
14–15	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs, and Civil Protection Council
15–16	Brussels	Agriculture Council
17	Brussels	Environment Council
18–19	Aalborg	Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Industry Meeting (Ministerial Informal)
21–22	Brussels	General Affairs Council
24–25	Brussels	European Council

US Co-operation (International Appointments)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the US Government with regard to appointments to international bodies with specific reference to *(a)* the control of chemical weapons and *(b)* global warming. [52320]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had a discussion with the US Secretary of State Colin Powell on the position of the Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) at the end of March. There have been further discussions at official level on the matter.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs discussed the chairmanship of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) earlier this month in Washington. Since then the subject has been discussed on further occasions at official level with members of the US Administration.

Bhutan

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received concerning the treatment of Christians in Bhutan; and if he will make a statement. [53074]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have received occasional NGO reports suggesting mistreatment of Christians in Bhutan, and have expressed our concern to the Bhutanese Government that the right to choose, declare, and practice one's religion should be respected.

Chechnya

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Russian authorities to register officially displaced Chechen persons in the republics neighbouring Chechnya. [53056]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have not made any recent representations to the Russian Government about this issue. The main focus of our dialogue has been the human rights situation in Chechnya. However, the UK has supported a Council of Europe project aimed at speeding up the registration process and the issue of identity cards to Chechen internally displaced persons.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made and to whom for an independent international inquiry into violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Chechnya. [53055]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK has not called for an international inquiry into allegations of human rights violations in Chechnya. Instead, we have, with our EU partners, pressed the Russian Government to establish, in accordance with recognised international standards, a national, broad-based and independent commission of inquiry to investigate alleged violations of human rights and breaches of international humanitarian law committed in the republic. We last raised this in mid-April at the 58th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many digital radios are owned by his Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52857]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. We do not maintain central records of different types of radio receiver.

Chemical Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has collated on the US Government's compliance with its obligations under the chemical weapons convention. [52056]

Mr. Bradshaw: The United States is a state party to the chemical weapons convention. We have no reason to believe that it is not fully compliant with its obligations.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will support the efforts of the US Government to remove the Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons; and if he will make a statement. [52054]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 294W.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to encourage the UN Security Council to back OPCW's bid to persuade the Iraqi Government to sign the chemical weapons convention. [52055]

Mr. Bradshaw: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1284 mandated the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) to inspect, monitor and, if necessary, destroy Iraq's chemical and biological weapons and its ballistic missile systems. The first priority must be to ensure that UNMOVIC has access to Iraq to carry out its mandate and to uphold the authority of the United Nations.

The UK fully supports OPCW's efforts to achieve universal ratification of the chemical weapons convention. Iraq could, of course, ratify CWC tomorrow, but this should not in any way undermine UNMOVIC's mandate.

WALES

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43680]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer to the answer I gave the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 365-66W.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the services of his Department have not been reviewed under the better quality services initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50310]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The better quality services programme was launched in 1998 as a means of delivering continuous improvements in the quality and effectiveness of Government activities and services. My Department was established on 1 July 1999 and has always sought to secure best value in contracts for services and will continue to do so.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many net additional staff his Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer and *(b)* administrative level. [52439]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since June 2001 this Department has taken on one additional staff member in November 2001 at executive officer level.

Public-Private Partnerships

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45681]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* My Department has entered no PPP contracts since it was created in July 1999.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45683]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* My Department has entered no PFI contracts since it was created in July 1999.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42452]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department came into existence only on 1 July 1999. Its headquarters building is heated by the Whitehall Standby Distribution Service which, in the interests of efficiency, serves a number of buildings around Whitehall from a common source.

Railways

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has made representations to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, regarding the full devolution of powers for the railways to the National Assembly for Wales. [32227]

Mr. Touhig: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales nor myself have made any such representations. Current UK Government policy is that railway powers should remain a reserved matter, particularly since the majority of the main rail routes start or end in England.

PRIME MINISTER

MOD Pensions

Mr. Gray: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness West (Mr. Kennedy), about MoD pensions, if he will make a statement on the letters the MoD have sent to MoD pensioners about arrangements for collecting their pensions in post offices; and how many such letters have been sent. [53079]

The Prime Minister: Letters were sent to some 6,700 recipients of occupational pensions from the armed forces in December last year informing them about revised arrangements, to be introduced from April 2002, for those who collected their pensions at Post Offices. The revised arrangements offer a more secure system of payment, and are most cost-effective. Pensioners may continue to draw cash at Post Offices subject to having an account with the following banks—The Alliance and Leicester, Barclays, Cahoot, Lloyds TSB, Smile or the Co-Operative Bank. These new arrangements apply to armed forces occupational pensions and not to state pensions.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Coin-in, Coin-out Machines

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the value of transactions through coin-in, coin-out machines in *(a)* licensed and *(b)* unlicensed premises. [52402]

Mr. Caborn: The Department itself has made no such assessment. However, information provided separately by Business in Sport and Leisure (BISL) and the British Amusement Catering Trades Association (BACTA) suggests that the total gross yield to legitimate operators of gaming machines is within the range of £1.3 billion to £1.5 billion per year; while the British Beer and Pub Association have estimated that the annual contribution to the pub economy from gaming machines is in the region of £0.5 billion to £0.6 billion.

Lottery

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what progress she has made in the review of the procedures for reviewing the Lottery licence at the end of the prescribed licence period; [53004]

(2) what progress she has made with the review of the procedure for the allocation of the Lottery licence. [53449]

Mr. Caborn: It is our intention to publish, before the summer recess, a consultation document inviting comments on options for changes to the current arrangements for licensing and regulating the National Lottery.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will provide a breakdown of amounts *(a)* allocated and *(b)* retained by each of the bodies allocating Lottery money in each of the last 12 months. [52985]

Mr. Caborn: This information is not readily available. I will, however, write to the hon. Member as soon as it has been collated, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Political Donations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if Ministers in her Department are informed of donations to political parties made by any *(a)* individuals, *(b)* companies and *(c)* organisations (i) before and (ii) after a meeting with them. [52882]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Ministers deal with the issues raised in meetings on their own merits and on a case by case basis. Ministers may be made aware of donations to political parties only if it is relevant to the matter being discussed and no central records are kept.

Cultural Property

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Government will accede to the UNESCO 1970 convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property. [53820]

Dr. Howells: I am very please to announce that the convention has today been published as Command Paper 5500 and laid together with an explanatory memorandum. We hope to achieve our aim of acceding to the convention by July.

Voluntary Service

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the new award for voluntary service by groups in the community. [53821]

Tessa Jowell: The Queen's Golden Jubilee Award (for voluntary service by groups in the community) is announced today. This new, annual award is for groups and teams in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, rather than for individuals. The award will be given in recognition of outstanding voluntary activity that enhances and improves the quality of life and opportunity for others in the community. Groups must be nominated for consideration, for example by beneficiaries of their work, members of the public, representatives of public bodies, or other voluntary groups. Initial selection will be by local panels in the devolved Administrations and Government regions, with final selection being done centrally by the Queen's Golden Jubilee Award Committee. The award illustrates the importance the Queen places on community and voluntary service by dedicated and committed teams and groups, and provides

an opportunity for communities to nominate and celebrate the invaluable contribution they make. Up to 200 awards will be given each year and the first ones will be announced on 2 June 2003. I have placed details in the Libraries of both Houses and will be writing to all hon. Members later this week enclosing further information.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Policing Arrangements

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans have been made for the review of Northern Ireland's policing arrangements that arose from the discussions at Weston Park; and when legislation will be introduced. [54009]

Dr. John Reid: Following discussions at Weston Park last year, the Government committed itself to a review of policing involving the Oversight Commissioner.

We intend to introduce legislation as soon as practicable thereafter to amend or clarify certain provisions as set out in the implementation plan, to reflect more fully the Patten recommendations.

Tom Constantine, the Oversight Commissioner, will, under his terms of reference, review and report on the progress made in implementing Patten on the basis of experience during the first year of the board's operation. The Government will draw on his detailed reports in implementing its stated objectives.

Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary, Dan Crompton, will conduct his annual inspection of the PSNI during the summer. He will study the impact of the new arrangements on police effectiveness and will look at the security situation. He will report to me by the end of October.

Where detailed administrative or legislative issues arise, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, as Minister with responsibility for policing, will be the main point of contact. She will take submissions from interested parties and invite the political parties to meetings.

Independent Commissioner for Detained Terrorist Suspects

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish the ninth annual report of the Independent Commissioner for Detained Terrorist Suspects. [53944]

Dr. John Reid: I have today arranged for copies of Dr. Bill Norris' annual report for 2001 to be placed in the Library of both Houses.

I welcome Dr. Norris' report and I will consider it carefully. I will respond as soon as possible.

Terrorism

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many terrorist-related incidents, excluding murder, have taken place in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 10 April 1998 for which no person has been convicted; and if he will list each of them. [44326]

Jane Kennedy: The information is unable to be provided in the format requested. A table listing the number of shootings and bombing incidents and deaths as a result of the security situation since 1969 to 10 April 1998 has been placed in the Library. These cannot be linked to any subsequent charge or conviction. Statistics on paramilitary style attacks are only available from 1973.

Scheduled Offences

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been convicted in Northern Ireland of scheduled offences committed before 10 April 1998 between *(a)* 11 April 1998 to 31 December 1998, *(b)* 1 January 1999 to 31 December 1999, *(c)* 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000, *(d)* 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001 and *(e)* 1 January 2002 to present. [44328]

Jane Kennedy: There were 114 convictions for scheduled offences between 11 April 1998 and 31 December 1998, which had been committed before 10 April 1998. Statistics for subsequent years cannot be provided as the data on scheduled offences are unreliable. A new database is currently being developed for courts and criminal records data since 1999. This development work has been required due to a change in the way in which the PSNI collect and store this information. It is unlikely that this system will be available for use before early summer 2002.

Compensation Agency

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will announce a decision on the future of the Compensation Agency. [53946]

Dr. John Reid: I have agreed that the executive agency status of the Compensation Agency should be continued until 31 March 2004. My decision follows the completion of Stage 1 of a quinquennial review which examined the past performance of the agency and the other organisational arrangements available for the administration of compensation schemes. Stage 2 of the review will look at ways of improving the delivery of services.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Communications

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list *(a)* consultation papers, *(b)* circulars and *(c)* forms issued to farmers by her Department in the past 12 months. [37532]

Margaret Beckett: As DEFRA was created in June 2001, twelve months have not elapsed yet. The Department lists its print production work using sequential alphanumeric job number/s. To transcribe and list these by title would incur a disproportionate cost.

Our records show that since DEFRA was set up;

(a) 38 consultation papers were issued.

(b) 418 items categorised as circulars/information literature documents were produced.

(c) 225 forms targeted at farmers and ancillary organisations were produced.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the average level of compensation paid to farmers for *(a)* sheep, *(b)* cattle, *(c)* pigs and *(d)* other animals during the foot and mouth outbreak in (i) the UK, (ii) France, (iii) Ireland and (iv) the Netherlands; and if she will make a statement. [48558]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information is as follows.

(i) The average level of compensation paid to farmers for sheep, cattle, pigs and other animals during the foot and mouth outbreak in the UK is as follows:

Type of livestock	*Average level of payment per animal (£)*
Sheep	137.43
Cattle	970.88
Pigs	76.11
Others	454.93

(ii) The average level of compensation paid to farmers for cattle in the Netherlands was £471 per animal. No other information for France, Ireland or the Netherlands is readily available.

Voluntary Environmental Groups

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from voluntary environmental groups concerning the availability of insurance cover. [51987]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* At a recent meeting in Allendale my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs discussed with a representative from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) the availability of public liability cover. BTCV have also discussed the issue with my officials, and wrote to me on 17 April providing further information. We are considering whether there is any need for the Government to intervene, and shall respond shortly.

Voluntary Service Councils

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to support the development of voluntary service councils in rural areas. [51986]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* My Department does not support Councils for Voluntary Service directly. We provide support via the Countryside Agency to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (£90,000 for the 2001–01 financial year), and to Rural Community Councils (£2.984 million, plus staff costs for a community development worker in each county, for the same year). Rural Community Councils work closely with Councils for Voluntary Service in their area; indeed some operate as Councils for Voluntary Service. The National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service receives funding through the Active Communities Unit at the Home Office.

We are exploring ways to strengthen the capacity of the voluntary and community sectors in rural areas. In particular the Cross-Cutting Review of the Role of the Voluntary Sector in Delivery of Public Services, as part of the current Spending Review, is examining the way in which the Government work with the voluntary sector, in urban as well as rural areas.

Energy Crops

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to encourage the planting of energy crops; and if she will make a statement. [51990]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* My Department has allocated support of £29 million to solid biomass crops through the Energy Crops Scheme, part of the England Rural Development Programme. Working with other Departments we are putting in place schemes with funding of £70 million which will develop markets for biomass, including purpose grown energy crops and material from forests, in heat, combined heat and power and electricity generation. We are also working closely with the Countryside Agency which has launched the Community Renewables Initiative to help local communities develop renewable energy projects. The Renewables Obligation permits the co-firing of energy crops with fossil fuels. In the Budget my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, confirmed the new duty rate for biodiesel set at 20 pence per litre below the rate for Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel. The Government are considering carefully the recommendation of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food that duty on biofuels should be reduced to the rates applied to other clean fuels. The Government have also welcomed the publication of the Energy Review by the Performance and Innovation Unit, which draws attention to the key role of renewable energy sources, including energy crops, in moving to a low carbon economy. The Government plan a public consultation on the key recommendations of the report leading to a White Paper in the autumn.

Fly Tipping

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase the penalties for fly tipping. [51993]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The penalties available for those convicted of fly tipping are severe. For non-special waste, the maximum penalty for conviction in Crown Court is an unlimited fine and/or up to two years imprisonment. For special waste, the maximum prison sentence is increased to five years. There are no plans to raise these penalties further.

In March 2000, the Sentencing Advisory Panel advised the Court of Appeal to issue a sentencing guideline on environmental offences, including flytipping. The court of Appeal has not yet issued such a guideline. In September 2000, the Magistrates' Association issued new Sentencing Guidelines for offences under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, including flytipping. The Government are now considering whether further awareness raising activities, in partnership with regulators would be helpful.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what

arrangements she has made for the contaminated land exposure assessment and guidance to be made available to local authorities. [51985]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The Contaminated Land Exposure Assessment (CLEA) Model and associated guidance reports are available to local authorities, and any other interested parties, in hard copy from the Environment Agency Research & Development Dissemination Centre at Swindon. They are also available on the Department's website.

Recycled Ash

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the health implications of using recycled ash in building materials. [18546]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* We have no evidence that the use of recycled incinerator bottom ash (IBA) in building materials is a significant source of human exposure to any substance, but we are undertaking research in order to make further quantitative estimates of exposures by this route.

As regards exposure to dioxins, latest industry figures for IBA going into the construction industry indicate dioxin levels of less than 25ng/kg I-TEQ (1999 AEAT figures for normal urban soils in the UK show a mean of 28ng/kg I-TEQ). There is limited information available on the levels that may be found in other construction materials, and there are no recommended acceptable levels. However we are awaiting the results of independent research into the health and environmental implications of using IBA in construction (including roads and the manufacture of building blocks). Initial indications are that exposure to dioxins from roads constructed with material incorporating IBA is negligible.

The Environment Agency is currently carrying out a full investigation into the destination of ash from incinerators, the environmental implications of its use and what steps may be needed in the light of these findings. The results of the investigation will be made public and any necessary action will be taken.

Rio Earth Summit (Implementation)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken by the Government since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to *(a)* set goals on environmental protection and *(b)* improve eco-efficiency and resource productivity relating to biodiversity issues; and what these (i) goals and (ii) improvements have been. [44340]

Mr. Meacher: Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan, was published in 1994 as the UK Government's strategy for implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity, signed at Rio as part of the Earth Summit in 1992. S74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 placed a duty on Ministers and Government Departments to have regard to the purpose of conserving biological diversity in accordance with the Convention. 436 action plans have been published for individual priority species and habitat types. Each of the Action Plans contains goals and targets for the conservation, enhancement and sustainable management of these habitats and species within their eco-systems in the UK. A report, "Sustaining the variety of life: 5 years of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan" was published by the UK Biodiversity Group in March 2001, and shows the progress that has been made. The 1994 UK Action Plan is in the House libraries and other relevant documentation and the March 2001 report can be found on "www.ukbap.org.uk"

Plastic Bags

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans the Government have to introduce a levy on plastic shopping bags; [51601]

(2) what recent steps her Department has taken to promote the *(a)* environmental and *(b)* economic advantages of re-using plastic bags to consumers and businesses. [51588]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* I am aware that the Irish Government have recently introduced a levy on plastic shopping bags. I have asked officials for a full assessment of the effects of this measure on litter and waste reduction and on consumer behaviour.

Meanwhile, measures imposed under the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended) include cost incentives both to reduce the amount of packaging handled and to re-use packaging as far as possible.

In addition, the Envirowise programme has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at companies in the retail sector to encourage resource minimization and re-use.

Sellafield

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if radioactive technetium is stored in the Sellafield B30 nuclear waste storage facility. [51963]

Margaret Beckett: The B30 facility at Sellafield was commissioned in the 1960s for interim storage of spent Magnox fuel in water-filled concrete ponds and the subsequent removal of cladding from the fuel prior to it being reprocessed. The facility no longer undertakes these operations and is now undergoing post-operational clean out. However, several hundred tonnes of spent fuel remain in the B30 storage ponds. The spent fuel contains a range of fission products including technetium-99.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on the Sellafield MOX plant since the decision to endorse the go-ahead for the Sellafield MOX plant. [15574]

Margaret Beckett: Since the decision on 3 October that MOX manufacture was "justified", my Department has received approximately 70 oral or written representations from hon. Members or others in the UK, and from Governments or others abroad, seeking information or expressing concerns about the implications of the decision. This compares with around 7,000 responses to our final consultation on MOX held in July-August 2001.

Home Energy Efficiency

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of pensioners in each region are eligible for HEES Plus, within the Warm Front programme; and how many HEES Plus grants have been made in each social services local authority area since the commencement of the scheme. [42955]

Mr. Meacher: At the time of the announcement of the New Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) it was estimated around 3.7 million households in England were eligible for New HEES Plus.

In total, 172,102 HEES Plus Grants were awarded between June 2000 and the end of March 2002.

The information requested could not be provided in the format requested without incurring disproportionate costs. I have previously written to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) and placed data in the Library of the House in respect of grants awarded under the scheme, by postcode, from June 2000 to March 2001.

Composting

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps have been taken by her Department to assess the risk of contamination from raw waste meat in composting; and if she will make a statement. [52389]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA has commissioned an assessment to determine the risks to public, animal and plant health from the land spreading of kitchen/catering wastes after treatment by composting or in a biogas plant and to compare these with the risks from other disposal routes. This work should be completed in May and the results will be made public thereafter. A subsequent stage of the project will assess the risks from such treatment of slaughterhouse waste and other low-risk animal by-products.

Air Quality

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to improve air quality standards; and what levels of emissions were recorded *(a)* in the Teesside region and *(b)* on average in England at the latest date for which figures are available. [52460]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's policies on air quality standards and objectives are set out in the air quality strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, published in January 2000. We consulted in September 2001 on proposals to tighten our policy objectives for three pollutants (carbon monoxide, benzene and particulate matter) and to introduce for the first time a policy objective for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

The National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory (available at www.aeat.co.uk/netcen/airqual) records UK emissions to air of all key pollutants. 1999 is the latest year for which comprehensive data for both the UK and Teesside are available. Nationally, emissions of most air pollutants fell significantly between 1990 and 1999, as table 1 shows.

Table 1: National emissions

Pollutant	*Emissions in 1990 (kilotonnes)*	*Emissions in 1999 (kilotonnes)*	*Percentage reduction*
Sulphur dioxide	3754	1187	68
Oxides of nitrogen	2760	1605	42
Particles (PM10)	305	186	39
Carbon monoxide	7160	4760	34
Lead	2.831	0.55	81
Benzene	54.42	29.69	45
1,3 butadiene	13.31	6.17	54

Table 2 gives a summary of the total emissions of key pollutants in Teesside in 1999.

Table 2: Emissions in Teesside

Pollutant	*Emissions in Teesside in 1999 (kilotonnes)*	*Percentage of national total*
Sulphur dioxide	36.997	3.1
Oxides of nitrogen	39.639	2.5
Particles (PM10)	4.969	2.7
Carbon monoxide	185.805	3.9
Lead	0.018	3.3
Benzene	0.657	2.2
1,3 butadiene	0.231	3.7

Information on air quality levels in Teesside and the rest of the country is also available at www.aeat.co.uk/netcen/airqual. This information is updated on an hourly basis. Figures for the year 2001 show that across the country as a whole the average number of days of moderate or poor air quality recorded by individual monitoring stations in urban areas of the UK was 21 days. This total has declined steadily over the last decade as measures to deliver cleaner air have started to take effect.

There are four automatic air quality monitoring sites in Teesside affiliated to the national air quality monitoring network. These are at Billingham, Stockton-on-Tees, Redcar and Middlesbrough. The average number of days of moderate or poor air quality recorded in 2001 at each of these four sites was 16 days. This figure is lower than the national average.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she plans to increase the number of air quality monitoring stations in the Teesside region. [52459]

Mr. Meacher: There are currently four automatic and 11 non-automatic air quality monitoring stations in the Teesside region. These are part of the UK air quality monitoring networks. In addition, a non-automatic benzene monitor has recently been installed in Middlesbrough as part of the UK non-automatic hydrocarbon monitoring network. There are currently no plans to increase the number of automatic monitoring stations in the region. I am not aware of any plans to further increase the number of non-automatic stations in the region, which are the responsibility of local authorities.

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire

dated 18 March and 18 June concerning Mr. A. Tabbenor of Youlgrave in Derbyshire and his suckler cow premium. [7351]

Mr. Morley: A response was sent to the hon. Member's letters on 10 February 2002.

I am sorry that the hon. Member's parliamentary question tabled in October was not answered when the response was sent.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the boundary definition for areas of outstanding natural beauty was last reviewed; what plans she has to review the boundaries; and what plans the Government have to create further areas of outstanding natural beauty. [52239]

Alun Michael: The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 empowers the Countryside Agency to designate an area in England as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area.

Boundaries for AONBs are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The last boundary variation was made to Dedham Vale AONB on 19 September 1991. Establishing AONBs, and varying their boundaries, is the responsibility of the Countryside Agency. They have no plans to create any new AONBs or to vary the boundaries of any of the existing ones, except in so far as a National Park in the South Downs might replace two AONBs.

Boundary reviews are very time consuming and expensive: So the Countryside Agency believes it is better to focus resources on managing existing AONBs, and maximising the opportunities offered by the new Countryside and Rights of Way Act, rather than pursuing minor variations. I support this view.

Meat Imports (Argentina)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tonnes of meat were imported into the UK from Argentina during 2001. [51558]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the volume of meat imported into the United Kingdom from Argentina during 2001.

	Tonnes
Beef	2,276
Beef preparations[1]	9,595
Sheep meat	240
Other meat and offal	572
Total	12,683

[1] Mainly corned beef

Note:

The importation of fresh meat and offal of the bovine, ovine, caprine and porcine species and other biungulates (including game) into the United Kingdom from Argentina was banned from 14 March 2001 until 1 February 2002.

Wildfowl

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department undertakes to control the population of wildfowl within London; and which species it monitors. [52258]

Mr. Meacher: All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which implements the EC wild birds directive in Great Britain. Some species of wildfowl and waterfowl are listed under schedule 2 part I of the Act and can be killed or taken during the open season. Outside the open season birds, their eggs and nests can be controlled only under a licence issued by DEFRA where specific criteria are met.

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), which is jointly funded by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust monitors all species of non-breeding waterbirds in the UK. Greater London has a number of sites which support non-breeding waterbirds at levels of international and/or national significance.

Canada Geese

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment her Department has made of the population of Canada geese within London. [52260]

Mr. Meacher: Although the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), which is jointly funded by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, monitors the non-breeding population of Canada geese no attempt to calculate the numbers present at all sites in the London area has been made.

Fruit Growers

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how negotiations are progressing over the implementation of the environmental impact assessment regulations as they affect top fruit growers. [52596]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* DEFRA has not received any requests to enter into negotiations about the implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-natural Areas) Regulations 2001 as they affect top fruit growers.

I have written to you to explain how orchards will be treated under the regulations, in response to the concerns raised in the hon. Gentleman's letter of 25 February 2002.

Departmental Website

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when the application form for *(a)* the licence for the movement of sheep and goats for export, *(b)* the individual movement licence for the export of sheep and goats, *(c)* the licence to gather animals and *(d)* sole occupancy authority will be available in Welsh from the Government website; [52618]

(2) when the information and guidance notes on *(a)* the cleansing and disinfection of commercial vehicles, *(b)* sole occupancy authority, *(c)* animal gatherings-veterinary compliance visit report and *(d)* animal gatherings-veterinary licensing visit report will be available in Welsh from the Government website. [52619]

Mr. Morley: Arrangements are in hand to make the application forms for licences to move sheep and goats available in Welsh from the website of the National Assembly for Wales. We expect these documents will be available in May 2002. The other documents referred to will be available in Welsh as soon as possible.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she plans to make it possible to download AMLS licences in Welsh from her Department's website; and if she will make a statement. [52617]

Mr. Morley: There are no plans to make it possible to download AMLS licences in Welsh from the DEFRA website. Welsh licences contain references applicable to the animal health legislation for Wales and are not valid for movements from premises in England. However there are links from the DEFRA website to the National Assembly for Wales' website which should enable Welsh licences to be downloaded, once they are on that website.

Heathrow

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent discussions she has had with BAA regarding the prevention of water pollution from water draining from the proposed new terminal at Heathrow; [49018]

(2) what recent discussions she has had with the Environment Agency regarding the cleanliness of water in the three holding reservoirs draining Heathrow airport; and when tests were last carried out; [49019]

(3) what recent discussions she has had regarding the adequacy of the Mayfield Farm reedbed system to clean water draining from Heathrow airport. [49017]

Mr. Meacher: No recent discussions have been held. Surface water drainage and pollution control measures were considered at the Terminal 5 public inquiry and in the Inspector's report. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions' decision to approve the development of Terminal 5 and his reasons were set out in full in his decision letter of 20 November 2001.

The Environment Agency, as environmental regulator, will consider detailed plans for drainage from the site, including the holding reservoirs and capacity at Mayfield Farm sewage treatment works, when they are submitted by the British Airports Authority to the London borough of Hillingdon in due course. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's decision letter required that:

> "Development pursuant to this permission shall not begin on any part of the site until a scheme for the disposal of surface water has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority in respect of that part."

The condition specifies certain aspects to be included in the scheme, including the disposal of run-off contaminated by substances used for de-icing.

Marine Stewardship Report

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to publish the Marine Stewardship report; and if she will make a statement. [53919]

Margaret Beckett: Tomorrow I will publish the first Marine Stewardship Report-Safeguarding Our Seas: A Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Development of our Marine Environment.

The report sets out our vision for the marine environment—clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas. It is underpinned by the principles of sustainable development, integrated management, the conservation of biological diversity, robust science, the precautionary principle and stakeholder involvement.

It outlines how we are adopting an ecosystem-based approach to marine management to better integrate marine protection objectives with sustainable social and economic goals. It covers the broad spectrum of policies that affect the marine environment. As well as describing past achievements and progress made, it contains new ideas and initiatives to turn our vision into reality.

Our initiatives will improve marine conservation. We will undertake our proposed regional seas pilot scheme in the Irish Sea as the next stage of our review of Marine Nature Conservation. The report also commits us to consult later this year on the regulations to extend the Habitats and Birds Directives out to limit of jurisdiction of UK waters. It also contains a commitment to explore with other countries the case for, and feasibility of, marine protected areas on the high seas.

The report announces our intention to review the regulations that affect development in coastal waters with a view to simplifying the regulatory system and protecting the marine environment. It also includes initiatives to explore the role of spatial planning for our seas at the regional level and provide a focal point to build on existing seabed mapping.

In addition, Safeguarding Our Seas commits us to review current arrangements for marine scientific research to ensure that we have the proper science base to deliver our vision. It underlines our commitment to develop our framework for environmental monitoring and that we will produce an integrated assessment of our seas by 2004.

The report emphasises the importance of involving stakeholders in making the decisions that affect them. It announces that we will hold a joint conference of the English, Scottish and Welsh coastal fora, together with stakeholders from Northern Ireland, on how to implement the EC Recommendation on Integrated Coastal Zone Management.

Some policy matters covered in the report are the responsibility of the devolved Administrations. The Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales were integral to the preparation of the report. The Northern Ireland Executive has monitored progress of the report and will consider the implications for Northern Ireland.

The report is a valuable first step in turning our vision into reality. I will place copies of the report in the Library of the House. It will also be available at: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/.

Sustainable Development

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to co-operate with developing countries on developing policies and processes for combating poverty and promoting sustainable development. [44359]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are committed to working in partnership with developing countries with large numbers of poor people to tackle poverty and promote sustainable development. It is essential that developing countries lead the process of reform and poverty reduction. My Department is seeking to focus the efforts of all international development agencies on supporting the development and implementation of nationally owned and led poverty reduction strategies.

My Department also continues to work internationally to promote a more favourable environment for sustainable poverty reduction in developing countries. At both the World Trade Organisation Conference in Doha and the UN Financing for Development Conference in Monterey, agreement was reached on the nature of the partnership between developed and developing countries. Developing countries have committed to actions on good governance and the creation of a domestic enabling environment. Developed countries have committed to support these efforts with action on aid volume, aid effectiveness, building capacity, investment and competition. We are contributing to preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in August to help ensure better understanding of the links between poverty reduction and globalisation, and more effective management of environmental resources.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Engagements

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 982W, if he will publish an itemised list of his engagements since 8 October 2001. [49887]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* In addition to meetings relating to departmental, Cabinet and Cabinet Committee and parliamentary business, I have undertaken the following engagements:

16 October

Attend the European Council of Transport Ministers in Luxembourg.

19 October

Visit to Cambridge to discuss a range of departmental issues with representatives of regional interests.

Visit to Atherstone, Warwickshire to discuss a range of departmental issues with representatives of regional interests.

25 October

Attend British Chamber of Commerce dinner to discuss transport and planning.

26 October

Visit to Exeter to discuss a range of departmental issues with representatives of the regional Assembly and local government.

30 October

Visit in London to discuss a range of departmental issues with representatives of local government in London.

Visit in London to discuss with representatives from the south-east departmental issues.

31 October

Visit to Lewisham to discuss action needed to tackle the problem of abandoned cars.

2 November

Meeting to discuss regeneration and transport needs in Leigh and Wigan with local MPs, representatives of local authorities and business interests.

5 November

Speech to Foreign Press Association in London.

6 November

Address CBI conference, Birmingham.

9 November

Visit to Leeds to discuss a range of departmental issues with representatives of the regional Assembly and local government.

Visit to Tyneside to discuss a range of departmental issues with representatives of the regional Assembly and local government.

Received presentation and had discussions with the north-east Assembly in Newcastle on their proposals for regional government.

15 November

Dinner with train operating companies.

16 November

Visit to Derby to discuss a range of departmental issues with representatives of interests in the east midlands.

Visit to Stretford to discuss a range of departmental issues with representatives of the north-west region.

20 November

Discussion on urban renewal at dinner organised by English partnerships with institutional investors.

3 December

Opening of Lemington Bridge in Newcastle.

5 December

Speech at Rail Passenger Council's conference.

6 December

Officially commence work on the extension of East London Line.

11 December

Attend Paddington Survivors Group Rail Summit.

14 December

Speech at UNISON conference on public services.

18 January

Speech to Local Government Association conference.

23 January

Speech at conference organised by Rail Magazine, London.

6 February

Speech to parliamentary Press Gallery.

8 February

Inspect improvement works to the London underground

27 February

Presentations and speech at the AA awards dinner.

13 March

Visit to Camden Housing Development and Alexander House Hostel.

18 March

Speech to the National Coalfields conference, York.

25 March

Speech on planning, transport and other issues at the CBI president's dinner.

28 March

Visit to Belsize fire station, London.

12 April

Speech on regeneration and regional issues at the Core Cities Summit in Manchester.

12 April

Visit to Birkenhead to inspect work in progress on new ferry terminal and the regeneration of the riverside area.

19 April

Meeting with West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority at Birmingham to discuss regional transport issues.

23 April

Dinner with Regional Development Agency chairs to discuss a wide range of departmental issues.

Building Projects

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the building projects under construction; and what coolant will be used for the building services water chilling system for such projects. [52048]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions currently has no significant building projects under construction. Wherever possible, building projects will be planned to avoid or minimise the use of air-conditioning. Where the need for air-conditioning and associated water chilling systems cannot be eliminated, the use of coolants that contribute to climate change will be avoided wherever this is safe, cost effective and technically feasible to do so.

2004 GLA Elections

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards a freepost mailshot to London electors during the 2004 GLA elections. [52064]

Mr. Byers: The Greater London Returning Officer has recently consulted on a range of issues relating to the 2004 GLA elections including the delivery of election addresses. We are awaiting his recommendations.

Infrastructure Charging Research

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what infrastructure charging research work his Department is funding. [52090]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* No such work has been commissioned by my Department. The former Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions, commissioned the following work which is ongoing:

Demonstration of Interoperable charging and telematics Systems (jointly with Leeds City Council and Highways Agency);

Dynamic Freight Analysis;

Economic geography of congestion charging;

Trade-off between practical and optimal cordon congestion charging;

Charging Appraisal Frameworks;

Scheme Design and User Acceptance;

Measuring social—spatial inclusion and exclusion in charging infrastructures.

Fares Policy Review

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Strategic Rail Authority will report to his Department on its review of fares policy; and if he will make a statement. [52386]

Mr. Jamieson: No firm date has yet been decided by the Strategic Rail Authority.

Network Railcards

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he has met the Association of Train Operating Companies since 7 June 2001 to discuss ATOC's proposals for changes to network railcards; if he will publish the minutes and list the actions arising from these meetings; and if he will make a statement. [52385]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Vehicle Fuels

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of vehicles registered to households in *(a)* Dumfries and Galloway, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK are (i) diesel engined, (ii) petrol engined and (iii) powered by other means. [52904]

Mr. Jamieson: The proportion of currently licensed vehicles registered to keepers with addresses in the Dumfries and Galloway unitary authority, Scotland and the United Kingdom powered by diesel, petrol or other means is shown in the table. The information for Great Britain is as at 30 September 2001; the information for Northern Ireland included in the United Kingdom total is as at 31 December 2001. The data include vehicles registered to companies and other entities as well as to individuals.

Proportion of vehicles by propulsion method

Percentage

Area	*Diesel*	*Petrol*	*Other*
Dumfries and Galloway unitary authority	32.7	67.2	0.1
Scotland	23.6	76.3	0.1
United Kingdom	21.9	78.0	0.1

Merchant Fleet

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the size of the UK registered merchant fleet was in each of the last five years. [52906]

Mr. Jamieson: The size of the fleet in both numbers of ships and tonnage is given in the following table.

As at 31 December	UK registered fleet (all vessels) Number of ships	UK registered fleet (all vessels) Gross tonnage (Thousand gt)	UK registered fleet (trading vessels)[1] Number of ships	UK registered fleet (trading vessels)[1] Gross tonnage (Thousand gt)
1996	1,506	4,437	381	3,291
1997	1,498	3,961	369	2,822
1998	1,498	4,389	378	3,081
1999	1,456	4,603	379	3,200
2000	1,518	5,971	417	4,579
2001	1,527	6,280	427	5,035

[1] 'Trading' vessels are those which carry cargo or passengers for commercial purposes. The remainder of the fleet consists of vessels which are deemed to be 'non-trading'. Examples of non-trading vessels are dredgers and trawlers, but vessels which were constructed for 'trading' purposes can also come into this category, if they have been converted to a non-trading use, e.g. storage or a floating restaurant.

Rail Safety

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many road barriers have been erected to increase safety and prevent road vehicles falling onto railway lines since the Selby crash; [52455]

(2) what recent measures have been taken to ensure adequate protection and fencing at intersections between roads and railways. [52456]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the road/rail accident last year at Great Heck, near Selby, two working groups were set up, both of which published their reports on 25 February 2002. The Minister for Transport has accepted all 19 recommendations in the two reports and commended to highway authorities and rail infrastructure authorities the risk assessment framework prepared by the CSS (formerly County Surveyors Society) and Railtrack.

The highway authorities and rail infrastructure authorities are working closely together and are examining the relevant sites on their networks to consider what, if any, mitigation measures might be appropriate to help prevent the incursion of vehicles on to the railway. Details of measures taken where roads meet, cross or run close to railways is not held centrally.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many road to rail accidents have been recorded in each year since 1997. [52458]

Mr. Jamieson: Information held by the Health and Safety Executive on the number of incidents each year since 1997 where road vehicles have encroached on to railway lines is contained in the table.

Incidents of road vehicles obstructing the line not at a level crossing

	Total
1997–98	23
1998–99	33
1999–2000	28
2000–01	31

Health and Safety Executive

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what technical support contracts were awarded by the Health and Safety Executive between 1 January and 31 December 1998. [53071]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Construction Industry

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many self-certification schemes are in operation relating to the construction industry; and what the cost is of joining each scheme. [53001]

Dr. Whitehead: Five schemes are operating self-certification under the Building Regulations in England and Wales. These are for installers registered with the Council for Registered Gas Installers (CORGI); the Oil Firing Registration Scheme run by the Oil Firing Technical Association for the Petroleum Industry (OFTEC); the Registration Scheme for Companies involved in the Installation and Maintenance of Domestic Solid Fuel Fired Equipment run by HETAS Ltd.; the Approved Contractor Person Scheme (Building Regulations) run by the Institute of Plumbing; and the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme run by FENSA Ltd.

We understand the costs for joining each scheme are as follows:

For an installer registered with CORGI the joining fee is £189, with an annual membership fee of £170 included in the first year's costs. Where the registered installer is a company, they can register additional employees at £49 per annum.

For OFTEC the annual fee is £36 for an individual, and £20 for a company, payable five years in advance. An individual must be employed by an OFTEC registered firm.

For HETAS the first year's fee is £150 for a firm followed by and annual membership fee of £100. For an individual the fee is £25 per annum. An individual must be employed by a HETAS registered firm.

For the Institute of Plumbing we understand that there will be no separate charge for membership of the Approved Contractor Person Scheme, but it will be necessary to be a member of the Institute of Plumbing (IoP). There is an IoP joining fee of £30 and an annual membership fee of £50.50.

For the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme all firms are required to pay a standard registration fee of £100, in addition to the vetting fee of £200. The vetting fee is not required, however, if the firm has already been vetted by another body which has standards comparable to FENSA. There is also an annual membership charge of £50 included in the first year's costs. Registered firms are required to purchase Approved Documents L1 and N which provide details on how to comply with the Building Regulations.

These costs are exclusive of VAT. There will be additional associated fees for training and assessment for CORGI, HETAS and OFTEC and in some cases the IoP.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria the Government used to determine who should be consulted regarding the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2002. [53002]

Dr. Whitehead: The criteria used were the same as normally followed when introducing a new initiative under the Building Regulations. There was an initial consultation with the Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC), followed by two extensive written consultations with interested representative bodies. This was followed up by further consultation with BRAC, including the creation of a separate BRAC working party. There was final consultation on the detailed regulations with BRAC along with requests for comments from the schemes involved and individual experts.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who will be responsible for policing the self-certification schemes introduced by the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2002. [53000]

Dr. Whitehead: The scheme operators will be responsible for maintaining the standards necessary for their members to self-certify their work. Working with the scheme operators my Department will monitor the extent to which standards have been maintained and improved as a result of the self-certification initiative.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the self-certification schemes introduced by the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2002 will operate in connection with the existing quality mark scheme. [53005]

Dr. Whitehead: In the consultation document 'Taking Forward Self-Certification Under the Building Regulations' we noted that the first stage of self-certification would develop a body of experience which it might be able to apply more widely when other bodies join. It was also noted that this process would "allow synergies to develop with the quality mark initiative . . .". We have started this process. In relation to the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme (FENSA), quality mark members are eligible for a discount on initial membership, and further discussions are currently taking place between the Department of Trade and Industry and FENSA over how the two schemes can work more closely together over the coming months. We will also be working with the other schemes during this first stage to see how they can work more closely with the quality mark initiative.

Vehicle Numbers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many cars are registered on UK roads. [52981]

Mr. Jamieson: At the end of September 2001, 24,980,000 cars were registered to keepers in Great Britain. The latest figures for Northern Ireland relate to the end of December 2001, when the number of registered cars was 657,000.

Network Rail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether his Department has formally applied for state aid approval for Network Rail. [53220]

Mr. Jamieson: No. If the Network Rail bid is successful, any state aid to be provided to the company would be notified as and when appropriate.

Alternative Road Fuels

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the creation of a nationwide distribution network for liquid hydrogen for use in cars. [53219]

Mr. Jamieson: The discussion draft of the Government's "Powering Future Vehicles" strategy for supporting the shift to low-carbon vehicles and fuels identified the Government's important role in supporting the development of new fuel infrastructures, as the need and demand for them arose. Hydrogen looks likely to be a key component in the long-term shift to low-carbon transport. The Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Budget announced that the Government intended both to exempt hydrogen from fuel duty for a period to encourage its further development and early take-up, and also to provide enhanced capital allowances for installing hydrogen fuel infrastructure. Additionally, the Government is already providing financial support for the pilot trials of hydrogen fuel cell buses to be carried out next year by Transport for London, including the hydrogen refuelling station to support the initiative.

Humber Bridge

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reasons the carriageway repair work being carried out on the Humber Bridge is not being carried out on a 24-hour basis. [52969]

Mr. Spellar: After consultation with the local environmental health department, the Humber Bridge Board has decided to limit repair work to regular working hours during the week in order to reduce noise levels for local residents and in order to reduce repair costs. Resurfacing repairs should be completed by September 2002.

Peak District National Park

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) which organisations were consulted on the decision to change the policy on mineral working in the Peak District National Park in the Regional Planning Guidance for the east midlands (RPG8); [52603]

(2) if he will define the exceptional circumstance set out in MPG6 for permission for mineral working as it applies to the Peak district; [52605]

(3) if he will list the criteria against which decisions to permit mineral working in the Peak district will be taken; [52604]

(4) on what date it was decided that the policy on mineral working in the Peak district national park set out in the Regional Planning Guidance for the east midlands (RPG8) should be changed; and when the public consultation period on the Regional Planning Guidance closed. [52602]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Regional Planning Guidance for the east midlands was published on 24 January 2002, following consultation that ended on 15 June 2001. The final wording was intended to be more concise than earlier versions but did not change national planning policy guidance as it applies to mineral development in the Peak district. Thus paragraphs 70 and 71 of Minerals Planning Guidance Note 6 advise that major developments should not take place in national parks, such as the Peak district, save in exceptional circumstances. All minerals applications must be subject to the most rigorous examination, and should be demonstrated to be in the public interest before being allowed to proceed. The factors to be taken into account in considering minerals applications in such areas include:

a) the need for the development in terms of national considerations of mineral supply; and the impact of permitting the development, or refusing it, on the local economy;

b) whether alternative supplies can be made available at reasonable cost; and the scope for meeting the need in some other way;

c) any detrimental effect of the proposals on the environment and landscape and the extent to which that should be moderated; and

d) in the case of extensions to existing quarries, the extent to which the proposal would achieve an enhancement to the local landscape.

Minerals policies in the RPG for the east midlands should be read within that context.

Community Transport Groups

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his oral answer of 23 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 137, on community transport, by what means community transport groups in south Gloucestershire will have access to the longer term funding to which he referred. [52595]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his answer, we will carefully consider the general point of how far the benefits of three-year spending programmes can be extended to those bodies involved in community transport provision. More specifically, the position on funding for the south Gloucestershire projects currently supported under the Rural Bus Challenge scheme was described in my answers of Monday 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 743W, and Tuesday 29 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 202W.

Council Housing

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the practice of local authorities writing off debts accrued by tenants in council-owned homes. [53102]

Ms Keeble: The Code of Accounting Practice applicable to local authorities requires them to write off debts known to be uncollectable. They are also required to make financial provision for the proportion of current debts which in due course are likely to turn out to be uncollectable.

Each local authority will, in addition, have procedures set out in their own financial regulations requiring proper authorisation for write offs.

Local authorities are obliged to obtain best value in carrying out their housing management functions. Performance, including that on rent collection, is reported annually to the public in an authority's best value performance plan.

Motorway Restrictions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of the A43 between the M40 and the M1 is expected to be *(a)* wholly and *(b)* partially open by the weekend of 5 to 7 July; and if he will make a statement on action being taken to accelerate the works. [52255]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Tim Boswell, dated 30 April 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the A43 between the M40 and the M1.

To help traffic during the British Grand Prix weekend on Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th July, at least two lanes of the new Silverstone Bypass between the A413 junction and Dadford Road (the main access to the Circuit) will be available for access by coaches and official race traffic to and from the north.

In addition, we aim to use existing A43 through Silverstone, to Towcester Bypass, as a one-way system as we did last year, making four lanes between the A413 junction and Dadford Road available to traffic to and from the north.

The new Whitfield Turn and Brackley Hatch section is not sufficiently advanced to be used so we intend to make the existing A43 at Syresham and Pimlico one-way to ensure two-lane access to and from the Circuit from the south on Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th July.

Traffic not intending to travel to the Grand Prix will be advised by signs, including the variable message signs on the motorway network, to use alternative routes. Traffic using the A43 between Brackley and Towcester, and not going to and from the Grand Prix, will be diverted.

The improved A43 between the M40 and B4031 Barley Mow Roundabout will be operating as a two-lane dual carriageway. Junction 10 on the M40 should still be operating in its present form.

Overall, there should be at least two lanes between M1 and M40 available for traffic going to and from the Grand Prix.

The existing lengths of dual carriageway between M1 (Junction 15A) and the Abthorpe Road roundabout at Towcester and from the Barley Mow roundabout, around Brackley Bypass to Whitfield Turn are unaffected and will operate in their normal way.

Ministers consider it important to support the Grand Prix as a showcase for an important UK industry whose success reflects positively on the UK. The Agency, the race organisers, the police and the contractor have successfully adopted a partnered approach to developing an accelerated programme to complete and use as much of the scheme as is required to allow a successful event.

Public Service Agreements

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what

reason district councils are not directly involved in local public service agreements; and what plans he has to extend them to district councils in the future. [53638]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Dr. Whitehead), to the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) on 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 557W.

Disabled Access

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many stations have been refurbished to ensure full disabled persons' access to railway platforms; and how many more are planned for completion by the end of 2002. [53258]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The information is not held centrally. However, the Strategic Rail Authority has recently written to all train operating companies requiring them to review their disabled peoples protection policies (DPPPs). As part of the review, operators will be required to identify the work that needs to be done at their stations to meet the standards of the authority's Code of Practice "Train and Station Services for Disabled Passengers". Following the review a programme of works to improve facilities for disabled passengers will be developed, part funded by the authority.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what buildings owned by his Department have solar panels installed. [53494]

Dr. Whitehead: Temple Quay House (Bristol) has a solar panel, which is used to power an atrium display.

E-Government

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress made by local government in the field of e-government. [53423]

Dr. Whitehead: All local authorities in England except one have demonstrated their commitment to e-government by preparing and submitting Implementing Electronic Government statements. These statements show how the local authority expects to implement local e-government to achieve the 2005 target and the progress made to date.

An assessment by local authorities in July 2001 showed that, on average, 29 per cent. of services were available electronically at that time. This was expected to rise to 45 per cent. by March 2003, 73 per cent. by March 2004 and 100 per cent. by the end of 2005. New information on the electronic availability of local services will be available later this year.

Road Safety

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received on the implications for road safety of the sale on the open market of the speed trap detector device, Snooper S5; and if he will make a statement. [53457]

Mr. Jamieson: The device in question is but one of a range of speed enforcement detection devices currently available in the UK. Successive Governments had believed such devices were banned under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949, but a court ruling in 1998 found this was not the case. My Department have consulted on proposals to introduce secondary legislation to ban the use of these devices in motor vehicles, and is considering how to proceed.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to amend the Health and Safety (Display Equipment) Regulations 1992 No. 2792 to ensure that the positioning of a computer monitor screen is at eye level when a user is sitting upright in front of it. [53302]

Dr. Whitehead: No. The minimum requirement for work stations, as set out in the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, already require that display screens should suit the needs of the operator or user.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which NDPBs in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland are accountable to the Government. [52509]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

All public bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are accountable, through their sponsoring Departments, to the relevant Minister, and therefore to Government. An index of public bodies is available in the Cabinet Office publication, 'Public Bodies 2001', a copy of which is held in the Library, and which is available on the internet.

Devolved public bodies and their public appointments are the responsibility of the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales. The Northern Ireland Office retains responsibility for a number of public bodies post devolution.

SCOTLAND

Dungavel Detention Centre

5. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Home Office concerning Dungavel detention centre. [51350]

Mr. Foulkes: I have regular discussions with Home Office Ministers on a range of issue. The operation of Dungavel detention centre was considered at a recent meeting.

Scottish Parliament

6. **Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will publish the results of her consultation on the size of the Scottish Parliament. [51351]

Mrs. Liddell: The consultation period closed on 29 March. Over 230 responses were received from organisations and individuals from across Scotland. I will publish my conclusions in due course.

Asbestosis Victims

7. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the insurance industry to review progress in paying compensation to asbestosis victims in Scotland. [51352]

18. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in securing the payment of compensation to asbestosis victims in Scotland. [51364]

Mrs. Liddell: I had a meeting on 24 April with the Association of British Insurers, the Chester Street scheme administrators, Iron Trades Management Services (ITMS), the Financial Services Compensation Scheme, Thompsons and Eversheds. This was a further meeting to discuss the handling of claims against Chester Street Insurance Ltd.

This was a productive meeting. ITMS produced statistics showing the progress of claims since I chaired a previous meeting on Chester Street on 6 March. These figures showed that, at the end of February, 10.6 per cent. of settled claims against insolvent policyholders had been paid. By 19 April, 40.7 per cent. of these claims had been paid.

The meeting agreed that a service standard would be laid down covering claims against Chester Street where the original policyholder is insolvent. Under this service standard, acceptance documents will be sent to claimants' lawyers within 20 working days of a claim being agreed. Once claimants' lawyers return the acceptance documents, cheques will be released within five working days.

Payments totalling over £3 million have now been made by the Association of British Insurers and the Financial Services Compensation Scheme, who are the two bodies responsible for organising payments of claims where the policyholder is insolvent.

I am determined to ensure that agreed claims against Chester Street are paid as quickly as possible. I will continue to monitor progress very carefully.

Drug Dealers

8. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the action being taken to seize the assets of major drug dealers in Scotland. [51353]

Mr. Foulkes: In the year from 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, 32 confiscation orders relating to the proceeds of drugs were secured in Scottish courts. The value of these orders totalled over £530,000.

Regeneration

9. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether she has recently visited Glasgow to examine economic regeneration. [51354]

Mrs. Liddell: I have visited a number of projects which contribute to the city's economic regeneration.

Manufacturing

10. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the performance of the manufacturing sector of the Scottish economy. [51355]

19. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on prospects for manufacturing industry in Scotland. [51365]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 791.

Post Offices

11. **Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues on the future of post office services in Scotland. [51356]

Mr. Foulkes: I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues on a wide range of matters. In addition, I have recently had meetings with the General Secretary of the Communication Workers' Union, executives from Consignia and the Chief Executive of PostComm, the industry regulator, to discuss Post Office services in Scotland.

Poverty

12. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues and others on the impact of health spending on strategies for alleviating poverty. [51358]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with UK Ministers and Scottish Ministers on a wide range of issues. Expenditure on the NHS in Scotland, however, is a devolved matter.

17. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made about the impact of the Budget upon child poverty in Scotland. [51363]

Mr. Foulkes: The Budget showed our continued determination to tackle child poverty. Around 450,000 families in Scotland will benefit from the introduction of the new working tax credit and the new child tax credit in 2003. The children's allowance in income support and job seeker's allowance will increase by £3.50 a week from October 2002, benefiting around 113,000 workless families in Scotland. We have also announced improvements to the new deal for lone parents, which has already benefited almost 15,000 people in Scotland.

The Department for Work and Pensions has also recently issued a consultation paper on "Measuring Child Poverty", to seek views on the best way of monitoring long-term progress.

Minimum Wage

13. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action is being taken against employers in Scotland who are failing to pay the national minimum wage. [51359]

Mrs. Liddell: The Inland Revenue has two specialist teams, one based in Aberdeen, the other in East Kilbride, who are responsible for enforcing the national minimum wage in Scotland. In the period April 2001–March 2002 over 500 investigations have been conducted, recovering £322,068 in wage arrears for Scottish workers. The Government have also run national publicity campaigns to raise awareness and the Inland Revenue regularly hold information seminars.

Defence Industry

14. **Mr. Roy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Ministry of Defence about jobs in Scotland which are *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly related to the defence industry. [51360]

Mrs. Liddell: I have had a number of recent discussions with my right. hon. Friend the Secretary of State on defence-related matters. Defence expenditure on equipment is estimated to support 6,000 jobs in Scottish businesses directly and a further 10,800 jobs indirectly.

Disability Rights Commission

15. **Miss Begg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action she is taking to promote the work of the Disability Rights Commission in Scotland. [51361]

Mr. Foulkes: I took part in a number of events last year publicising the role of the Disability Rights Commission in Scotland, including a seminar for Scottish MPs. In February, I held a reception in Edinburgh celebrating the commission's work which my hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People co-hosted.

Small and Medium Enterprises

16. **Rosemary McKenna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make an assessment of the impact of the Budget on SMEs in Scotland. [51362]

Mrs. Liddell: My right hon. Friend's Budget statement announced a package of reforms to the business tax system which will benefit small and medium-sized enterprises and provide longer-term economic stability and a competitive business environment. The simplification of the VAT regime will be of benefit to 107,000 small businesses in Scotland. The small firms rate of corporation tax will be reduced from 20 per cent. to 19 per cent., benefiting some 33,000 small firms in Scotland and some will now pay no tax at all on the first £10,000 of their profits. Small businesses in Scotland with turnover up to £150,000 will also benefit from the removal of automatic VAT penalties.

Future of Europe

20. **David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to ensure Scotland's interests are represented in the debate on the future of Europe. [51366]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government wish to encourage a wide ranging public debate on the Future of Europe in advance of the Inter-Governmental Conference in 2004. I will continue to contribute to that debate. For example, on 15 April I spoke at a Spanish Government seminar in Segovia on the Future of Europe.

I am also a member of the Cabinet Committee on European Policy and the Joint Ministerial Committee (Europe), as well as the Ministerial Committee on European Co-ordination (MINECOR). The Scottish Executive participates directly in the latter two committees. The Government are committed to involving and consulting the devolved administrations in line with the terms of the Concordat on the Coordination of EU Policy Issues.

NHS (Border Areas)

21. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health and Health Ministers from the devolved Administration to discuss NHS provision in border areas. [51367]

22. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health and Health Ministers from the Scottish Executive to discuss NHS provision in border areas. [51368]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with UK Ministers and Scottish Ministers on a wide range of issues. The most recent meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee on Health took place on 22 October; my hon. Friend the Advocate General for Scotland represented the Scotland Office. The NHS in Scotland is a devolved matter.

Rural Economy

23. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will next visit Galloway and Upper Nithsdale to discuss the rural economy with representatives from the farming industry. [51369]

Mrs. Liddell: I visited Dumfries on two occasions last year to discuss the local rural economy. I have at present no plans to visit Galloway and Upper Nithsdale.

24. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with rural businesses in Scotland regarding the aggregate tax. [51370]

Mr. Foulkes: I met with the British Aggregates Association on 21 January to discuss issues relating to the aggregates tax and rural business in Scotland.

Scottish Interests

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what steps she is taking to represent Scottish interests to the Treasury in setting net borrowing attributable to Scotland; [46353]

(2) what steps she is taking to represent Scottish interests to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Budget negotiations; [46354]

(3) what steps she has taken to represent Scottish interests to the Treasury in agreeing levels of services and their associated expenditures for Scottish residents; [46350]

(4) what steps she is taking to in represent Scottish interests to the Treasury in agreeing levels of tax on Scottish residents and enterprises; [46351]

(5) what steps she is taking to represent Scottish interests to the Treasury on the Comprehensive Spending Review. [46352]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with Treasury Ministers on a wide range of issues affecting Scotland.

Textile Industry

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had about support for the textile industry in Scotland since 11 September. [53235]

Mrs. Liddell: I work closely with colleagues in the Department for Trade and Industry to ensure that the national strategy for the UK textile and clothing industry and DTI's support for British designers is implemented in Scotland. I also work closely with Scottish Executive Ministers in the delivery of their three-year strategy for Scottish textiles.

I am delighted that Johnstons of Elgin have recently won a Queen's Award for Enterprise. This demonstrates what can be achieved in overseas markets with innovative and well-designed products. My aim is that all of our textile industry can achieve that kind of success.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive about the setting up of a public inquiry into the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [51357]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) on 14 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1207W.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Devolution

28. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Advocate-General what devolution issues she has considered in respect of the Land Reform Bill and the European convention on human rights. [51315]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill completed stage 1 in the Scottish Parliament on 20 March. This means that the general principles of the Bill were approved. I examine all Bills of the Scottish Parliament as they progress and when a Bill is passed I decide whether to refer it to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. My consideration of this Bill will cover a variety of matters, including its human rights aspects.

Legislation

27. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Advocate-General which Scottish Parliament Bills she has assessed since June 2001. [51314]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: My powers under the Scotland Act allow me to refer a Bill, or a provision of it, to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council for a decision as to the Bill's competence. Since June 2001 I have assessed 19 Bills passed by the Scottish Parliament. Those Bills have included important legislation concerning community care and health; housing; the International Criminal Court and the water industry. I have arranged for a complete list to be placed in the Library.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Members' Cars

45. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the President of the Council what proposals he has to discourage hon. Members from bringing their private vehicles into central London. [51338]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Traffic in London is the responsibility of the Mayor of London. I agree that we should all do our best to reduce vehicle usage in central London. Members have travel warrants and bicycle allowances to encourage us to leave our cars at home. I am sure my right hon. Friend would be interested in any suggestions the hon. Member has.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Public Information

47. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the President of the Council what proposals he plans to put before the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons for improving the system of public information relating to proceedings in the House. [51341]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Much is already happening. Work is in hand on a redesign of the parliamentary website, and an experiment in web casting proceedings in the House and its Committees is underway. The new visitor cafeteria and interpretation centre is scheduled to open on Tuesday 14 May.

My right hon. Friend will keep this work under review, and make further proposals as necessary.

Select Committees

48. **Andrew Bennett:** To ask the President of the Council what steps he is taking to take forward reform of Select Committees; and if he will make a statement. [51342]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Welsh Bills

49. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to bring forward proposals to provide more opportunities and mechanisms for the debate of Bills relating exclusively to Wales. [51343]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Standing Orders already provide a variety of mechanisms for debating Bills relating exclusively to Wales, and this Government will continue to bring forward such Bills.

People's Peers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council when the House of Lords Appointments Commission is to take its roadshow around the country to solicit applications from aspiring people's peers. [51340]

Mr. Robin Cook: I understand that the Commission has yet to finalise plans for its forthcoming programme of regional visits.

Modernisation

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on his proposals for reform of the sitting times of the House and the parliamentary calendar. [51332]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons is currently considering the proposals contained in my memorandum of December 2001. (HC 440).

I would like to see changes to our sitting patterns which would fit in better with the needs of modern life, and increase the House's ability to hold the Government to account.

Carry-over Bills

51. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on his proposals for carrying over Bills from one Session to another. [51345]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend's proposals are contained in his memorandum to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons published in December 2001 as HC440.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Child Care Facilities

50. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission if he will make a statement on the progress being made to improve child care facilities on the parliamentary estate. [51344]

Mr. Kirkwood: The House of Commons Commission is committed to family-friendly employment policies, and provides child care vouchers for staff with young children and a subsidised summer holiday play scheme. The Director of Finance and Administration has recently commissioned a consultancy study of options for child care in the parliamentary estate and in the Westminster area. I understand that the results of the study are expected in May.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Guardians Ad Litem

34. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what evaluation her Department has made of the effectiveness of the recent reforms of the guardians ad litem. [51324]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The functions of the guardians ad litem and reporting officers, the Family Court Welfare Service and the Children's Divisions of the Official Solicitor were combined to form the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service in April 2001.

CAFCASS is subject to independent inspection by HM Magistrates Court Service Inspectorate (MCSI). Its first report was published on 1 March and a copy has been placed in the Library.

Citizenship

35. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps the Department is taking to involve magistrates in promoting citizenship initiatives for young people. [51327]

Mr. Wills: The Department, over many years, has funded the outreach work of the Magistrates Association, which grew out of its schools project. Last year we provided just over £50,000 for this work. In addition my Department contributes £20,000 towards the cost of the annual Magistrates Court Mock Trial Competition, which is organised by the Citizenship Foundation in conjunction with the Magistrates Association.

Judges' Lodgings

36. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement about the current cost of judges' lodgings. [51328]

Mr. Wills: The hon. Member will be aware that the Lord Chancellor has decided that any changes to the means of accommodating High Court Judges while on circuit will only take place in the context of relevant recommendations of Lord Justice Auld's report. Consultation on the report has closed and Ministers are currently considering the comments received prior to publication of a White Paper.

In the meantime, administrative improvements in the existing lodgings' network are being implemented.

Family Support Services

37. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has for CAFCASS to provide a bilingual service in Wales. [51329]

Ms Rosie Winterton: CAFCASS plan to appoint a Welsh language officer in Wales this year, to provide translation services and support implementation of CAFCASS's diversity strategy in Wales and their Welsh Language Scheme.

Police Time

38. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the results of co-operation between the courts and the police to ensure efficient use of police time during court hearings. [51330]

Mr. Wills: Co-operation on this aspect of inter-agency work takes place in a number of ways. HM Magistrates Courts Service Inspectorate, jointly with the Inspectorates for the police and Crown Prosecution Service, are

undertaking a joint thematic inspection of listing. Fieldwork has commenced and their report is expected in the autumn.

Sir David O'Dowd is chairing the Reducing Bureaucracy Task Force that has been set up to identify and reduce bureaucratic burdens in the criminal justice system and in particular on police officers. This includes work on the role of the courts. Fieldwork through this task force has commenced and a final report is due in July. There is close co-operation between the Inspectorates and the work being done by the O'Dowd task force.

In 2001, the national Trials Issues Group issued guidance to all criminal justice areas, pointing out the huge cost implications of calling officers to court on their rest days, or at the end of a late turn of duty, etc. The advice raised awareness of the cost and manpower implications of court listings and it is hoped that the good practice advice contained therein has led to further improvements. At a local level, there is on-going consideration in relation to the efficient use of all court users' time through local Trials Issues Group meetings and the Area Criminal Justice Strategy Committees.

The Crown court are currently running the Xhibit pilot project in Chelmsford which is look to use IT better to inform parties to a case on how the case is progressing. This includes sending electronic messages from the courtroom to pagers and mobile phones and means that witnesses do not have to wait in the court building to give evidence but can be contacted as and when needed. Although not specifically targeted at police officers, it allows the officers to remain in their station (if it is relatively close to the court building) and carry on with other duties while they are waiting.

In relation to "cracked and ineffective" trials in the Crown court, a study commenced in Manchester on 16 April in conjunction with other agencies and is looking at the best ways to avoid unnecessary attendance at court by the parties and their witnesses. In the magistrates courts, a new data collection exercise commenced in April 2002, which will consider the reasons for "cracked and ineffective" trials and this will also impact upon police officers' role in court.

QCs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent discussions she has had with the Law Society concerning the procedures for appointing QCs. [51319]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has had no recent discussions with the Law Society about the procedures for appointing Queen's Counsel.

Better Quality Services Initiatives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which of the services of his Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50309]

Mr. Wills: The Better Quality Services programme was launched in 1998 and adopted by the Cabinet Office in the Modernising Government White Paper of 1999 as a means of delivering continuous improvements in the quality and effectiveness of Government activities and services. It requires all Departments to review every activity and service over a five-year period starting in October 1999. The scheme covers all activities in Departments, Agencies and Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

The Lord Chancellor's Department's wide ranging programme of policy, service and organisational reviews forms the basis of its BQS programme and provides comprehensive coverage of functions. The review of activities and services started in 1999. A major part of this programme is the Quinquennial Review of the Court Service. The Review has just been completed and will be published shortly.

There are a number of office service and supply activities that are due to be reviewed within the next couple of years before the current contracts expire. This will complete the Department's current BQS programme.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many net additional staff her Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52429]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The number of staff recruited by the Department are as follows:

Recruitment since June 2001

	(a) Executive officer level staff	*Higher/senior executive officer level staff*	*(b) Administrative level staff*
LCD HQ and associated offices			
June 2091	1	0	0
July 2001	3	1	0
August 2001	1	0	0
September 2001	10	2	1
October 2001	1	3	11
November 2001	0	2	5
December 2001	0	1	7
January 2002	0	0	5
February 2002	0	6	3
March 2002	1	9	1
The Court Service			
June 2001	2	0	43
July 2001	3	0	37
August 2001	9	2	43
September 2001	15	1	69
October 2001	20	1	77
November 2001	3	1	51
December 2001	4	0	29
January 2002	4	0	100
February 2002	3	1	59
March 2002	2	0	43
The Public Guardianship Office			
June 2001	4	0	3
July 2001	1	1	1
August 2001	1	0	0
September 2001	1	0	0
October 2001	0	7	0
November 2001	0	0	0
December 2001	1	1	0
January 2002	0	1	0
February 2002	3	3	1
March 2002	6	2	2

It is not possible to determine how many of these are

"net additional staff". Many of these recruits will be to replace staff who have left the Department, through resignation, retirement, transfer etc., and only a small proportion will be to fill new vacancies. A more accurate measure would be to compare the numbers of staff from one year to another, as shown in the annually published Civil Service Statistics, but even that would include transfers from other Government Departments as well as new recruits.

Contact Centres

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what systems are in place to monitor the work of contact centres. [39369]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Child contact centres are run by the voluntary sector. Many contact centres are affiliated to other organisations, principally the National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC). The Lord Chancellor's Department is working with NACCC and other key organisations in this field, to develop national definitions of contact and more consistent and safer referral processes. The Department provided grant-in-aid funding during 2000–01 and 2001–02 to assist these organisations in developing their respective models of contact. The Government are also currently considering as a matter of priority the recent recommendations on contact centres made by the Children's Act Sub-Committee, of the Lord Chancellors Advisory Board on Family Law, in its report "Making Contact Work" published on 8 February 2002.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training is given to staff running contact centres. [39370]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Child contact centres are run by the voluntary sector. Many contact centres are affiliated to and trained by other organisations, principally the National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC). The Lord Chancellor's Department is working with NACCC, and other key organisations in this field, to develop more consistent and safer referral processes which includes training of staff. The Department provide grant-in-aid funding during 2000–01 and 2001–02 to assist these organisations in developing their respective models of contact which included training packages. The Government are also currently considering as a matter of priority the recent recommendations on contact centres made by the Children's Act Sub-Committee, of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Board on Family Law, in its report "Making Contact Work" published on 8 February 2002.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she will reply to the questions from the hon. Member for Winchester of 26 February (refs 39369 and 39370). [52346]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I apologise to the hon. Member for not replying to his questions of 26 February. I regret that this was due to an administrative oversight. I have answered both questions today.

Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance is given to *(a)* magistrates and *(b)* the judiciary about court proceedings involving people with autistic spectrum disorders as (i) witnesses and (ii) defendants. [51325]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB) which is an independent non-departmental public body. It is chaired by Lord Justice Waller.

All judges are supplied on appointment with a copy of the Equal Treatment Bench Book, which contains guidance on different aspects of disability, including autism. The Equal Treatment Bench Book is also available to Magistrates through their Magistrates Courts' Committees.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in the Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions he has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within his Department. [50478]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department has not made extensive use of smart card technology to date. Future plans for the delivery of electronic services are set out in our e-Business Strategy (www.lcd.gov.uk/ebus/stratcont.htm). This is accompanied by a supporting technical strategy for Information and Communications Technology (www.courtservice.gov.uk/info/reps/ictstrategy.pdf) which is fully compliant with central standards laid down by the Office of the e-Envoy. Smart cards are one of a large number of technologies discussed in this document and it is within this framework that any future deployment of smart cards will be delivered.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new initiatives his Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47187]

Mr. Wills: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will list for each of the last five years the total amount of money spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes; [47207]

(2) how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46849]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I have previously provided total entertainment expenditure figures for Ministers and Officials relating to the financial years from 1998–99 to 2000–01 and I refer

the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 405W.

User Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new steps her Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if he will publish the findings. [47308]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Court Service has initiated a programme of regular customer satisfaction surveys of court and tribunal users. A press notice was released in April last year, giving details of the first findings. The second part of the survey was completed in November 2001 and the third is in progress: these results will be published in the summer of 2002. All magistrates' courts carry out two court user surveys a year. The results are published and can be found in the House Library.

The Public Record Office and HM Land Registry conduct formal customer surveys each year. The Public Record Office conducted four customer satisfaction surveys of visitors to Kew and the Family Records Centre and achieved an average user satisfaction figure of 95.6 per cent. The highlights of the survey will be published in the Keeper's Report.

The results from the Land Registry 2001 annual survey show that 99 per cent. of respondents were either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the Registry's services. The results are published on the Land Registry website.

In addition the Lord Chancellor's Department conducts a programme of research across its responsibilities which bear on service users and their wishes and expectations. The results are published. Details of the research programme are available from the Department's website.

The Lord Chancellor's Department also issues consultation documents from time to time. These are published on the Department's website. In line with the Code of Practice on Written Consultation summaries of responses to consultation papers are published and are also available from the Department's website.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44943]

Mr. Wills: The target times for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members in the 2002 calendar year and *(b)* officials to reply to letters received direct from members of the public in 2002–03 business year will be as follows:

All figures in working days

	(a) Letters from MPs	*(b) Letters from public*
Lord Chancellor's Department	20	15
Court Service	[1]15	15
Public Guardianship Office	[1]15	15
Hon. Member Land Registry	[1]20	5
Public Record Office	[1]20	10
Northern Ireland Court Service	[1]20	15

[1] Agency Chief Executives to Members of Parliament

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44812]

Mr. Wills: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for a Resource Accounting and Management Information System for the Lord Chancellor's Department by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49662]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Probate Records Centre for the Lord Chancellor's Department by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49669]

(3) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Local County Court Systems for the Lord Chancellor's Department by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49661]

(4) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Libra project for the Lord Chancellor's Department by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49550]

Mr. Wills: Before the award of the contracts for the Resource Accounting and Management Information System (ARAMIS), the Local County Court Systems (LOCCS) and the Libra project the contract values were compared with public sector comparators and demonstrated value for money.

Since the award of these contract additional work has been commissioned which was not included in the original comparison. It is not possible to produce a lifetime 'comparative' savings figure for these contracts because of work that has taken place since contract award. However, additional work commissioned under these contracts is subject to an evaluation process to ensure that value for money is achieved.

Savings over the lifetime of the contract for the Probate Records Centre are estimated at £16.4 million.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which she is

responsible under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [49607]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on the New Deal programmes has never been collected centrally for non-departmental public bodies. Only one of our NDPBs, the Legal Services Commission, has employed people under the New Deal and they do not record data in a way that would enable an answer to be given to the exact question. However, one person was employed by their predecessor body, the Legal Aid Board, under the New Deal in October 1998 and subsequently became a permanent member of staff.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in his Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50421]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The cost of the pay award for staff in the Lord Chancellor's Department, including its agencies and NDPBs, in 2001–02 was as follows:

LCDHQ and associated offices—£1,125,529.

Court Service—£6,240,000

Public Guardianship Office—£276,000.

The Legal Services Commission—£792,000.

The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) came into existence in April 2001 and pay was previously the responsibility of the services which preceded it.

Proposals for pay in 2002–03 are still under consideration.

Staff (Locally Elected Representatives)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many members of staff at his Department are locally elected democratic representatives; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become locally elected democratic representatives. [44538]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department actively supports staff members in undertaking voluntary public service by the provision of special leave with pay. For example, an elected member of a local authority, including Mayors in their Mayoral year and Chairpersons of Councils, are entitled to up to 18 days paid leave each year. However, we keep no central record of numbers.

Information Disclosure

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the *(a)* amendment and *(b)* repeal under section 75 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 of legislation prohibiting the disclosure of information. [53819]

Mr. Wills: We have identified 155 items of primary legislation and 83 items of secondary legislation that contain provisions prohibiting the disclosure of information. We have also identified a further 62 items of primary legislation and 18 items of secondary legislation which contain provisions providing discretion to disclose information.

We have identified 36 items of legislation to be repealed or amended under the provisions in section 75 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. 57 items of legislation have been identified which fulfil our international obligations. It will be necessary to retain these.

A list of all the legislation identified will be placed in the Library of the House.

Decisions on the repeal or amendment of legislation governing the disclosure of information relating to devolved matters in Scotland is a matter for the Scottish Executive. The repeal or amendment of legislation within the devolved authority of the Northern Ireland Assembly will be a matter for consultation with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Each item of legislation not already identified as a candidate for repeal or amendment and not fulfilling an international obligation is now being reviewed to determine whether it may be so repealed or amended in light of the provisions in the Freedom of Information Act 2000. A further update will be given in the annual report in November on implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Death Penalty

Jean Corston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether the UK intends to sign and ratify Protocol 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights, on the death penalty, when it is opened for signature. [54031]

Mr. Wills: Yes. The Government will sign Protocol 13 with a view to ratification when it is opened for signature at the next Council of Ministers meeting at Vilnius on 2 and 3 May. We will seek Parliament's approval under the Human Rights Act to add this Protocol to the Convention rights set out in that Act.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Children's Rights

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the UK reservation on the United Nations convention on the rights of the child; and if he will make a statement. [31155]

Angela Eagle: The United Kingdom ratified the United Nations convention on the rights of the child in 1991. The reservation in respect of article 22 in no way inhibits the discharge of our obligations under the convention. It is there to safeguard the right of the United Kingdom to determine its own immigration and nationality laws. We have carefully reviewed the reservation in the light of

recent requests that it should be withdrawn. However, we are convinced that it remains necessary in the interests of maintaining an effective immigration control.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46804]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The total cost of running the Home Office press office in 1996–97 was £1,229,000. This does not include the cost of the then separate Prison Service Media Relations Unit, for which no detailed central records exist. The costs for the year 2001–02 were £2,415,606 including a cost of £358,399 for media relations for the Prison Service, now integrated into the Home Office press office.

Staff numbers increased when a 'breaking news' press team was established in 2000. This was one of the recommendations from the independent external consultants who carried out a review of the structure and operation of the press office in 1999. One of the benefits has been that media calls to the press office, one of the busiest in Whitehall, are now being answered within four rings 90 per cent. of the time. Previously there were occasions when up to 40 per cent. of media calls were being 'lost'.

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by his Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34989]

Angela Eagle: The available information on the number and value of contracts awarded by the Home Department to *(i)* Arthur Andersen, *(ii)* Deloitte and Touche, *(iii)* Ernst and Young, *(iv)* KPMG and *(v)* PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997 is as follows:

Company	*Number of contracts*	*Value £*
1997–98		
Ernst and Young	1	10,465
KPMG	2	178,756
1998–99		
Ernst and Young	1	35,250
PricewaterhouseCoopers	2	70,440
KPMG	2	178,973
1999–2000		
PricewaterhouseCoopers	5	7,119,027
KPMG	1	25,000
Ernst and Young	2	311,000
Deloitte and Touche	1	130,000
2000–01		
PricewaterhouseCoopers	3	253,999
Ernst and Young	2	1,166,913
2001 to date		
PricewaterhouseCoopers	3	128,855
Deloitte and Touche	1	15,800
Ernst and Young	1	429,000

Note:

The Home Office has not awarded any contract to Andersen for the period in question.

Contracts were awarded following civil service rules.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times Ministers in his Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47103]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Library. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 31 April 1999. Details for travel undertaken in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Library.

Theft of Identity

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the change in incidences of theft of identity and his initiatives to tackle this crime. [47578]

Mr. Denham: The recorded crime statistics do not record specifically incidence of identity theft as this often forms part of another crime such as credit card fraud.

However, it is generally acknowledged that the incidences of identity theft and identity fraud are rising. The Government estimate that the current cost of identity theft and fraud to the United Kingdom economy is at least £1.2 billion per annum, though it is difficult to isolate the cost of identity theft and fraud from the cost of other types of theft and fraud.

Following an extensive study on identity fraud which has been led by officials in the Cabinet Office, the Home Office will co-ordinate the development and implementation of a work programme to counter identity theft and fraud and the private sector will be invited to participate. The Government will seek views on potential initiatives to counter identity fraud in a consultation paper. I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 872W.

Some of the potential initiatives on which the Government will be consulting will include:

(i) strengthening the procedures for issuing current identity documents such as driving licences and passports;

(ii) establishing a public sector database of known and suspected fraudsters against which applications for Government services could be cross-checked;

(iii) making identity theft a specific offence in itself rather than relying on offences being committed after the identity has been stolen;

(iv) establishing a database of stolen identity documents that can be checked when they are produced as forms of identification.

Illegal Entrants

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegal entrants were detained when entering the UK by truck through Dover in each quarter of 2001. [49933]

Angela Eagle: In 2001 the Immigration Service at Dover eastern docks detected and initially detained a total of 2,835 illegal entrants attempting to enter the United Kingdom concealed in vehicles, mainly lorries. By quarter, the figures for Dover in 2001 were 572 (January to March), 596 (April to June), 871 (July to September) and 796 (October to December).

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Government buildings owned by his Department have solar panels installed. [51188]

Angela Eagle: At present no Home Office buildings have solar panels installed. However, a pilot study to install solar water heaters at Her Majesty's Prison Prescoed is out to tender. If successful, consideration will be given to extending the use of solar water heaters to other prison establishments. A new unit at Her Majesty's Prison Askham Grange is also to include solar water heating panels.

Mrs. Dayekh

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Woking dated 7 November 2001 and 9 January on the subject of Mrs. Dayekh on appeal (ref no VV 03010/2001). [50865]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* My right hon. and noble Friend Lord Rooker wrote to the hon. Member on 24 April 2002. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Mr. Mohamed

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the Department has not responded to the application for consideration of political asylum for Mr. Mohamed, an Iraqi national, port reference EDD/01/20967 and HO reference M1051379, which was submitted on 10 April 2001; and if he will make a statement. [51132]

Angela Eagle: I wrote to the hon. Member on 29 April 2002.

Ms Yoko Sibthorp

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce his response to the outcome of the appeal by Ms Yoko Sibthorp for the right to remain permanently in the United Kingdom. [51426]

Angela Eagle: The appeal by Ms Yoko Sibthorp was allowed in a determination promulgated on 8 April 2002. The Secretary of State has decided not to challenge the decision and the papers have now been passed to the relevant caseworking department for the necessary leave to be granted.

Voluntary Sector Funding

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous) of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1185–86W, on Government funding of the voluntary sector, what information is collated on the contributions made to the state funding of the voluntary sector by *(a)* central Government, *(b)* local government, *(c)* the European Union, *(d)* the National Lottery and *(e)* other state sources. [51406]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Information on funding from all these sources is not routinely collated by Government.

The most recent estimates available to the Home Office on funding to the voluntary sector, in the categories identified, are for 1999–2000 and are totals for the United Kingdom as follows:

(a) Central government—£1,220,069,420

(b) Local government—£1,611,387,000

(c) European funds—£232,061,849

(d) National Lottery—£1,118,315,366

(e) Other state sources—£878,400,000

Note:

Other state sources include health authorities and trusts, police and fire authorities.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding the Government have given to the *(a)* National Council for Voluntary Organisations, *(b)* Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, *(c)* Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, *(d)* Wales Council for Voluntary Action, *(e)* British Youth Council, *(f)* Charities Aid Foundation, *(g)* Community Action Network, *(h)* Community Development Foundation, *(i)* Charity Finance Directors Group, *(j)* National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service, *(k)* Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations and *(l)* Ethnic Minority Foundation in each of the last five years. [51218]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Information on Government funding to these organisations is currently only available for 1998–99 and 1999–2000. Data for 2000–01 are in the process of being collected. Total Government funding is as follows:

£

	1998–99	*1999–2000*
British Youth Council	49,000	52,277
Charities Aid Foundation	6,000	1,608,000
Charity Finance Directors Group	0	[1]—
Community Action Network	107,481	45,000
Community Development Foundation	901,800	13,829,916
Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Section Organisations	0	42,000
Ethnic Minority Foundation	0	[1]—
National Association of Councils of Voluntary Service	239,893	342,003
National Council of Voluntary Organisation	1,037,887	990,000
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action	[1]—	[1]—
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations	377,150	3,199,199
Wales Council for Voluntary Action	768,564	1,091,537

[1] No data

Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the budget is for the OISC in 2002–03. [51519]

Angela Eagle: The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC's) budget has been provisionally agreed for the year 2002–03 as £3,462,466. This is subject to approval by my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State at the Home Office (Lord Rooker).

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints he has received concerning immigration advisers since the establishment of the OISC. [51521]

Angela Eagle: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate do not keep a central record of complaints received about immigration advisers. If any are received, the complainant is advised to contact the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) or other relevant authority.

I understand that, as of 31 March 2002, the OISC had received or initiated 417 complaints about immigration advisers since their establishment.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the staffing arrangement is for the OISC. [51520]

Angela Eagle: Both the Immigration Services Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner are appointed by the Secretary of State. The Commissioner recruits his own staff and is currently authorised to employ a maximum of 55; the breakdown, with civil service equivalent grades shown, is as follows:

	Grade[1]	*Number of staff*
Senior Managers	(SEO)	7
Deputy Managers	(SEO)	2
Investigators	(SEO)	4
Caseworkers	(HEO)	20
Assistant Caseworkers	(EO)	3
Support	(HEO)	8
Support	(EO)	2
Senior Secretary	(SPS)	1
Admin Officers	(AO)	8
Total		55

[1] Civil service equivalent

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received from hon. Members concerning the work of the OISC. [51554]

Angela Eagle: Since 1 January 2002, three hon. Members have each written once to Home Office Ministers about the work of the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). In the same period, there have been two parliamentary questions on this subject.

Experience Corps

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of each of the regional branches of the Experience Corps was. [51010]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The Experience Corps is a single initiative and the Experience Corps Company has been allocated a total of £19.9 million for the period until 31 March 2004 to deliver said initiative.

The Experience Corps Company is a private company limited by guarantee. It is obliged to produce and publish an annual report, which includes audited accounts, no later than 30 September of each financial year.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the shareholders of the Experience Corps; and what system of financial accountability is in place in relation to funds provided by his Department. [51012]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The Experience Corps has no shareholders; it is a private company limited by guarantee.

An appropriate system of financial accountability is in place, details of which are contained within the Financial Agreement. The Home Office and National Audit Office do have access to all relevant documents relating to the expenditure of the grant in aid.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place a copy of the Financial Agreement of September 2001 between the Home Department and the Experience Corps in the Library. [51009]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* Yes, I will place a copy of the Financial Agreement in the Library.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the budget for communications, publicity and advertising of the Experience Corps is. [51011]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The grant in aid allocation to the Experience Corps Company for publicity, marketing and branding is £6 million.

The Experience Corps Company is a private company limited by guarantee. It is obliged to produce and publish an annual report, which includes audited accounts, no later than 30 September of each financial year.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many public appointments he has made since 1 January; and if he will list the names and remuneration of those appointed. [51502]

Angela Eagle: The table lists 42 appointments and reappointments made by the Home Office to public bodies between 1 January 2002 and 31 March 2002.

It is the practice not to publish the names of those appointed to the Board of Visitors in prison establishments in England and Wales because of concerns for their personal safety, but a total of 83 appointments and 428 re-appointments were made between 1 January 2002 and 31 March 2002.

Public body/appointee	*Remuneration*
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	
Dr. Dima Abdulrahim	Nil
Lord Victor Adebowale	Nil
Mr. Norman Bettison[1]	Nil
Dr. Margaret Birtwhistle	Nil
Rev. Martin Blakeborough[1]	Nil
Dr. Cecilia Bottomley	Nil
Mr. Roy Boyjoonauth[1]	Nil
Ms Carmel Clancy	Nil
Professor Ilana Crome	Nil
Ms Robyn Doran	Nil
Mr. Robert Eschle	Nil
Professor Hugh Edmondson	Nil
Ms Viviene Evans[1]	Nil
Professor C. Robin Ganellin	Nil
Dr. Laurence Gruer[1]	Nil
Mr. Paul Hayes[1]	Nil
Mr. Andrew Hayman	Nil
Mr. Russell Hayton[1]	Nil
Mr. Peter Housden[1]	Nil
Mr. Roger Howard[1]	Nil
Mr. Alan Hunter[1]	Nil
His hon. Judge Trevor Joseph	Nil
Dame Judith Kilpatrick	Nil
Dr. John Marsden	Nil
Mr. Peter Martin	Nil
Professor David Nutt[1]	Nil
Mr. Richard Pates	Nil
Mr. Trevor Pearce	Nil
Mr. Arthur Preddy	Nil
Mrs. Kay Roberts[1]	Nil
Mrs. Patricia Roberts[1]	Nil
Dr. Roy Robertson[1]	Nil
Dr. Mary Rowlands	Nil
Mr. Hywel Sims	Nil
Dr. Polly Taylor	Nil
Ms Monique Tomlinson	Nil
Animal Procedures Committee	
Reverend Professor Michael Banner[1]	£206 per day
Community Development Foundation	
Mrs. Mavis Best[1]	Nil
Jagwant Singh Johal[1]	Nil
Peter Latchford[1]	Nil
Prof. Ruth Lister	Nil
Ms Avila Kilmurray[1]	Nil

[1] Re-appointment

Drug Abstinence Order

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug abstinence orders have been issued. [51471]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* Drug abstinence orders and drug abstinence requirements were made available to the courts covering the three pilot sites, Nottingham, Staffordshire and Hackney on 5 November 2001. As at 28 February 2002, seven drug abstinence orders and 85 drug abstinence requirements have been issued.

Drug Policy (Brixton)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on progress made on the new drug policy in Brixton; [51615]

(2) what plans he has to extend the drug scheme in Brixton to the rest of the country; [51614]

(3) when he last met police representatives to discuss the drug policy in Brixton; and what was concluded. [51616]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 24 April 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has not met police representatives to discuss the drug policy in Brixton, but he has been following the progress of the Lambeth cannabis pilot very closely. I have met officers in Brixton additionally, officials from the Home Department meet regularly with representatives from the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Metropolitan police to discuss this and other issues.

The Home Secretary recognises that it is important to address policing cannabis issues such as those raised by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, so as not only to bring consistency to policing practice on the streets but also to make the most effective use of police time.

I understand that the Metropolitan police are continuing their evaluation of the policy being operated in Lambeth to assess more accurately its precise impact. I further understand that the Metropolitan police have no plans to extend the operational pilot to other areas in advance of a full evaluation of all the issues being available.

Henry Kissinger

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from Spain concerning the visit of Henry Kissinger to the UK. [53675]

Mr. Blunkett: A letter of request from Spain for mutual legal assistance involving the evidence of Henry Kissinger was received in the Home Office on 19 April 2002. This request was refused on 22 April, since it did not comply with United Kingdom legislative requirements. No representations were received from Spanish authorities in this connection.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many induction, accommodation and removal centres for asylum seekers there are in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales; where they are; and how many people each of them holds. [46981]

Angela Eagle: Currently there is one induction centre in Dover. Generally speaking asylum seekers requiring accommodation will spend approximately one week in the induction centre before being dispersed. Other asylum seekers requesting either subsistence only support or who do not require support will spend between one and two days at the centre. We are proposing to open further induction centres over the coming months close to major ports such as Heathrow and Gatwick and a small number in the regions. There is no ceiling on the number who can be accommodated in an induction centre but typically there are between 200 and 500 in the centre at any one time.

There are no accommodation centres at present but we intend to establish a number of these with a total capacity of 3,000 to accommodate a proportion of new asylum seekers from application through initial decision and any appeal. This will be taken forward on a trial basis. We have identified eight potential sites for accommodation centres. Six of these are in England, one in Scotland and one in Wales.

They are located as follows:

QinetiQ (the Defence Establishment Research Agency formerly (DERA)) Pershore, Worcestershire

Royal Air Force (RAF) Hemswell, West Lindsey, Lincolnshire

Sully Hospital, Cardiff

Hooton Park, Ellesmere Port, Cardiff

Land vacated by Ministry of Defence (MOD) Logistics, Bicester, Oxfordshire

Air West Edinburgh (formerly RAF Turnhouse), Edinburgh

RAF Newton, West Bridgeford, Nottinghamshire

National Energy Site Killinghome, Grimsby, North Lincolnshire.

The Government are committed to ensuring that the long-term mix of facilities for the support of asylum seekers and management of the asylum processes is based on evidence of what works. The operation of the trial accommodation centres will be thoroughly evaluated, taking account of a number of factors including costs, processing times, ease of access to integration programmes for those granted refugee status and the rate of returns in cases which are refused.

The following removal centres are located in England and Scotland.

Removal centres	*Location*	*Total capacity*[1]	*No. of family beds*
Campsfield	Kidlington, Oxford	184	—
Harmondsworth	West Drayton, Middlesex	550	72
Tinsley House	Gatwick airport	[2]137	14
Dover	Dover, Kent	316	—
Lindholme	Doncaster	112	—
Haslar	Gosport, Hampshire	160	—
Dungavel	Strathaven, South Lanarkshire	150	54

[1] Including family beds

[2] From end April 2002

The total detention capacity at immigration removal centres is 1,609. This figure excludes the 400 places at Oakington Reception Centre and the provision of detention places at Yarl's Wood Removal Centre that is currently unused.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how detained asylum seekers are informed of rights they have to apply for bail. [48281]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The notice (IS91R) served on detainees to inform them of the reasons for their detention also contains details of their rights to apply for bail. The immigration officer serving the notice must sign this form to confirm that the detainee has been informed of these rights. If the detainee does not understand English, the immigration officer must ensure that the form's contents are interpreted.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many families there were awaiting a final decision on their asylum application in each of the last six months. [51742]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Information on the number of families awaiting a final decision on their asylum application is not readily available and would be obtained only by examination of individual case files to get information on the outcomes of initial decisions, of subsequent appeals to the Immigration Appellate Authority and to the Tribunal, which would incur disproportionate cost.

An initial decision has been served for around two thirds of asylum applications from families received in April to September 2001 (the latest period for which such data are available).

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the most recent Ofsted inspection of education provision in each *(a)* detention and *(b)* removal centre in England took place. [51661]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* There have been no inspections by Ofsted of the children's education provision at the two immigration removal centres which have such provision as neither Harmondsworth nor Dungavel have been operating long enough to warrant such an inspection.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* separated children and *(b)* children in families arrived in the UK and made an asylum application in each of the last six months. [51743]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The table shows the number of unaccompanied children under the age of 18 who have made an asylum application in the period March to August 2001, inclusive. August is the latest month for which data are available.

Unaccompanied children[1,2,3], aged 17 or under, applying for asylum to the United Kingdom, March to August 2001

Month	*Total applications*
March	281
April	216
May	281
June	331
July	305
August	471
Total	1,885

[1] Unaccompanied at the point of their arrival, and not known to be joining a close relative in the United Kingdom
[2] Figures exclude disputed age cases
[3] Provisional data

Reliable information on the number of children who have applied for asylum in the United Kingdom, accompanied by an adult, is not readily available and could be obtained only by examination of individual case records and is, therefore, only available at disproportionate cost.

Information on unaccompanied minors is published annually in the statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library and from the RDS website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Parole

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome is of the review of parole and lifer processes announced by the right hon. Member for Brent South in February 2000. [53948]

Beverley Hughes: The report of the comprehensive review of parole and lifer processes was published today on the Prison Service website, www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk. A copy has also been placed in the Library. The report concluded that the Parole Board for England and Wales should continue to function as an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by Her Majesty's Prison Service. The report also recommended a series of improvements to the parole and lifer processes, consolidate and continue improvements over the last few years, which will now be taken forward.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the information-gathering powers contained in the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 will be brought into effect. [54010]

Malcolm Wicks: The Social Security Fraud Act contains important new powers for the Department and local authorities to get information from organisations such as banks and utility companies to help in the fight against benefit fraud. These new powers come into effect from today and a revised Code of Practice has been laid before Parliament.

Further sections of the Fraud Act are also brought into effect from today. These include new powers for the Department and local authorities to offer financial penalties to benefit offenders, on behalf of each other, as an alternative to prosecution, rather than each having to offer a separate penalty as was previously the case; and for the Department and local authorities to offer financial penalties to employers who collude with their staff in the commission of benefit offences, again as an alternative to prosecution.

These new measures should send out a strong message to all benefit cheats and would-be cheats, and those who collude with them, that we are on to them. From today, the odds on getting away with it have lengthened.

Benefits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 261W, how many households are estimated to be eligible for one or more of *(a)* pension credit, *(b)* housing benefit, *(c)* council tax benefit, *(d)* child tax credit, *(e)* working tax credit, *(f)* income support and *(g)* income-based jobseeker's allowance. [50429]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates are not available on a household basis.

Child Support

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the average time taken by the CSA Appeals Service to deal with appeals over the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [45759]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Neil Ward, chief executive of the Appeals Service. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Neil Ward to Mr. Vernon Coaker dated 19 April 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what assessment he has made of the average time taken by the Appeals Service to deal with Child Support appeals over the last 12 months.

The Appeals Service handles all appeals relating to Social Security, Child Support, Housing/Council Tax benefit, Vaccine damage and Compensation Recovery.

The average waiting time over the 12 month period, ending February 2002, in respect of Child Support appeals was 18.2 weeks.

The average waiting time over the 12 month period, ending February 2002, for all types of appeal, including Child Support, from date of receipt by the Appeals Service until first hearing, was 13.3 weeks. This is well within the Secretary of State's target of 14 weeks.

Child Support appeals invariably incur longer waiting times due to their complicated nature compared to other appeals, i.e. Child Support appeals require more further evidence, and often have more Parties to the Proceedings attend, than other appeals.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what performance targets he has set for the Child Support Agency for 2002–03; and when he will publish business plans for the Child Support Agency, Child Benefit Centre and the Disability and Carers Service. [54011]

Mr. Darling: The targets I have set the Child Support Agency are given as follows:

Further information on the Child Support Agency plans for 2002–03 is contained in their business plan, which has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Business plans for the Child Benefit Centre and the Disability and Carers Directorate have also been published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

Child Support Agency targets 2002–03

Existing cases:

Accuracy—accuracy on the last decision made for all assessments checked in the year to be correct to the nearest penny in at least 80 per cent. of cases.

Case compliance—to collect child maintenance and arrears from 71 per cent. of non-resident parents with maintenance liability due to be paid through the agency's collection service.

Cash compliance—to collect 68 per cent. of child maintenance and arrears due to be paid through the agency's collection service.

New cases:

When the new child support scheme is ready to be implemented I will set targets for new cases.

Voluntary Sector Funding

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1185–86W, on Government funding of the voluntary sector, if he will list the grant schemes and other mechanisms by which his Department distributes funding to voluntary sector organisations. [51407]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The voluntary sector is a key partner in the Departments efforts to help people back into work, particularly those facing the greatest disadvantages. Organisations in the voluntary sector receive funding under contract to the Department for delivering a range of our employment and training programmes, including for example elements of the New Deal. We also have key relationships with, and make grants to, the voluntary sector in: helping people with disabilities to live more independently in the community; providing mobility related assistance; and free help and advice to members of the public regarding their company, stakeholder or personal pension scheme.

Pensions

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will introduce proposals to require employees to pay into a joint insurance policy to underwrite employees pension schemes. [51372]

Mr. McCartney: We have no plans to introduce proposals requiring employers to contribute to a joint insurance policy to underwrite employees pension schemes. Compulsory mutual insurance to support the pension fund of an insolvent company was among the options considered when we consulted on the future of the minimum funding requirement in September 2000, but it received little support. Such an arrangement could lead to schemes neglecting their obligations knowing that their liabilities would still be met in the event of insolvency. Many employers sponsoring well-funded schemes would object to subsidising firms which neglected their obligations.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will take steps to remove company representatives from the management of pension funds. [51373]

Mr. McCartney: We have no plans to remove company representatives from the management of pension funds.

Pension schemes are set up voluntarily by employers for the benefit of their workforce, and the financial commitment this involves means they have a legitimate interest in the running of the scheme. Where decisions made by trustees have a direct implication for the financial position of the employer, it is understandable and right that the employer wants to be part of that decision making process.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people who had to make a claim for the 2001–02 winter fuel payment; and of that number how many failed to do so by 31 March. [50990]

Mr. McCartney: Pursuant to my written answer on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 205W.

For winter 2001–2, an estimated 500,000 people became newly entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment. At least 255,000 of these people were paid automatically.

Exact numbers of people who need to claim are not available. However, by the deadline of 30 March, around 220,000 claims forms have been received. It is up to the individual to choose whether to claim.

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the functions of his Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [43005]

Mr. Nicholas Brown:

£

	Money saving (£)	*Percentage saving*
Market tested functions:		
Corporate Document Services	403,803	3
Accommodation and Office Services	41.5 million	17.6
Outsourced functions:		
Benefits Agency Medical Services	62.2 million	14
Estates Management Services	560 million	22
Employment Service HR and payroll	11 million	27.5
Strategic Outsourcing of IS/IT	72 million	3

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases have been brought against his Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45064]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We do not collect central records of all cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 is relied on. Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge.

We do not collect separate information centrally about the costs to public funds, legal fees or compensation payments in cases which include a human rights issue. In most cases it will be difficult to single out associated costs relating to the human rights element.

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43670]

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [38725]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. The information requested on contracts let by the ex-Employment Service and ex-Department of Social Security is not held centrally in the new Department and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The Department for Work and Pensions lets a large number of contracts in a year, most of which are for low value purchases let by distributed units. The cost of collecting and analysing information on centrally let deals since the department was formed is provided in the table. The table includes a range of commercial deals including framework agreements under which individual contracts can be let at set terms, conditions and prices. Contract value are not provided because of commercial confidentiality.

Awards between May 2001 and February 2002 by value

Contract or Agreement	*Supplier (current name)*
IS/IT distribution, implementation and disposal services (DIDS) business allocation under ACCORD	Arcway (BT led consortium)
Rail travel booking services framework	Qjump
Travel services framework	Lonsdale Travel
Desktop stationery framework (2 suppliers)	Banner Business Systems Guilbert UK Ltd
Computer consumables framework (3 suppliers)	Banner Business Systems Guilbert UK Ltd Orion Media Marketing and Supplies
Paper framework (5 suppliers)	Banner Business Systems Bunzl Fine Paper Guilbert UK Ltd Premier Paper Glenmore Business Papers
Vehicle leasing framework	Arval PHH
Envelopes framework	Banner Business Systems

Social Fund

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what his assessment is of *(a)* the incidence of fraud in Social Fund applications and *(b)* the cost of such fraud in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [51045]

(2) how many applications for Social Fund payment have been investigated as a result of suspected fraud in each year since 1997; how many of them have resulted in *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions; and if he will break down the figures by the sentences imposed in cases which resulted in convictions. [51046]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The information requested is not available.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the understanding of Social Fund applicants of (i) the conditions of eligibility for each of the Social Fund payments and (ii) the basis on which decisions are taken relating to their Social Fund payments. [51047]

Malcolm Wicks: In 1999–2000 research was commissioned from the Personal Finance Research Centre at the university of Bristol which explored customers' views of the application process for the new Social Fund budgeting loan scheme introduced in April 1999. The research report was published[1] in the autumn of 2000 and confirmed that the sample of users welcomed the new budgeting loan scheme for its easier access and quicker decisions.

[1] Whyley, Claire, Collard, Sharon and Kempson, Elaine, Saving and Borrowing: Use of the Social Fund Budgeting Loan Scheme and Community Credit Unions. Department of Social Security, research report no. 125, 2000.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Benefits Agency offices in England where the public attend have no security grilles. [31715]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Benefits Agency ceased to exist at the end of March 2002. All the social security offices within the new Jobcentre Plus network which previously belonged to the Benefits Agency network where the public attend have security screens.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of prosecutions brought as a result of investigations carried out by the Benefits Agency resulted in convictions in each year since 1997. [45330]

Malcolm Wicks: In each year since 1997, over 98 per cent. of prosecutions brought by the Benefits Agency have resulted in convictions.

Note:

Data underlying these figures have been collected from several sources and past definitions have varied. Figures may therefore differ slightly from those previously published.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30087]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security and parts of the Department for Education and Employment.

The expenditure by the new Department for Work and Pensions between June 2001 and the end of March 2002 on newspapers, magazines and periodicals was £96,368.15.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the total real terms expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36172]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions further to his answer to the hon. Member for Hertsmere of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 633W, on Jobcentre Plus offices, when he expects to receive the report from the Health and Safety Executive on Jobcentre Plus offices; and if he will publish it. [40201]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have written to the Department's Director of Human Resources following the HSE's inspection of three Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices. A copy of this letter has been placed in the Library.

The Director of Human Resources has met with representatives of the HSE to discuss the issues raised and has, in conjunction with the chief executive of Jobcentre Plus, taken steps to ensure that these issues are dealt with effectively. A copy of his reply has also been placed in the Library.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans the Government have to increase security at the new Jobcentre Plus centres; and if he will make a statement. [51232]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Fifty six integrated Jobcentre Plus offices are already open and operating effectively—with positive feedback from staff and customers. For each of these offices a full health and safety risk assessment has been conducted and its recommendations implemented in full. These risk assessments have also been reviewed in the light of experience of live operations.

The measures implemented to support the safety of staff and improved customer service as a result of the risk assessments include:

Closed circuit television;

Better management in each office to avoid difficult situations building up, for example floor managers to greet customers and guide them through their visit;

Where recommended by risk assessments, security guards with clear instructions as to when to intervene;

In each pathfinder area screened facilities to deal with situations likely to give rise to particular risk;

A clear zero tolerance policy under which determined action will be taken against, anyone threatening or abusing Jobcentre Plus staff.

Public-private Partnership (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total external spending by his Department was on public private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [43189]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department does not record information about the use of PPP consultants in the form requested and an answer could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been spent by his Department and its agencies on newspaper advertising, in each year since 1992. [46469]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not held in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which of the services of his Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50316]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Better Quality Services (BQS) programme was launched in 1998 and adopted by the Cabinet in the Modernising Government White Paper of 1999 as a means of delivering continuous improvements in the quality and effectiveness of Government activities and services. It requires all Government departments to review every activity and service over a five-year period starting in October 1999. The scheme covers all activities in Departments, Agencies and Executive Non Departmental Public Bodies, and is similar in remit to the Best Value programme in local government.

The Department for Work and Pensions was established in June 2001, specifically to improve customer service, and two new executive agencies, Jobcentre Plus and The Pension Service, were launched on 1 April 2002. During this period the Department did not carry out any Better Quality reviews. We are now considering where they would be appropriate.

Shared Residency Orders

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with the Lord Chancellor's Department regarding the effect of shared residency orders on the benefit entitlement of non-resident parents when custody is divided equally. [29790]

Malcolm Wicks: This Department has regular discussions with other Government Departments. This includes the Lord Chancellor's Department as necessary.

TREASURY

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of the total expenditure on working families tax credit went to each income decile in each year since the introduction of the working families tax credit; [50061]

(2) what percentage of the total expenditure on family credit went to each income decile in each of the last five years of family credit payments. [50060]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The estimated distribution for working families tax credit (WFTC) in 2000–01 is shown in the table. Note that to derive their decile groups people are ranked by their net incomes including WFTC.

Estimates for other years, and reliable estimates for family credit, are not available.

Percentage of total weekly expenditure on WFTC in each decile group of income, 2000–01[1]

Decile group of income[2]	*Percentage of WFTC expenditure*
Bottom	11
2	20
3	20
4	16
5	14
6	9
7 to 10 (Top)[3]	10
Total	100

[1] Estimated from families reporting receipt of WFTC in the 2000–01 Family Resources Survey. The estimates are subject to sampling error. They are rounded to the nearest 1 per cent., but should not be taken as accurate to this level.

[2] Recipients of WFTC have been allocated to the decile group of income of the household in which they live (the household may include other people as well as the family in question). The decile group of each household is established by ranking individuals by the net income of household, equivalised using the McClements scale. Net income is defined as including WFTC, after deducting tax and national insurance contributions, and before deducting housing costs.

[3] The small sample size means that separate reliable estimates for the four top decile groups are not available.

Contracted-out Rebates

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to paragraph C48 on page 221 of the Budget Red Book, if he will provide his estimate of how much lower grant in the contracted-out rebates is than was expected in the pre-Budget report; and if he will provide his estimate of higher receipt in the later years of the forecasts. [51949]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Lower growth in contracted out rebates than assumed in the pre-Budget report is estimated to result in an increase of £0.2 billion in net receipts from social security contributions in 2002–03. Estimates of higher receipts from Budget measures on a national accounts basis from 2003–04 are given in rows two to four of Table A.1 in the April 2002 Financial Statement and Budget report, and estimates of social security contributions as a percentage of GDP to 2006–07 are shown in Table C9.

EU Code of Conduct

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the application of the EU Code of Conduct to the Channel Isles. [51478]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The report of the Code of Conduct Group on Business Taxation to the ECOFIN Council on 29 November 1999 lists 66 tax measures in European Union member states and their dependent or associated territories which are considered to have harmful features. Nine of these are in the Channel Islands. The United Kingdom wishes to see the harmful aspects of all 66 measures removed.

Private Medical Insurance

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of *(a)* how many employees in the United Kingdom are covered by private medical insurance schemes provided by their employer and *(b)* the additional cost to those employers of the rise in national insurance contributions. [53267]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Over 2 million employees receive benefit from private medical and dental treatment or insurance arranged and paid by employers. This does not include self-employed individuals, or company policies provided for retired employees or for employees with earnings below the P11D threshold.

An additional 1 per cent. class 1A national insurance contribution from 2003–04 on the amount of private medical and dental benefit provided by employers is estimated to raise around £10 million per year.

National Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total UK revenue collected from direct taxes and National Insurance contributions in 2000–01. [49062]

Dawn Primarolo: The total revenue collected from Inland Revenue taxes net of tax credits and National Insurance contributions in 2000–01 was £209.4 billion.

Pay Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase

to staff in his Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03; [50404]

(2) what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible in each of the last five years. [50294]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is as follows:

Department, agency or non-departmental public body	*Cost of pay increase in 2001–02*	*Cost of forthcoming increase in 2002–03*
HM Treasury	The cost is estimated to be £924,000 at the time of settlement	Costs cannot be given because the pay increase has not yet been agreed
Royal Mint	The cost is estimated to be £804,000 at the time of the settlement	Royal Mint do not propose to increase pay rates in 2002–03
National Savings and Investments	The cost is estimated to be £5,232 at the time of the settlement (includes accrued expenditure that is still in the process of being refined	Costs cannot be given because the pay increase has not yet been agreed
ONS	The cost is estimated to be £2,387,000 at the time of settlement	Costs cannot be given because the pay increase has not yet been given
GAD	The cost is estimated to be £105,000 at the time of the settlement	Costs cannot be given because the pay increase has not yet been agreed
DMO	The cost is estimated to be £82,000 at the time of the settlement	Costs cannot be given because the pay increase has not yet been agreed
VOA	The cost is estimated to be £4.862 million at the time of the settlement	Costs cannot be given because the pay increase has not yet been agreed
OGC	The cost is estimated to be £913,000 at the time of the settlement	Costs cannot be given because the pay increase has not yet been agreed
Inland Revenue	The cost is estimated to be £34.3 million for staff below the SCS and £1 million for SCS staff at the time of the settlement	Costs cannot be given because the pay increase has not yet been agreed
Customs and Excise	The cost is estimated to be £17 million at the time of the settlement	Costs cannot be given because the pay increase has not yet been agreed
Statistics Commission	The cost is estimated to be £10,000 at the time of the settlement	Costs cannot be given because the pay increase has not yet been agreed

The Statistics Commission has been in existence for just under two years. The total salary costs are as follows: 2000–01 £135,528 (taken from published accounts); 2001–02 £199,000 estimated as 2001–02 accounts have not yet been published.

Tax Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the *(a)* total cost and *(b)* cost per claimant of administering (i) working families tax credit, (ii) children's tax credit, (iii) child tax credit and (iv) working tax credit in the last 12 months. [50991]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 438W, and the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 29 June 2000, *Official Report*, column 590W.

There is no administrative cost attached to child tax credit and working tax credit in 2000–01.

Resource Accounts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when each of the resource accounts for 2000–01 were published; what the *(a)* greatest, *(b)* median and *(c)* least number of days that elapsed was between each of the resource accounts being (i) laid formally upon the Table and (ii) made generally available to the public; what the median number of days that elapsed was between each of the resource accounts for 1999–2000 being (A) laid formally upon the Table and (B) made generally available to the public; and if he will make a statement. [51467]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The dates on which Departments' resource accounts for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 were published and laid are shown in the following table.

1999–2000

Departments	*HC No.*	*Cmd No.*[1]	*Laid*	*Published*	*Working days between laying and publishing*
Armed Forces Pension Scheme—MOD	4	—	13 December 2000	13 December 2000	0
British Trade International	—	—	—	—	—
Cabinet Office	—	5053	30 March 2001	5 July 2001	64
Cabinet Office: Civil Superannuation	—	5061	30 March 2001	29 March 2001	−1
Central Office for Information	190	—	31 January 2001	19 April 2001	54
Charity Commission	191	—	31 January 2001	28 March 2001	40
Crown Estate	192	—	31 January 2001	19 April 2001	54
Crown Prosecution Service	193	—	31 January 2001	30 March 2001	42
Customs & Excise	165	—	31 January 2001	31 January 2001	0
DCMS	181	—	31 January 2001	31 January 2001	0
Defence—MOD Consolidated	50	—	31 January 2001	1 February 2001	1
Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions	—	5054	30 March 2001	29 March 2001	−1

1999–2000

Departments	*HC No.*	*Cmd No.*[1]	*Laid*	*Published*	*Working days between laying and publishing*
Department of Health	194	—	31 January 2001	22 March 2001	36
Department of National Savings	830	—	2 November 2000	3 November 2000	1
DFEE	182	—	31 January 2001	22 March 2001	36
DfID	116	—	31 January 2001	3 May 2001	66
DfID—Superannuation Pensions	187	—	31 January 2001	3 May 2001	66
DSS	183	—	31 January 2001	16 February 2001	12
DTI—Main	11	—	20 December 2000	1 February 2001	27
ECGD	51	—	20 December 2000	20 December 2000	0
FCO	195	—	31 January 2001	30 March 2001	42
Food Standards Agency[4]	—	—	—	—	—
Food Standards Agency Consolidated[4]	—	—	—	—	—
Forestry Commission	196	—	31 January 2001	27 April 2001	62
Forestry Commission Pension Scheme	201	—	31 January 2001	22 March 2001	36
GAD	153	—	31 January 2001	31 January 2001	0
HM Treasury	—	5062	30 March 2001	11 May 2001	30
Home Office	—	5055	30 March 2001	27 April 2001	20
Inland Revenue	129	—	24 January 2001	24 January 2001	0
Intervention Board Executive Agency	833	—	9 November 2000	9 November 2000	0
Lord Chancellor's Department	—	5056	30 March 2001	30 April 2001	21
MAFF	—	5057	30 March 2001	27 April 2001	20
National Investment and Loans Office	798	—	22 November 2000	22 November 2000	0
NHS Pension Scheme (England and Wales)	188	—	31 January 2001	11 May 2001	72
Northern Ireland Court Service	199	—	31 January 2001	30 March 2001	42
Northern Ireland Office	—	5058	30 March 2001	27 April 2001	21
Office for National Statistics	185	—	31 January 2001	2 April 2001	43
Ofgem	24	—	20 December 2000	20 December 2000	0
Ofsted	155	—	25 January 2001	15 February 2001	15
Oft	75	—	31 January 2001	31 January 2001	0
Oftel	151	—	31 January 2001	31 January 2001	0
Ofwat	176	—	31 January 2001	31 January 2001	0
ORR	184	—	31 January 2001	21 March 2001	35
Postal Services Commission[4]	—	—	—	—	—
Privy Council Office	197	—	31 January 2001	9 February 2001	7
Public Records Office	134	—	25 January 2001	25 January 2001	0
Scotland Office	186	—	31 January 2001	27 April 2001	62
Security and Intelligence Agencies	—	5059	4 April 2001	12 April 2001	6
Serious Fraud Office	198	—	31 January 2001	7 March 2001	25
Teachers' Pension Scheme	189	—	31 January 2001	22 March 2001	36
Treasury Solicitors	—	5060	30 March 2001	30 April 2001	21
UK Atomic Energy Authority—DTI	10	—	20 December 2000	31 January 2001	27
Wales Office	96	—	24 January 2001	24 January 2001	0

2000–01

Departments	*HC No.*	*Cmd No.*[1]	*Laid*	*Published*[2]	*Working days between laying and publishing*
Armed Forces Pension Scheme—MOD	245	—	21 November 2001	21 November 2001	0
British Trade International	526	—	30 January 2002	13 February 2002	11
Cabinet Office	—	5443	28 February 2002	—	—
Cabinet Office: Civil Superannuation	554	—	31 January 2002	18 March 2002	32
Central Office for Information	566	—	31 January 2002	31 January 2002	0
Charity Commission	565	—	31 January 2002	27 February 2002	19
Crown Estate	544	—	30 January 2002	30 January 2002	0
Crown Prosecution Service	540	—	31 January 2002	31 January 2002	0
Customs and Excise	530	—	30 January 2002	26 March 2002	39
DCMS	469	—	9 January 2002	9 January 2002	0
Defence—MOD Consolidated	443	—	17 December 2001	18 December 2001	1
Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions	536	—	31 January 2002	4 February 2002	2
Department of Health	567	—	31 January 2002	15 April 2002	52
Department of National Savings	121	—	24 October 2001	24 October 2001	0
DFEE	551	—	31 January 2002	18 February 2002	12
DfID	512	—	30 January 2002	26 February 2002	19
DfID—Superannuation Pensions	514	—	30 January 2002	26 February 2002	19
DSS	491	—	31 January 2002	31 January 2002	0
DTI—Main	503	—	23 January 2002	23 January 2002	0
ECGD	441	—	10 January 2002	10 January 2002	0
FCO	553	—	31 January 2002	7 March 2002	24
Food Standards Agency[4]	513	—	31 January 2002	7 February 2002	6
Food Standards Agency Consolidated[4]	594	—	5 February 2002	[5]5 February 2002	0
Forestry Commission	527	—	31 January 2002	—	—

2000–01

Departments	*HC No.*	*Cmd No.*[1]	*Laid*	*Published*[2]	*Working days between laying and publishing*
Forestry Commission Pension Scheme	535	—	31 January 2002	—	—
GAD	284	—	31 October 2001	31 October 2001	0
HM Treasury	573	—	31 January 2002	14 March 2002	30
Home Office	—	5444	28 February 2002	—	—
Inland Revenue	425	—	12 December 2001	12 December 2001	0
Intervention Board Executive Agency	123	—	31 October 2001	31 October 2001	0
Lord Chancellor's Department	568	—	31 January 2002	—	—
MAFF	—	5447	28 February 2002	—	—
National Investment and Loans Office	321	—	31 October 2001	31 October 2001	0
NHS Pension Scheme (England and Wales)	569	—	31 January 2002	1 March 2002	21
Northern Ireland Court Service	570	—	31 January 2002	3 April 2002	44
Northern Ireland Office	—	5445	28 February 2002	11 April 2002	30
Office for National Statistics	122	—	31 January 2002	—	—
Ofgem	170	—	19 July 2001	19 July 2001	0
Ofsted	403	—	5 December 2001	5 December 2001	0
Oft	538	—	30 January 2002	30 January 2002	0
Oftel	416	—	12 December 2001	12 December 2001	0
Ofwat	313	—	21 November 2001	21 November 2001	0
ORR	490	—	30 January 2002	14 February 2002	11
Postal Services Commission[4]	495	—	30 January 2002	30 January 2002	0
Privy Council Office	571	—	31 January 2002	11 February 2002	7
Public Records Office	362	—	21 November 2001	21 November 2001	0
Scotland Office	531	—	31 January 2002	6 February 2002	4
Security and Intelligence Agencies	—	5446	28 February 2002	14 March 2002	10
Serious Fraud Office	572	—	30 January 2002	18 March 2002	33
Teachers Pension Scheme	552	—	31 January 2002	8 February 2002	6
Treasury Solicitors	574	—	31 January 2002	24 April 2002	59
UK Atomic Energy Authority—DTI	504	—	23 January 2002	23 January 2002	0
Wales Office	288	—	28 November 2001	28 November 2001	0

[1] With the agreement of the NAO, these accounts were presented to Parliament on a non-statutory basis as Command papers with a target date of 30 March 2001 for the 1999–2000 accounts 24 April 2002 for the 2000–01 accounts.
[2] Where no date is shown the accounts were not published by 24 April 2002.
[3] This non-statutory resource account was published the day before it was presented to Parliament.
[4] These organisations did not prepare resource accounts in 1999–2000.
[5] Formal resource accounts were not separately published but included in the Food Standards Agency's annual report and accounts (HC 488). The publication date of HC 488 os given in the table.

As at 24 April 2002, and excluding those Departments which had not published their resource accounts by that date, the greatest, median and least number of working days elapsing between resource accounts for 2000–01 being laid formally upon the Table and made generally available to the public are:

Greatest: 59

Median: 1

Least: 0.

There are eight accounts still to be published and the Treasury is following up late publication with the Departments concerned.

The median number of working days elapsing between resource accounts for 1999–2000 being laid formally upon the Table and made generally available to the public was 21.

Business Cars

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the total cost to the Treasury will be at *(a)* the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of the enhanced capital allowances for the purchase of business cars with carbon dioxide emissions not exceeding 120 grammes per kilometre, as announced in the Budget; [52394]

(2) to how many cars, broken down by make, vehicle excise duty was applied at a rate of a £30 reduction for carbon dioxide emissions of 120 grammes per kilometre in each month since March 2001; and to how many that rate will be applied in each of the next three years; [52392]

(3) to how many cars, broken down by make, enhanced capital allowances for the purchase of business cars with carbon dioxide emissions not exceeding 120 grammes per kilometre as announced in Budget 2002 will apply *(a)* at the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years. [52391]

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cars in the UK this year will benefit from the new vehicle excise duty band of 120 g/km of carbon dioxide. [52982]

Mr. Boateng: The 120 gm/km band for vehicle excise duty (VED) applies to new licences commencing from May 2002. It is expected that about 34,000 cars will qualify in 2002–03 rising to 105,000 cars in 2004–05.

Enhanced capital allowances for cars with carbon dioxide emissions of up to 120 gm/km are expected to support about 7,000 new business car purchases in 2002–03 rising to over 10,000 purchases in 2004–05. It is estimated that the cost of enhanced capital allowances over the three years from 2002–03 will be £5 million/£10 million/£10 million. There are no stock projections for individual makes of vehicle.

Electronic Filing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons the incentives for small employers to switch to electronic filing will be introduced in 2004–05 and not 2003–04. [52368]

Dawn Primarolo: Incentives for small employers to switch to electronic filing will be introduced in 2004–05, so that as many businesses as possible can be ready to qualify for the first year's incentive payment.

Deferred VAT Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when and how he will consult on his proposal to allow approved companies to defer paying VAT on imports until they submit their VAT returns. [52372]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise have already initiated discussions on these proposals with affected businesses, and will issue a formal consultation document in due course.

Customs and Excise (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additional resources are being provided to HM Customs and Excise in Scotland prior to the commencement of ferry services to the continent from Rosyth; and if he will make a statement. [52584]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise are funded, according to risk assessment, to provide Customs controls at all UK entry points, including Rosyth. In addition to £2 million funding for a mobile scanner that will be regularly used at Rosyth, £245,000 has been allocated for the provision of the latest technical equipment to be used in the detection of drugs and other contraband. Customs staff will be deployed regularly at Rosyth on a risk basis, both from flexible multi-functional teams currently located in Scotland and, as required, from UK national strike force teams.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs and Excise staff were employed in Scotland in each of the last five years; and what the staff complement is. [52909]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise does not have a "staff complement" for Scotland, as they deploy their resources across the United Kingdom according to risk.

The numbers of staff employed as are follows:

Year	*Headcount*	*FTE*
2002	1,215	1,184.7
2001	1,294	1,258.6
2000	1,324	1,289.5
1999	1,413	1,376.2
1998	1,488	1,449.2

Note:

Numbers of staff in Scotland are given both in headcount and full-time equivalent, and are based on data for the 1 April in each year. They include all staff working in Scotland. The full-time equivalent figures for 1998 and 1999 are not available and have therefore been estimated.

National Insurance (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what value of employers' national insurance contributions was paid by employers in Scotland in the last financial year. [52582]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that the Government Actuary's Department could provide a reliable answer only at disproportionate cost.

Alcohol Imports

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce a voluntary system of prior approval for legitimate import of alcohol for personal use. [52557]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to his last question on this subject on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 260W.

Contraband Goods (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated value of contraband goods confiscated by Customs and Excise staff based in Scotland in the last three years. [52583]

Mr. Boateng: This information is not available. Customs records of seizures are typically based on quantity rather than value.

Aggregates

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the reasons for the change of policy regarding the taxation of uncrushed rock, with specific reference to armourstone; and if he will make a statement. [52957]

Mr. Boateng: Following consultation with the industry, the scope of the aggregates levy was broadened to include uncrushed rock to prevent the possibility of tax avoidance and scope for inequitable tax treatment, as not all rock used as aggregate is crushed.

Armourstone is an example of uncrushed rock that can be used as aggregate. It is used for its bulk space filling properties in applications where there are often recycled alternatives available.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost to the Treasury will be *(a)* at the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of the introduction of a levy on aggregates from 1 April. [53718]

Mr. Boateng: The projected revenue form the introduction of the aggregates levy was published on 17 April in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2002.

Underspending

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on underspending against departmental expenditure limits; and if he will make a statement. [53306]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The public spending system introduced in 1998 provides three-year budgets for departments and allows underspends in one year to be carried over to the following year. Budgets are linked to targets for results set out in Public Service Agreements. This encourages departments to plan their budgets over a longer timeframe and reduces the incentive to spend wastefully at the end of the year.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letters of *(a)* 20 March and *(b)* 18 March from the hon. Member of Walsall North, regarding constituents. [52974]

Dawn Primarolo: I have done so.

Inland Revenue (Electronic Submissions)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much *(a)* businesses and *(b)* the Inland Revenue will save as a result of introducing a requirement to submit information to the Inland Revenue electronically, as announced in his Budget statement. [52994]

Dawn Primarolo: Employers are expected to realise savings from the greater certainty and speed that electronic preparation and submission of returns provide. The extent of the savings will be determined during consultation with employers on the full Regulatory Impact Assessment to be prepared and published by the Inland Revenue.

The Inland Revenue are expected to realise savings from the reduction in paper handling and correction of errors, both in local offices and at their National Insurance Contributions office. In his review of Payroll services, Patrick Carter estimated the potential savings to the Inland Revenue at £35 million a year, after a period of five years.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses *(a)* use and *(b)* have access to computer hardware that may be updated to allow businesses to submit end of year returns to the Inland Revenue electronically. [52993]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not hold information about how many businesses use or have access to computer hardware that may be updated to allow businesses to submit end of year returns to the Inland Revenue electronically. However, businesses do not need to own a computer to submit their PAYE end of year returns electronically. It is a key part of the strategy in Patrick Carter's report to encourage small employers to use the services of intermediaries if they find that more helpful than personally handling the completion and submission of their returns. Employers who wish to complete and submit their own returns can use PAYE online forms which are accessible from the Inland Revenue's website using any Internet connected computer, including those available in libraries and Internet cafes.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Inland Revenue internet service for administering PAYE was introduced; and how many employers have made use of the scheme since its introduction. [52995]

Dawn Primarolo: The internet service for PAYE was launched in April 2001. There are over 14,000 employers and agents registered to use the service. 2,700 employers used the service to submit their end of year return in 2001. The Inland Revenue also provides an EDI (electronic data interchange) service which employers can use to submit returns. EDI is currently used by 55 organisations, including payroll bureaux, who represent 5,536 employers who between them have over six million employees.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action will be taken against those small businesses who are unable to submit their end of year returns to the Inland Revenue by 2010. [52992]

Dawn Primarolo: Employers with fewer than 50 employees will be required to send their end of year returns electronically to the Inland Revenue by 2010. To support businesses in the switch to new technology, the Inland Revenue will be expanding the payroll support given by their business support teams and employers' helpline. Employers, who do not wish to handle electronic submission of returns themselves, may use an intermediary, such as a payroll bureau, to submit returns on their behalf.

We intend that the emphasis will be very much on helping employers to comply with their obligations, but we envisage that the relevant legislation will include some sanctions for those who do not do so.

Vaccines, Medicines and Medical Supplies

Tony Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which companies will be expected to receive tax relief on *(a)* research and development into vaccines and medicines for the prevention and treatment of malaria, TB and those strains of AIDS which predominantly affect people in developing countries and *(b)* responsible donations of medical supplies and equipment to support developing countries' own health strategies and the needs of their people. [53117]

Dawn Primarolo: Any company that meets the requirements of the legislation to be introduced in the current Finance Bill can benefit from the measures. Details of claims by individual taxpayers are confidential.

Budget Projections

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the reasons are for his projection in Budget 2002, page 217, Table C7, of a reduction of the revenue from tobacco duties in 2002–03 compared with 2001–02. [52949]

Mr. Boateng: Forecasts of tobacco duty revenues are affected by a number of factors, including consumption trends, retail prices, brand popularity and demand elasticities.

Hepatitis C

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have died from hepatitis C in each of the last 10 years. [53289]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Tim Loughton dated 30 April 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning numbers of deaths from hepatitis C in each of the last 10 years. (53289) I am replying in his absence.

The table below gives the number of deaths with an underlying cause of hepatitis C from 1995 to 2000. Figures are only available from 1995 as the information needed to identify deaths from hepatitis C has only been held in a reliable, electronic form since that date.

Number of deaths where the underlying cause of death[1] was hepatitis C[2], persons, England and Wales, calendar years 1995 to 2000[3]

Calendar year	*Number of deaths*
1995	59
1996	60
1997	82
1998	92
1999	92
2000	125

[1] The underlying cause of death is the disease or condition that initiates the train of morbid events leading directly to death

[2] Selected using a combination of underlying cause codes 070.4–070.5 from the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) and the presence of text referring to hepatitis C on the death certificate.

[3] Data relate to deaths occurring per calendar year.

These figures are likely to underestimate the true mortality related to hepatitis C for several reasons. Firstly, because the certifying doctor may not always know about the existence of a hepatitis C infection, contracted many years earlier, that had given rise to another fatal liver disease. Secondly, where several other factors (e.g. alcohol, other blood-borne viruses) contributed to fatal chronic liver disease, the certifying doctor may judge that one of the other factors is more important. And finally, because deaths with an underlying cause of primary liver cancer are not included here, even if certified as being the result of hepatitis C infection. This is because international coding rules in use at the time (ICD-9) do not accept cancers being due to infections, except in the case of HIV/AIDS.

Individual Savings Accounts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost has been of tax relief on individual savings accounts. [26322]

Ruth Kelly: The estimated costs of tax relief on individual savings accounts for 1999–2000 is contained in table A3.1 of the 'Financial Statement and Budget Report 2001' and for 2000–01 and 2001–02 in table A.3.1 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2002.

Income Inequality

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the scale of income inequality in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK. [52231]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Ian Davidson, dated 30 April 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on income inequality. (52231) I am replying in his absence.

I would like to refer you to the analysis "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2000–01", published on the National Statistics (ONS) website at http://statistics.gov.uk/taxesbenefits. A paper copy can be obtained from the House of Commons library. This includes measures of income inequality for the United Kingdom as a whole based on the Family Expenditure Survey.

Estimates of the level of income inequality in Scotland were calculated for the first time this year. They are included in an article entitled "Income Inequality in Scotland" in the publication "Scottish Economic Statistics 2002" published by the Scottish Executive. It can be obtained from the House of Commons library or the web link is http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/sec/ses-00m.asp. The analysis covers the period up to 1999–2000 and is based on the Family Resources Survey which has a larger sample size for Scotland than the Family Expenditure Survey but covers Great Britain rather than the United Kingdom as a whole.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost to the Treasury will be at *(a)* the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of (i) the reduction in vehicle excise duty for vans meeting the Euro-IV emissions standard from March 2003 and (ii) the freeze of other van VED rates, as announced in the Budget. [52410]

Mr. Boateng: The cost of the reduction in VED for vans meeting euro IV emissions standard from March 2003 is given in table A.1 (page 155) of the FSBR. The cost of the freeze for all vans first registered after 1 March 2001, which are recorded in the light goods vehicle class is negligible. For vans registered before 1 March 2001 specific data are not available.

Excise Duty

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how many months excise duty collection was delayed as stated in paragraph C50 of the Financial Statement and Budget report 2002; what estimate he has made of the interest costs of the delay; and if he will make a statement. [53403]

Mr. Boateng: Collection of excise duty was not delayed but additional receipts associated with the forestalling of road fuel duties will now be received in april 2002 rather than March 2002. No estimate has been made of the interest cost of such a delay.

Basic Skills

John Mann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in testing how financial incentives can support employers and individuals in tackling poor basic skills and attainment to Level 2 qualifications. [53093]

Dawn Primarolo: As part of Skills for Life, our national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, pathfinder areas were established in September 2001 to pilot a range of approaches including financial incentives for learners and fixed rate replacement costs for employers to release low skilled staff for training. In addition, the Employment Service, now Jobcentre Plus, has recently completed piloting alternative approaches to identify and meet the literacy, language and numeracy skills needs of jobseekers. These pilots included the use of financial incentives. Evaluations of all these approaches are currently underway.

In addition to these pilots, Budget 2002 announced details of six new Employer Training Pilots which will test, among other things, how financial incentives can

support employers and individuals to tackle the problem of poor basic skills and attainment of an initial level 2 qualification. It is intended that the pilots will become operational by September 2002. The pilots will provide information about how different measures might impact on UK skills, and will gather evidence, which will contribute to the Government's consideration of workforce development policy. Further details can be found in 'Developing Workforce Skills: Piloting a New Approach', which was published alongside the Budget and is available in the House Library.

Beer Duties

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the total UK beer production will benefit from the 50 per cent. reduction in beer duties for small breweries. [52984]

Mr. Boateng: Approximately 400 brewers will benefit from the equivalent of 50 per cent. on the first 5,000 hectolitres they produce. The scheme will therefore apply to 90 per cent. of licensed brewers, responsible for around 2 per cent. of the beer produced in the UK last year.

Sun Screen Products

Dr. Fox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax was raised through VAT levied on sun screen products in the last year. [53013]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not available.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce VAT on sun creams that meet agreed standards. [53443]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no plans to reduce the VAT on sun cream products.

North Sea Tax

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government conducted an economic assessment of the impact of the 10 per cent. North Sea tax on *(a)* current and *(b)* future (i) employment and (ii) exploration related to North Sea activities prior to the measure being announced in the Budget. [53215]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government has been reviewing the North Sea taxation regime since 1998. The changes announced in the Budget were subject to detailed analysis to ensure that they delivered the Government's objectives of securing a fair share of North Sea revenues, encouraging long-term investment, and establishing a stable tax regime in the North Sea for the long term.

Motor Vehicle Repairs

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much VAT was raised in each year since 1997 on body shop motor vehicle repairs. [53061]

Mr. Boateng: No such information is available.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason VAT is levied on independent motor accident repair businesses for the labour element of the service; and if he will make a statement. [53062]

Mr. Boateng: A fundamental principle of VAT is that businesses charge VAT when they supply goods and services in the UK. When a business makes a supply, VAT is due on the price it charges and that price takes account of its costs, including labour costs.

Stability and Growth Pact

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the compatibility of the plans set out in Budget 2002 with the stability and growth pact. [53590]

Ruth Kelly: As set out in paragraph 2.65 of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report, the Budget 2002 projections are consistent with the Government's prudent interpretation of the stability and growth pact which takes account of the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment (as specified in Article 104 of the EU treaty).

Rating Appeals

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many appeals have been listed in respect of entries in the 2000 Rating List; how many of these appeals have been dealt with fully; and what the cost has been of considering these appeals. [53499]

Dawn Primarolo: As at 31 March 2002, the Valuation Office Agency had received 918,970 appeals against the 2000 Rating Lists. 323,609 of those appeals have been settled at a cost to the agency of approximately £90 million.

Contaminated Land Tax Credit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated value is of the contaminated land tax credit in 2002–03. [53408]

Mr. Boateng: The estimated cost in 2002–03 of tax relief for cleaning contaminated land is £85 million, as given in tables A11 and A12 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report, March 2001.

Research and Development

Tony Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the 50 per cent. tax credit on research and development into vaccines and medicines for the prevention of malaria, TB and some strains of AIDS in poorer countries will apply to *(a)* current and *(b)* future research and development; [53340]

(2) when the tax credit on research and development into vaccines and medicines for the prevention treatment of malaria, TB and some strains of AIDS in poorer countries announced in the Budget will be implemented; [53341]

(3) if his Department will outline new criteria to entitle companies to claim the research and development tax credit with vaccines and medicines for the prevention treatment of malaria, TB and some strains of AIDS in poorer countries announced in the Budget. [53342]

Mr. Boateng: Finance Bill 2002 will introduce a new tax credit to encourage research and development into vaccines and medicines for the prevention of TB, malaria and for the prevention of the onset or treatment of AIDS for those strains of HIV most commonly found

in the developing world. (Research and development expenditure on vaccines for the prevention of HIV infection will also be eligible for this relief.) Companies will be entitled to deduct an additional 50 per cent. of qualifying current expenditure incurred on or after a date specified by an order to be made by the Treasury.

Red Book

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the figures in Table 4.4 of the Budget Red Book include the effects of *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax benefit; and how many people would be in each marginal deduction rate if their benefits were included. [53529]

Dawn Primarolo: The effects of housing benefit and council tax benefit are included in Table 4.4 of the Budget 2002 report.

Climate Change Levy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the total cost to the Treasury will be *(a)* at the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years from the exemption from the Climate Change Levy of electricity from electricity from coal mine methane sold via licensed electricity suppliers; [53726]

(2) what the total cost to the Treasury will be *(a)* at the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years from the exemption from the Climate Change Levy of electricity from combined heat and power plants sold via licensed electricity suppliers; [53727]

(3) what the total cost to the Treasury will be *(a)* at the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of the freeze in the rate of the Climate Change Levy announced in the Budget; whether this freeze is in real terms; and if he will make a statement. [53724]

Mr. Boateng: The costs of the freeze in rates of the Climate Change Levy, the exemption of electricity from combined heat and power plants, and the exemption of electricity from coal mine methane sold via licensed electricity suppliers are set out on pages 155 and 167 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report (FSBR) 2002.

The freeze in rates is in nominal terms and therefore represents a real terms cut.

New Deal

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officials in his Department were working on the New Deal in *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* 2001. [53410]

Ruth Kelly: Several Treasury officials worked on the Government's new deal initiative alongside their other duties.

As to the numbers of new deal staff employed by the Treasury, I refer the hon. Member to an earlier reply dated 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 748–49W.

Life Assurance Premium Relief

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the size is of the accounting adjustment made in Table C13 of the Financial Statement and Budget report 2002, for life assurance premium relief; and if he will make a statement. [53407]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The tax credits line in Table C13 includes £100 million in respect of life assurance premium relief for 2000–01 and slightly lower amounts in each succeeding year.

Public Capital Expenditure

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the net public capital expenditure has been in *(a)* cash, *(b)* real and *(c)* GDP terms in each year since 1998–99; and what the latest estimate is for the 2001–02 out-turn. [53482]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The figures requested are given in the table.

Public sector net investment

	Current prices (£ billion)	*2000–01 prices (£ billion)*	*Percentage of GDP*
1998–99	5.9	6.1	0.7
1999–2000	4.7	4.8	0.5
2000–01	5.7	5.7	0.6
2001–02[1]	12.0	11.7	1.2

[1] Provisional

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Anti-Competitive Practices

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce *(a)* direct and *(b)* rapid remedies for victims of anti-competitive practices; and if she will make a statement. [52229]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Improving the opportunities for victims of anti-competitive practices to gain redress is a key theme of the Enterprise Bill (introduced to the House of Commons on 26 March 2002).

The Bill will enable those harmed by anti-competitive practices to follow a decision establishing a breach of competition law with a claim for damages before a specialist competition body—the Competition Appeal Tribunal. The tribunal offers the advantages of being a quicker and more streamlined route for consumers and businesses to obtain redress from companies that have broken the law. In addition, representative bodies will be able to bring claims for damages in front of the tribunal on behalf of groups of named consumers, thus helping consumers obtain redress where a large number of parties have each suffered a relatively small level of harm.

The Government are also providing a faster and fairer route to an independent review of a decision under the Competition Act by allowing third parties to appeal direct to the Competition Appeal Tribunals instead of first having to ask the Director General or one of the sector regulators to withdraw or alter his decision.

Coal Methane Electricity Generation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the extent of the scope for new jobs from electricity generation from coal methane. [52367]

Mr. Wilson: There are no Government estimates of the scope for jobs but the industry estimates that some 105 new permanent jobs will be created as a result of coal mine methane's exemption from the CCL as well as some 1,050 temporary jobs for the construction industry.

Postal Services

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will provide a breakdown by constituency of the percentage of people who live within one mile of a post office branch. [53031]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that the information is not available on a constituency basis. However, 94 per cent. of the UK population lives within one mile of a post office.

Post Offices

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices closed in the last financial year ending 31 March, broken down by *(a)* whether rural and urban and *(b)* constituency. [53066]

Mr. Alexander: I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that figures for the quarter ending March 2002 are not yet available. However, for the nine months April to December 2001 closures totalled 208 comprising 167 rural and 41 urban offices.

The information is not available on a constituency basis.

Business Statistics

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* sole traders, *(b)* partnerships and *(c)* limited companies are registered in (i) Dumfries and Galloway, (ii) Scotland and (iii) the UK. [52902]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We do not maintain statistics for sole traders or partnerships.

The details for *(c)* are as follows:

(i) 1,114 companies as at 28 February 2002

(ii) 88,809 companies as at 31 March 2002

(iii) 1,658,215 companies as at 31 March 2002 in England, Wales and Scotland.

Research Councils

Mr. Mike Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the outcome of the Second Stage of the Quinquennial Review of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils will be announced; and what were the main recommendations associated with the implementation of a strategic ownership model. [53818]

Ms Hewitt: My noble Friend the Minister for Science and Innovation has today announced the outcome of the Second Stage of the Quinquennial Review of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CCLRC).

The first stage of the review recommended that the second stage of the review should focus on the issues associated with the implementation of a strategic ownership model, to encourage collective ownership by the user research councils of CCLRC's large facilities, addressing in particular the implications for the status of CCLRC and its accountability to Ministers and Parliament.

The second stage of the review has been led by the chief executive of the CCLRC, Professor John Wood and conducted under the guidance an external review board chaired by Sir Peter Williams, and the Office of Science and Technology. The review has been conducted in accordance with the latest Cabinet Office guidance and Cabinet Office and Treasury officials have had an opportunity to comment on the draft report and its recommendations.

The principal recommendation is that for its core business the CCLRC should remain a non-departmental public body (NDPB) and a research council. In addition, CCLRC should be given a strategic role, as identified in stage one, to act as a national focus for large facilities for neutron scattering, synchrotron radiation and high power lasers on behalf of the research councils UK. Further, it should also co-ordinate the development for research councils UK of policies and strategies for the provision of access by UK scientists to leading edge large-scale facilities in these scientific areas, both nationally and internationally. The co-ordination and provision of strategic advice would be carried out separately from the day-to-day operation of CCLRC owned facilities.

There should be a common scheme for access to the large facilities for researchers sponsored by all the research councils. For those proposals that successfully undergo competitive peer review, there will be a "free at the point of access" arrangement.

CCLRC's funding arrangements should alter so that CCLRC receives direct funding from the Office of Science and Technology for providing, operating, maintaining, developing and upgrading its large facilities and their instrumentation. This would be on the basis that, a rolling medium term plan for the operational requirements of the large facilities be prepared by CCLRC and endorsed by research councils UK. This arrangement would ensure that the chief executive of CCLRC as accounting officer is clearly and visibly accountable for the value for money of all aspects of the delivery of science from these large facilities. In addition, there will be an external review of CCLRC's cost base and financial processes in advance of the changes to the funding arrangements.

I warmly welcome these recommendations and offer my thanks to Professor Wood and the review board.

Temporary Workers

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research she has conducted into the *(a)* social and *(b)* economic benefits of temporary work. [52301]

Alan Johnson: According to the Labour Force Survey, in Autumn 2001 28 per cent. of temporary employees do not want a permanent job and 39 per cent. chose temporary employment for other reasons. Therefore, for many individuals, temporary employment is a matter of positive choice that suits their current circumstances.

The Labour Force Survey defines temporary employees as including individuals engaged on: employment business assignments, seasonal work, fixed term contracts, casual work and other non-permanent work.

The Department's officials are preparing a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) which will look at the possible costs and benefits of the Directive to workers, agencies and user companies in the UK. The RIA will be placed in the Libraries of House in due course.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the timetable is for the introduction of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations. [52296]

Alan Johnson: I have no definite dates for the introduction of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations. However, following a short consultation exercise on certain aspects of these Regulations, we will lay the Regulations before Parliament. Subject to the approval of Parliament, the Regulations will take effect later in the year.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research she has commissioned into pay differentials between temporary and permanent workers. [52305]

Alan Johnson: No research has been commissioned specifically to examine the pay differentials between temporary and permanent workers. However, a study has been commissioned to identify the extent to which employers treat part-time and fixed term contract staff differently from full-time workers doing a comparable job. This includes a question about the comparable rate of pay. The report is currently being prepared for publication.

The study was carried out by BMRB International and is based on a sample survey of employers.

Budget (Effects on Cheltenham)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what effect the budget of 17 April will have on business in Cheltenham. [52937]

Alan Johnson: I am pleased to support the Budget measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 17 April. The Budget contained a variety of measures designed to help business become more competitive and productive. These included a freeze on road tax and fuel duty, abolition of stamp duty relief for business transactions in poor areas, an extra £30 million for small firms training needs, direct cash help to small firms filing tax returns online, a capital gains tax cut, small companies starting rate cut to zero and small companies tax cut by 1p with immediate effect. More detail can be found on *www.budget.treasury.gov.uk*. Business Link Gloucestershire Ltd (tel 01452 509522) can also provide advice on the impact of the Budget on business activity.

Equal Opportunities

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the complexities referred to in Towards Equality and Diversity are that require age discrimination legislation to be introduced on a longer timetable than equivalent legislation on sexual orientation, religion or belief; what action will be taken before 2006 to tackle these complexities; and if she will make a statement. [53118]

Alan Johnson: Implementing the age strand of the Employment Framework Directive (2000–78) is a significant undertaking and we need to allow time to get it right. Unlike sexual orientation and religion, differences of treatment on the grounds of age are capable of objective justification under the Directive in certain circumstances. The Directive itself acknowledges that age is more complex than the other strands by allowing a longer time to implement—2006 instead of 2003.

There are significant practical issues to be worked through in consultation with employers, particularly small businesses and others that may be affected. We want to ensure we implement age legislation sensibly.

We have already undertaken widespread consultation to identify what age-related practices employers have and why they might need to retain them. Chapter 15 of the consultation document "Towards Equality and Diversity" identified and invited views on key age issues. These include arrangements for recruitment, selection and promotion, training, pay and non-pay benefits, redundancy and retirement.

We want to prohibit unfair practice so as to remove the barriers which people of all ages can face in the workplace. We do not want to ban employment practices which can be clearly and objectively justified. We will need to consider each of these areas in detail, and will consult again later this year with a set of firm proposals.

We made it clear in the consultation document that we needed to use the full timescale—to 2006—to prepare and introduce new legislation in age.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry with whom she is consulting on the implementation of the European Community Employment and Race Directives; how the proposed draft regulations impact upon the policy responsibilities of Government Departments; and if she will make a statement. [53119]

Alan Johnson: The consultation document 'Towards Equality and Diversity' set out the government's proposals to implement the EC Employment and Race Directives. During the fifteen week consultation period, which closed at the end of March, more than 850 responses were received from a range of stakeholders including small businesses, large employers, the voluntary sector, unions, interest groups and individuals.

We are currently considering the responses, working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions, Home Office, Cabinet Office and Department for Education and Skills and all interested Government Departments. The results of the consultation, and more detailed proposals, including draft legislation to outlaw discrimination at work, will be published in the autumn.

Motor Accident Repairs

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the percentage of repairs to accident-damaged vehicles carried out by *(a)* insurance-owned companies and *(b)* independent body shops in the last 12 months. [52240]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government do not collect this information.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Government policy is on competition in the motor accident repair market; and if she will make a statement. [52241]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government want to see a competitive and efficient motor accident repair market. Responsibility for monitoring the market and investigating allegations of anti-competitive behaviour lies with the Director General of Fair Trading.

Websites

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many visits there have been to the website www. ukonline.gov.uk in each month since it was launched. [51516]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The UK online website (www.ukonline.gov.uk) was launched in January 2001. The table shows the number of visits that the site has received for each month since its launch, with the latest full month of figures being for March 2002.

Month and year	*Unique user sessions*[1]	*Page impressions*[2]	*Registered users*
January 2001	—	—	5,588
February 2001	—	991,071	9,833
March 2001	—	1,635,728	14,125
April 2001	—	1,743,973	16,597
May 2001	—	2,038,984	19,602
June 2001	—	3,043,119	21,787
July 2001	—	4,120,772	24,034
August 2001	—	4,806,766	26,194
September 2001	—	4,036,503	29,718
October 2001	—	2,995,678	32,769
November 2001	322,721	3,696,221	37,063
December 2001	639,915	4,789,029	40,605
January 2002	632,450	4,912,704	43,010
February 2002	228,273	2,318,572	44,954
March 2002	418,114	2,605,319	48,933 (9.03)

[1] This represents individual visitors to the site, and is tracked from a users IP address. For example, this means that if four people visit the site this week, we record that as four unique users. If each of these users visit twice, we still only have four unique users in that week. The complementary measure is number of visits (or sessions).

[2] Page impressions are literally 'pages seen, or loaded onto the user's PC'. The home page is one page impressions, the news page is another etc.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many digital radios are owned by her Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52849]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* This information is not held centrally by my Department and cannot be answered except at disproportionate cost.

DEFENCE

ROROs

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what options were given to the bidders for the roll-on/roll-offs for the provision of crews; [50888]

(2) what the preferred crewing option of AWSR Ltd. was when selected as the preferred bidder for the roll-on/roll-offs; [50889]

(3) what arrangements will apply for the crewing by British seafarers of the roll-on/roll-offs. [50887]

Dr. Moonie: Bidders in the competition for a strategic sealift service were invited to tender on the basis of a crewing option that they considered would offer best value for money and to provide details that would facilitate an assessment of sponsored reserve crewing of all six ships. AWSR initially expected to be using sponsored reserve crews on the six ships when they were in Ministry of Defence use, with British officers and multinational crews when the ships were on commercial work. Negotiations with AWSR in 2001 were able to take account of the implications and benefits of the Government's "British Shipping Charting a New Course" which had been published the previous year. As a result, when working for MOD ships will be manned by British crews who will be eligible to be called out as sponsored reserves and, although not mandated by MOD, British crews will man the ships being used in commercial trade.

Service Personnel (Transport)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what provision is made for the transportation of service men and women returning from overseas tours of duty, from their point of arrival in the UK to their home base; and if he will make a statement; [51724]

(2) if he will make a statement on how the equipment and kit of personnel returning from overseas duty is transported from their point of arrival in the UK to their home base. [51725]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* I assume the hon. Member is referring to operational tours of duty and exercises, not administrative moves of personnel returning from longer term postings overseas.

It is the Ministry of Defence's aim to ensure the efficient and safe redeployment of service personnel—and their equipment and kit—when returning from overseas tours to Britain, in accordance with UK Customs procedures and other relevant legislation. The infrastructure, facilities and resources at the point of arrival will play a major part in determining the dispersal plan, but in the majority of cases we provide coach transport which offers a secure, efficient and flexible means of moving formed bodies of service men and women and their equipment to their home base.

SPEAR Weapon

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussion has taken place with the US to ensure that the development of the SPEAR weapon for

the US version of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter is compatible with the UK version; and if he will make a statement; [52263]

(2) what assessment has been made of the compatibility of the SPEAR weapon with the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter; and if he will make a statement. [52264]

Dr. Moonie: SPEAR (Selective Precision Effects At Range) is a term used to describe the capability to attack surface targets at intermediate range from legacy and planned UK strike aircraft. Studies into how best to meet this requirement are still on-going, and no decisions have yet been taken. The SPEAR capability could be provided by improvements to legacy or near-term weapons and/or by a new system or systems.

Whatever capability solution is chosen would need to take into account the capabilities offered by the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), which as been selected as having the best potential to meet the UK's Future Joint Combat Aircraft requirement.

Our participation in the JSF programme ensures our close involvement with regard to potential weapons systems for the aircraft.

Continuous Attitude Survey

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the questions asked in the latest continuous attitude survey undertaken by the *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Royal Air Force and *(c)* Army; how often the surveys have been compiled; to what use they are put; and if he will make a statement. [51810]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* The Army and the RAF latest continuous attitude surveys include over 200 questions each, while the Royal Navy survey has over a hundred. The questions are on a wide variety of subjects with the following broad categories: personal circumstances; quality of life; job satisfaction; career development; operational tours and postings; pay and allowances; accommodation; welfare; families; facilities; communication and equal opportunities. The questions are structured around the Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy; however, they are not fixed and are varied to determine attitudes to particular conditions of service.

Each of the three services has conducted its own continuous attitude surveys of serving personnel since the 1980s. The Royal Navy conducts surveys three times per year, the Army twice yearly and the Royal Air Force conducts surveys quarterly.

Each survey is designed to ascertain the attitude of personnel towards a range of service conditions and to gather intentions with regard to their remaining in the service. Senior staff and policy makers use the information gathered to identify which policies are seen to be working and inform subsequent policy development work. The three services also periodically survey spouses of serving personnel to gather evidence on the effects of service life on families.

Missile Defence

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Government policy is on missile defence for the UK. [52477]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 654–55, to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk).

British Forces (Gibraltar)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* his Spanish counterpart and *(b)* Spanish officials regarding the sovereign future of the Headquarters British Forces Gibraltar under the Brussels Process; and if he will make a statement. [53135]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has not had any such discussions. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe told the House on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 451, the United Kingdom will retain full control over the British military base in Gibraltar.

Sea Harriers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if HMG *(a)* has entered into and *(b)* intends to enter into talks with the Indian Government concerning the sale of Royal Navy Sea Harriers to that country. [51018]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) on 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 528–29W.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost of the upgrade of the Sea Harrier fleet from FRS1 to FRS2 standard was. [53463]

Mr. Ingram: The total cost of upgrading the FRS1 Sea Harrier fleet of 33 aircraft to FRS2 standard, beginning in 1994, amounted to just under £466 million.

Asylum Seekers (Cyprus)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many asylum seekers have entered the sovereign base areas in Cyprus in the last 12 months; how many remain; and what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government on this issue. [52976]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Five asylum seekers have entered the Sovereign Base Areas since 29 April 2001, one of whom remains there. The current total of refugees and asylum seekers in the Sovereign Base Areas numbers 95 individuals from a total of 165 who have arrived since October 1998. The Sovereign Base Areas Administration applies the principles of the refugee convention when dealing with asylum seekers and acts in close cooperation with the authorities of the Republic of Cyprus.

Discussions between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of Cyprus regarding the long term future of the Sovereign Base Area's refugees and asylum seekers, and the arrangements for handling new arrivals, are continuing.

Ministerial Visits

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times Ministers in his Department visited United States Government military bases and establishments on United Kingdom territory between

1 January 1997 and 1 January 1999; which Ministers were involved; what the date of each visit was; and which United States military facility was visited. [53359]

Dr. Moonie: There were no visits made available to the United States Visiting Forces in the UK by Ministers from my Department between 1 May 1997 and 1 January 1999. However, a number of Ministers visited RAF Fairford during the Royal International Air Tattoo in 1997 and 1998.

Naval Vessels

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to dispose of Type 23 frigates; and what discussions he has had with foreign Governments in respect of their future disposal. [52894]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* On current plans our Type 23 frigates will remain in service until around the middle of the next decade from which point they will be progressively withdrawn. No substantive or detailed discussions over Type 23 disposals have taken place with any potential foreign Government buyer.

Kosovo

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to withdraw British forces from Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [52900]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* British military involvement in Kosovo will be decided in the light of the major review currently being undertaken by NATO of its operations in the Balkans. The review, entitled the Joint Operational Area Review, will be discussed by NATO Foreign Ministers in May 2002. We welcome the review and remain committed to maintaining a military contribution to NATO peacekeeping in the Balkans. The form that this contribution will take has yet to be decided.

Eurofighter

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the first Eurofighters will be delivered to the RAF; and when they will become operational. [52898]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Eurofighter delivery schedule is being reviewed by the four participating nations and the prime contractor EF GmbH. It would be wrong to speculate on the outcome of this review, but we do not expect to impinge on our plans to achieve full operational capability during the second half of the decade. The recent flights of Instrumented Production Airport were significant programme milestones.

Army Manpower

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by when *(a)* 45 Cd. RM and *(b)* 1 R Anglian will be relieved or replaced. [53051]

Mr. Hoon: Although there is a planning assumption of three months, the deployment of 45 Commando Royal Marines will last as long as it takes to deal with the continuing threat. If it becomes necessary to replace the Royal Marines in-theatre, that decision will have to be taken according to the circumstances on the ground. The 1 Royal Anglian tour as part of the International Security Assistance Force began officially on 15 March 2002 and will probably last into June.

Defence Medical Services

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* consultants, *(b)* specialist registrars and *(c)* vocationally trained general practitioners have (i) joined the Defence Medical Services, (ii) completed training in the DMS and (iii) left the DMS in each of the last 10 years, broken down by specialty. [R] [52989]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Airfields

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which UK RAF airfields will experience increased air traffic volumes as a result of the closure of West Freugh airfield. [52560]

Dr. Moonie: The RAF airfields nearest to the West Freugh range are RAF Valley, RAF Leeming and RAF Leuchars. There may be some small increase in the use of these airfields by aircraft operating in support of trials at the West Freugh range; the extent of any increase will depend upon a number of factors, including weather conditions, required range time and fuel requirements.

Integrated Project Teams

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what review has been made of the National Audit Office report on its Department's integrated project teams; what time scale has been set for pursuing the recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [52265]

Dr. Moonie: All of the recommendations raised in NAO Report HC671 have been evaluated as part of a recent Stock-take Review of Smart Acquisition. They are being taken forward in the action plans that have been developed subsequently. The time scales for pursuing the individual recommendations vary, and will be kept under review.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Lakshmi Mittal

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) whether she was consulted before her Department approved the £45.7 million loan from the International Finance Corporation to Ispat Karmet; [43765]

(2) whether she was consulted before officials from her Department approved the *(a)* £37.9 million loan to Ispat Karmet from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and *(b)* the £2.3 million World bank grant to Lakshmi Mittal from the World bank in May 2001; [43767]

(3) whether officials from the Office of the Prime Minister were consulted before her Department approved *(a)* the £45.7 million loan from the International Finance Corporation, *(b)* the £37.9 million loan to Ispat Karmet

from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and *(c)* the £2.3 million World bank grant to Lakshmi Mittal from the World bank in May 2001. [43766]

Clare Short: The decision to support the £45.7 million loan to Ispat Karmet from the International Finance Corporation in 1997; the £37.9 million loan to Ispat Karmet from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; and the £2.3 million World bank equity and quasi-equity investment to Lakshmi Mittal from the World bank in May 2001 was taken solely by DFID departmental officials. As I have repeatedly made clear officials from my Department work to policies set out in our published strategies for the EBRD, World bank and other international development banks. These decisions were uncontroversial and therefore not referred to Ministers.

HIV Treatment

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much, on average, full treatment for one HIV sufferer costs over the course of a year in the last five years. [37937]

Clare Short: There are currently 17 different separate licensed anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs which can be used in a variety of combinations. Moreover, different countries use different types of drugs and treatments to help treat people living with HIV/AIDS.

The retail cost of all three classes of drugs in developed countries averages between $10,000 and $14,000 per year. Costa Rica has negotiated a price equivalent to $7,000 per patient per year for ARV. Nigeria has launched the largest ARV treatment programme in Africa, using a generic form of ARV at a cost of $350 per patient per year. In Brazil, where some ARV drugs are produced locally, triple combination therapy costs $1,460 per patient per year, whereas in Thailand the cost of triple combination therapy is over $4,100 per patient per year. In addition to drugs costs there are laboratory monitoring costs (estimated at around US$400 per annum in Uganda) and other associated service delivery costs.

My Department is working with the international community to facilitate a framework for differential pricing, which would provide essential medicines to the developing world at substantially lower cost. However, the cost of ARV represents only part of the cost of treatment for people living with HIV. For example, an essential pre-requisite to any programme to increase access to medicines is widespread availability of voluntary counselling and testing. Adequate access to treatment for opportunistic infections such as tuberculosis, is also crucial. Furthermore, building capacity to use ARVs effectively cannot be achieved overnight, and will require substantial and sustained investment in health systems to reduce resistance to the drugs and to maximise the utility of the drugs in the short and long term.

SIDEX

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what conditions to the loan to LNM/Ispat for the purchase of SIDEX were *(a)* sought and *(b)* obtained by the British representatives of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [44576]

Clare Short: None. The EBRD negotiates appropriate financial and other conditions with individual clients. In accordance with its mandate, these typically include conditions designed to enhance both the transition and environmental impact of the project.

Young People

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what subjects and on which dates her Department has consulted organisations representing young people; and if she will list such organisations. [52498]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development formally consulted organisations representing young people specifically on the draft of its Institutional Strategy Paper on the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which was published in 2000. The Department also included such organisations in its consultations on the Government's White Paper on "Eliminating World Poverty: Making Globalisation Work for the Poor" in 2000 and on nine Target Strategy Papers between 1999 and 2001. The Department has frequent informal contacts in the course of its business with a wide range of civil society organisations, in the UK and overseas, representing the interests of children. During 2001 and 2002 the Department has held a number of consultation meetings with civil society organisations representing young people to discuss the United Kingdom's position on the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, which will take place next month, and its draft outcomes document.

Overseas Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Primary Schools Education Management Development Project in Botswana. [49170]

Clare Short: DFID has contributed technical assistance worth £1.2 million to support the Government of Botswana in strengthening the management of primary education. DFID and the Botswana Government have reviewed progress regularly to ensure value for money. The last major review of the project was conducted in May 2001 and another is planned for later this year. The project has been effective in training school principals and school management teams, and we regard it as a successful collaboration between our two Governments.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Shapla: Nursing, Medical Education and Public/Private Partnership projects in Bangladesh. [49173]

Clare Short: These are three components of DFID's support to the Government of Bangladesh's health sector reforms. The contractors responsible for delivering the outputs of the components were jointly selected by DFID and Government of Bangladesh on the basis of technical competency and overall cost.

They are subject to ongoing monitoring by our Bangladesh office and have, in addition been subject to two independent, external reviews in May 2000 and May 2001. The standard of work undertaken has been judged

to be consistently high and DFID is satisfied that this support is achieving good value for money and is producing demonstrable results.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Humanitarian Assistance Services Projects. [49182]

Clare Short: The Humanitarian Assistance Services contract was awarded under a process of international competitive bidding to the Crown Agents in 1999. The contract is currently in the process of being re-tendered.

We are satisfied that the contract has provided a competitively priced service which has enabled DFID to respond to numerous crises around the globe, most recently in, for example, Afghanistan, Gujarat and Mozambique.

During 1999–2000 the National Audit Office conducted a value for money audit of DFID's response to the Kosovo crisis, this included the role played by the Crown Agents under the Humanitarian Services Contract. The report acknowledged the leading role played by DFID during the crisis.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Restructuring Forests of the former Homeland Administrations Project in the Republic of South Africa. [49191]

Clare Short: DFID is providing technical assistance worth £2.95 million to South Africa's Department of Water Affairs and Forestry to support its policy of restructuring the forests of the Former Homeland Administrations in the way that addresses social objectives. DFID and the South African Government have reviewed progress regularly to ensure value for money. The project was last formally reviewed in May 2001. This programme has made an important contribution to the effective management of these forests, which are very important to some of the poorest areas of South Africa.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Family Protection Project Managers Project in Jordan. [49197]

Clare Short: Officials from my Department visited Jordan in February to monitor the Family Protection Project. Their report identified significant progress as having been made over the past year, and appropriate action has been agreed with the project managers for ensuring that this continues to be the case during the remainder of the project.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Social Marketing of Condoms Project in Mozambique. [49207]

Clare Short: The Mozambique Social Marketing Condoms Project is regularly monitored by the implementing partner, Population Services International in collaboration with the funding partners, DFID, The Netherlands and USAID. We believe that cost effectiveness is very important, and one of the key indicators monitored is the cost per condom sold. Higher sales reduce the cost per condom, and although final cost figures for 2001 are not yet available, last year saw the highest sales since the project began. An evaluation of the project is planned for the third quarter of this year, when cost effectiveness and value for money will be among key issues examined.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Guyana Land Administration Support Programme in Guyana. [49186]

Clare Short: My Department undertook a review of DFID support to the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission in November 2001. The project continues to meet its objectives cost effectively.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [49608]

Clare Short: My Department is responsible for three non-departmental public bodies. None of them employ any support or other staff, and the question of using the new deal does not arise.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many digital radios are owned by her Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52852]

Clare Short: DFID have no digital radios.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what buildings owned by her Department in the United Kingdom have solar panels installed. [53489]

Clare Short: DFID have no solar panels installed on our buildings. Options for utilising renewable energy resources were studied in 2000–01. Solar panels were not appropriate or viable due to the configurations and locations of our two main UK offices. The studies showed that subject to planning permission, a wind turbine should be investigated for our East Kilbride office. This work, looking at location and wind regimes, is on-going.

Belize

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 369W, regarding Belize, when in November 2001 officials from her Department held a meeting with Prime Minister Musa and Minister Fonseca; and where this meeting took place. [53413]

Clare Short: My officials met with Prime Minister Musa and Minister Fonseca on 20 November 2001 in Belmopan.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 369W, regarding Belize, when she took her decision not to grant debt relief under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative to Belize. [53411]

Clare Short: My decision not to grant debt relief under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative to Belize was taken in September 2001.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46814]

Clare Short: DFID's Information Department includes the Public Enquiry Point, Publications, Development Awareness and Knowledge Management as well as the press office. It would involve disproportionate cost to break down the press office element of the total expenditure.

Engineering

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement regarding the projects within her Department that aim to strengthen professional engineering in developing countries, indicating which countries are involved. [49829]

Clare Short: The provision and maintenance of water, transport and energy infrastructure underpins much of what we do to eliminate poverty and encourage pro-poor economic growth. In our programmes we will try to include an element of strengthening and training into the institutions which provide the engineering services. Our Knowledge and Research programmes regularly look at projects which try to improve the technical standards and the quality of decision making for the engineering profession in developing countries.

However more specifically the Strengthening Professional Engineering Associations Project (SPEAP) has been using the Institution of Civil Engineers to study the particular needs of the engineering profession in Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Infrastructure services consume a very large proportion of public funds in developing countries. The rationale for the project lies in the recognition that poor quality engineering often leads to the inefficient use of those funds and the rapid deterioration of facilities. Earthquake disasters result in loss of life which could be mostly avoided by implementation of simple engineering good practice. As we move away from donor supervised project level support towards budget and sectoral support the quality of local professional services becomes increasingly critical. A strengthened profession will help to maintain higher standards and improve decision making to the benefit of the whole community.

The project will also address the impact of strengthened professional standards on professional integrity and corruption and look at the potential impact of the GATS 2000 decisions in respect of the worldwide trade in engineering services. If engineering qualification and standards are not raised to internationally accepted norms then the full benefits will not be realised.

Throughout our work in engineering we are continuously emphasising the broader responsibilities of engineers towards the social and environmental issues associated with infrastructure developments.

Afghanistan

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to provide aid to Afghanistan following the earthquake in that country on 25 March. [49270]

Clare Short: The earthquake which struck northern Afghanistan on 25 March is estimated to have killed around 800 people and left 20,000 families in need of food and shelter assistance.

My Department deployed a team from its Kabul office to assess the situation and established a co-ordination centre in the affected area on behalf of OCHA.

While most of the acute needs of the affected population have been met, the focus of the response is now shifting towards reconstruction. UN agencies have delivered relief items from existing stockpiles including tents, blankets, mattresses, plastic sheeting, clothing, shoes, kitchen sets, jerrycans, hygiene kits, and soap.

Since September last year, DFID has provided £60 million in response to the Afghan crisis, through UN agencies, the Red Cross movement and non-governmental organisations.

Annual Report

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when her Department's annual report is being published. [48873]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 316W.

Debt Relief

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how the Government calculates the cut-off date for eligibility for debt relief; and what post cut-off date relief packages have been agreed. [53613]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom grants 100 per cent. debt relief on all official debt currently owned by countries eligible for the enhanced heavily indebted poor countries' initiative once these countries have reached decision point. No distinction is made between pre and post cut off date debt as defined by the Paris Club of official creditors. The Government have pressed all creditors to follow this example.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Bushmeat

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to raise the subject of the trade in bushmeat at the Johannesburg World Summit. [48156]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Government's work to tackle the trade in bushmeat is primarily channelled through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). We have funded research to analyse knowledge on the bushmeat trade, highlight gaps in data and understanding, and recommend further action. The Government support a number of initiatives with links to bushmeat, such as the UK Bushmeat Working Group.

Although the UK Government have not planned to raise the specific subject of trade in bushmeat at WSSD, this issue has links with the Johannesburg agenda. The Government's priorities for the summit include poverty eradication and sustainable livelihoods. Action in these areas will address the diverse underlying causes of bushmeat trade.

National Insurance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the cost in a full year of the Budget changes to employers' National Insurance contributions to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* agencies of his Department, *(c)* local government carrying out functions within the responsibility of his Department and *(d)* the Duchy of Lancaster. [51954]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W.

Civil Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the salary costs have been to each Government Department of employing staff from employment agencies to undertake work as *(a)* administrative assistant or equivalent, *(b)* administrative officer or equivalent, *(c)* administrative executive officer, *(d)* higher executive officer and *(e)* senior executive officer located in (i) London and (ii) the south-east in each year since 1995. [52095]

Mr. Leslie: Details of salary costs incurred as a result of employing staff from employment agencies are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the starting salary is for a civil servant employed at each level for each Government Department. [52094]

Mr. Leslie: Responsibility for pay, outside the senior civil service, is delegated to Departments and agencies. Starting salaries are therefore a matter for the Department or agency concerned and will depend on the job to be done and the skills and experience of the individual.

Information on civil service pay, broken down by salary and responsibility level, is published in the "Civil Service Statistics 2000" and is based on 1 April 2000 data. Copies of the publication can be found in the Library of the House.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if his Department is running a recruitment campaign to encourage graduates to join the civil service. [53261]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office is responsible for fast stream recruitment which is aimed at graduates who have the potential to reach the senior levels of the civil service. The current recruitment campaign includes elements aimed both specifically at the fast stream, and also at encouraging interest in civil service careers more generally, for example:

- Production and distribution of fast stream information packs to all university career services in the UK
- Attendance at career fairs, including diversity fairs, at universities around the country (programme to date has been placed in the Library)
- Advertising in *The Guardian* (Society and Rise sections)
- Advertisement in *Disability Now*
- Advertisement monthly in *Ready Willing and Able* (disability publication)
- An entry on the following internet sites:
  - www.skills.org.uk
  - www.gradunet.co.uk
  - www.blackbritain.co.uk
  - www.prospects.ac.uk
- Advertisement in Prospects Directory (annual, guide to employers)
- A programme of careers presentations in universities by current fast streamers
- Publicising and administering the summer development programme to select 60 ethnic minority undergraduates for a six to eight weeks development programme with the civil service
- Two publications, "Work Experience in the Civil Service" and "Sandwich Course Placements", lodged with university career services and available on the internet, promoting work experience in the civil service
- Work with the disability charity, Workable, to secure disabled undergraduates work experience in the civil service.

We have a comprehensive recruitment website at www.civil-service.gov.uk and at www.faststream.gov.uk.

In addition to the fast stream, the Cabinet Office itself opens up a proportion of its junior and middle management posts (for which graduates may be eligible to apply) to external recruitment and plans to continue to do so in the coming year.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 58W, regarding the cost of refurbishing ministerial private offices, what has been the total cost of the work associated with the relocation of buildings for operational purposes over the last four years. [50549]

Mr. Leslie: I assume the hon. Member refers to my answer of 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1499W.

As I stated with that answer, separately identifying work undertaken on Minister's private offices could be answered only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Fireworks

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many firework-related injuries were treated in hospitals in the UK during the Christmas and new year period. [39894]

Yvette Cooper: I refer my hon. Friend to the response I gave him on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1067W.

Clinicians

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received from *(a)* the Royal College of Obstetricians and *(b)* the Royal College of Paediatricians on the annual numbers of patients per clinician which they consider to be necessary in order to ensure the safety and efficiency of treatment. [41406]

Yvette Cooper: The Department has not received any advice from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists or the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health specifying the numbers of patients a clinician needs to see to ensure the safety and efficiency of treatment.

Autism

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with regard to the Brent Taylor report on MMR/autism, *(a)* what type of study was undertaken and for what purpose, *(b)* how many children were included in the study, *(c)* if the study was for case-series analysis method, *(d)* what its findings were on levels of autism and *(e)* if the raw data collected will be published. [43604]

Yvette Cooper: The third population study that has recently been reported by Taylor et al[1] involved a review of patients clinical notes linked to independent computerised vaccination records (record-linkage). The key objective of this research was to investigate whether there was any evidence of a 'new variant' form of autism caused or triggered by MMR and associated with bowel problems.

This study examined approximately 500 children with childhood (278) or atypical (195) autism born between 1979 and 1998 in five health districts in north-east London. Of these children, 25 per cent. were reported to have regression and 17 per cent. to have had bowel problems. There was no significant difference in the rates of bowel problems or regression in those who had had MMR vaccine before onset of problems, after onset or who had never had the vaccine. In addition the proportion of autistic children with regression or bowel problems did not change significantly over the period from 1979–98, which included the introduction of MMR in 1988. This study found no evidence to support a 'new variant' form of autism, where MMR vaccination is associated with developmental regression and bowel problems.

[1] Taylor B., Miller E., Lingam R., Andrews N., Simmons A., Stowe J. Measles, mumps and rubella vaccination and bowel problems or developmental regression in children with autism: population study. BMJ 2002, 324;393–6.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the number of cases of autism in East Surrey; and if he will make a statement. [53249]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* None. Local statutory authorities are responsible for ensuring that they have sufficient knowledge of local needs and priorities to inform the pattern of services in their area.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what precautions *(a)* local hospitals and *(b)* emergency management services are planning to take in preparation for the crowds anticipated during the weekend of the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and if he will make a statement. [44596]

Ms Blears: Planning for big events, including the Queen's Golden Jubilee, is co-ordinated by the local police forces built upon tried and tested procedures. There are established major incident procedures and cross border support mechanisms. All hospitals and ambulance services have major incident plans.

The main celebrations for the Queen's Golden Jubilee are being held in London. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport has an operational and safety planning group, which includes emergency services and health representatives, to oversee the safety and health aspects of the events in the Royal parks, the City of London and the processional route to St. Paul's Cathedral.

The intention is to use systems that are tried and tested in London at events such as the Notting Hill Carnival and the VE Day Anniversary Celebrations. These systems are designed to treat as many casualties as possible at the event sites using first aid posts or advance treatment centres which will be staffed by doctors, nurses and first aiders. This will reduce vehicle movements around the events and reduce potential pressure on accident and emergency departments.

Medical Training Costs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average gross cost was of training post age 18 for *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* hospital doctors and *(c)* nurses. [44283]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave my hon. Friend, the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) on Tuesday 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 642W.

Training costs for general practitioners are the same as those for doctors.

Cancer Plan

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards establishing a lead clinician for cancer within each PCT as identified in the Cancer Plan. [45770]

Yvette Cooper: In 2001–02 the Department allocated £2 million in the first year of a three year programme. By March 2002, 323 primary care lead clinicians for cancer had been appointed. A full programme of support and

development for all the primary care lead clinicians for cancer, is being funded and managed by Macmillan Cancer Relief.

Nurses

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses working for the NHS are on work permits. [46182]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health national health service hospital and community health services non-medical workforce census for England showed that there were 330,353 qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed in the NHS at 30 September 2001.

Information on the number of nurses working for the NHS on work permits is not collected centrally, but may be available from local NHS employers.

Operation Cancellations (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been cancelled by the NHS in Lancashire within one month of the supposed date of the operation in each year since 1997. [48599]

Jacqui Smith: The available information is shown in the table.

We recognise and fully understand the distress that cancellations can cause for patients and their families. This is reflected by the fact that from the end of this month, any patient who has their operation cancelled by the hospital on the day it is due to happen will be guaranteed treatment within 28 days, or else the hospital will have to fund their treatment at the time and place of their choice.

The NHS is carrying out more operations than ever before—up by more than half a million between 1996–97 and 2000–01. But cancellations are a long term problem which can only be resolved through the investment and reform that is now taking place in the NHS.

	East Lancashire		*Morecambe Bay*		*North-west Lancashire*		*South Lancashire*	
Year/quarter	*(1)*	*(2)*	*(1)*	*(2)*	*(1)*	*(2)*	*(1)*	*(2)*
2001–02								
3	200	27	195	30	139	0	99	0
2	166	16	162	43	178	0	89	0
1	176	11	192	34	218	1	91	0
2000–01								
4	145	17	310	81	264	0	129	0
3	161	10	249	29	88	1	91	1
2	126	9	142	13	72	6	91	0
1	147	13	102	12	68	10	115	1
1999–2000								
4	127	7	127	35	183	12	23	0
3	123	19	50	9	250	19	13	0
2	97	14	61	8	59	0	29	0
1	90	5	71	8	91	0	37	0
1998–99								
4	99	8	32	2	98	0	34	5
3	122	11	32	4	117	0	19	0
2	124	13	46	10	86	9	15	0
1	111	8	44	2	79	6	31	0
1997–98								
4	130	15	47	2	163	0	18	0
3	99	8	28	3	120	0	25	1
2	70	3	32	3	94	0	26	1
1	52	3	28	0	101	0	20	0

Notes:

1. Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the quarter

2. Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation.

Source:

Department of Health forms QMNG and QMPC

Medicines

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the public health consequences of reclassifying medicines from prescription-only to pharmacy sale; and where the liability for the use of these products will lie; [47847]

(2) if he will make a statement on where the liability for the use of products newly reclassified from prescription-only to pharmacy sale will lie; [47875]

(3) if he will make a statement on the risks to public health of changes to the availability of treatments by reclassifying medicines from prescription-only to pharmacy sales. [47876]

Ms Blears: The changes to the process by which the legal status of a medicine is changed (introduced on 1 April 2002), are designed to speed and streamline the procedures, halving the time taken to deliver a change from application to decision, while maintaining appropriate safeguards.

The changes to the process do not impact on the liability for a product. Where the liability for the use of a product lies will vary according to the circumstances of each individual case but will be the same for products with an existing legal status as for those which have been newly reclassified.

Patient safety remains paramount and any application to consider a change of legal status for a particular medicine will continue to require an applicant to demonstrate its safety in use, including without medical supervision, and that the patient information is suitable for the medicine to be made more widely available.

Making more medicines more widely available when it is safe to do so is a key part of the national health service objective to empower patients. Many patients are expert on their own conditions and early access to treatments for known conditions can have a significant public health benefit where early intervention would not otherwise be possible.

Overseas Treatment

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many British patients have been treated by the NHS in the EEA, broken down by country of origin. [47852]

Mr. Hutton: 188 patients have been treated in other member states of the EEA since 18 January 2002 under the pilot scheme to send patients overseas for treatment. Of these 112 were treated in France and 76 in Germany.

In addition, 340 applications for treatment within the EEA were approved under the E112 scheme between 1 January and 22 April 2002 (Great Britain figure, rounded to the nearest 10). The countries concerned were Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting over six months on the in-patient waiting list in *(a)* each quarter since March 1997 and *(b)* each month since January 2001. [47855]

Mr. Hutton: The data requested are shown in the table. Table 1 provides quarterly statistics from March 1997 onwards and table 2 provides monthly statistics from January 2001 onwards.

Table 1: Quarterly Statistics—Number of patients on the in-patient waiting list waiting over six months on the last day of the period: England (health authority based)

Year	Quarter	six months +
1996–97	4	290,000
1997–98	1	318,000
1997–98	2	338,000
1997–98	3	368,000
1997–98	4	382,000
1998–99	1	382,000
1998–99	2	348,000
1998–99	3	316,000
1998–99	4	280,000
1999–2000	1	279,000
1999–2000	2	281,000
1999–2000	3	285,000
1999–2000	4	268,000
2000–01	1	273,000
2000–01	2	275,000
2000–01	3	267,000
2000–01	4	246,000
2001–02	1	267,000
2001–02	2	277,000
2001–02	3	259,000

Source:
DH QF01 return

Table 2: Monthly statistics—Number of patients on the in-patient waiting list waiting over six months at the end of the period: England (health authority based)

Month	Year	Six months +
January	2000–01	266,000
February	2000–01	255,000
March	2000–01	246,000
April	2001–02	259,000
May	2001–02	271,000
June	2001–02	267,000
July	2001–02	268,000
August	2001–02	274,000
September	2001–02	277,000
October	2001–02	262,000
November	2001–02	247,000
December	2001–02	259,000
January	2001–02	260,000
February	2001–02	246,000

Source:
DH monthly waiting list returns.

Radiography Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting times were, broken down by regional health authority, for radiography treatment in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [47995]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Waiting times for radiotherapy treatments are not collected centrally. The NHS Cancer Plan set out maximum waiting time targets for first definitive cancer treatment which will come into effect over the next few years. Arrangements to monitor these targets are currently being put in place and will cover radiotherapy where this is the first treatment.

From December 2001, there is a one month maximum wait from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer and a one month wait from urgent general practitioner referral to first treatment for children's, testicular and acute leukaemia. By 2005, there will be a maximum one month wait from diagnosis to first treatment for all cancers. Monitoring of these targets is being introduced and figures will be published as the targets apply.

MMR Vaccination

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to release MMR vaccination rates by health authority for the final quarter of 2001. [47465]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination rates for the last quarter of 2001 were published in *Communicable Disease Weekly* of 28 March 2002. This is available on www.phls.co.uk/facts/Vaccination/VaccIndex.htm. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for a medium secure unit for the Oxfordshire Mental Health Care NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49536]

Ms Blears: The business case justifying the individual schemes estimated the net savings in present value terms (ie all future costs and benefits discounted to their present values) compared with publicly funding the scheme as follows:

Net present costs of PSC v. PFI option

Trust	*PFI (£000)*	*Public (£000)*	*Savings in net present value terms (£000)*	*Difference (Percentage)*
Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare NHS Trust	3,707	3,777	70	2

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Bills introduced by his Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans he has for the future use of such clauses. [49616]

Mr. Hutton: None of the Bills introduced by the Department in the last five years contained a sunset clause. The use of such provisions in future will be considered on a case-by-case basis as the circumstances require.

Haemophilia

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whom his Department has consulted as part of its consideration of whether to make recombinant available to all people with haemophilia. [50850]

Yvette Cooper: The Department has had formal meetings with the United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Doctor's Organisation (UKHCDO) and the Haemophilia Society and more informal discussions with other groups from the haemophilia community.

The Government are considering extending the provision of recombinant clotting factors to all haemophilia patients in England. Recombinant clotting factors are provided in England for new haemophilia patients and children under 16 (from April 1998). The UKHCDO has advised that recombinant clotting factors are available to those who are eligible to receive them.

Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the incidence of foetal alcohol syndrome in England and Wales. [51823]

Ms Blears: The Department has made no specific estimate of the prevalence of foetal alcohol syndrome in England and Wales, although the World Health Organisation estimates an incidence of between 0.33 and 9.7 per 1,000 live births in a range of countries. The risks of excessive drinking during pregnancy are well documented, and for this reason the Government recommend that women who are pregnant or who are trying to become pregnant do not drink more than one to two units of alcohol per week.

In 2000–01, foetal alcohol syndrome was reported in 38 birth records on the Hospital Episode Statistics System (HES), representing 0.07 cases per 1,000 births.

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government have a mechanism to record the incidence of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. [51824]

Ms Blears: The Department does not collect specific information about the incidence of foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). Where FAS is recognised at the time of delivery, it may be recorded in the clinical details on the HES (Hospital Episodes Statistics) record. The number of cases is likely to be small: the World Health Organisation estimates an incidence of between 0.33 and 9.7 per 1000 live births in a range of countries.

FAS will of course be recorded on an individual patient's medical records, to ensure that health and other professional staff are aware of the situation and can help the sufferer to access the support that they need.

Birth Statistics

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government have a mechanism to monitor the number of babies born to mothers *(a)* with alcohol problems and *(b)* who abuse illegal drugs. [51826]

Ms Blears: The Department has no central mechanism to record the numbers of babies born to mothers who misuse alcohol or illegal drugs, although the numbers are likely to be small. Information from the infant feeding study 1995 indicated that only 1 per cent. of pregnant women drank more than 14 units of alcohol per week.

Information about any problems with drug or alcohol misuse can be noted on a mother's medical records, and health professionals will encourage the mother to seek help to address their substance misuse problems both before and after the birth.

Parliamentary Questions

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the question tabled on 6 March, ref 41373, by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden. [51815]

Jacqui Smith: The question was replied to on 25 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 455W.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 756W, on parliamentary questions, how much the investigation cost; what the Civil Service grade was of the civil servant who headed the investigation; how many civil servants were involved in the investigation; whether external consultants were involved in the investigation; and how many civil servants from other Departments were seconded to the investigation. [53324]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The investigation was carried out under the personal supervision of the Department's Director of Corporate Affairs and reported to the Permanent Secretary.

It was headed by a Senior Civil Servant supported by two other civil servants from the Department of Health.

No additional costs were incurred as these staff were temporarily redeployed on to these duties.

No external consultants were involved or any civil servants from other departments.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to improve the answering of written parliamentary questions by his Department since 1 November 2001. [52271]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State (Mr. Milburn) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report,* columns 756–59W.

Social Services SSA

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the process that was used to calculate the increase in social services SSA for *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [52277]

Jacqui Smith: The increase in social services standard spending assessment for 2000–01 and 2001–02 were arrived at as a result of the 1998 comprehensive spending review. That review looked at the pressures facing social services departments at that time and the level of spending that the Government could make available.

Intermediate Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what systems of evaluation are in place to monitor the quality of provision of *(a)* pre-admission and *(b)* rehabilitation services of intermediate care. [52278]

Jacqui Smith: Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating local intermediate care services were set out in the Department of Health circular "Intermediate Care" (health service circular 2001:01: local authority circular (2001)/01), published on 19 January 2001. A copy is in the Library.

Since the circular was published, research into intermediate care has been commissioned, and there is a growing body of evidence from local evaluations. The Commission for Health Improvement, Social Services Inspectorate, and the National Care Standards Commission (and their successor bodies, announced in "Delivering the NHS Plan") all have a role in evaluating the quality of intermediate care services in various settings. The Department collects data on rates of hospital admission, re-admission and delayed transfers of care, which help to measure the impact of intermediate care services.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much additional funding has been invested in intermediate care services since 28 March 2000. [52689]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan announced extra investment of £900 million annually by 2003–04 for intermediate care and related services to promote independence. Of this, around £255 million was earmarked specifically for national health service investment in intermediate care. This is in addition to £150 million made available recurrently from 2000–01. Full details are in the intermediate care circular health service circular 2001–01:LAC (2001)1 published in January last year, a copy of which is in the Library.

Additionally, a one-off allocation of £63 million was announced in August 2000 to help expand capacity for the 2000–01 winter. This included investment in intermediate and transitional care to tackle delayed discharges and initiatives for recruitment and retention of key staff.

NHS Plan

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the *(a)* targets and *(b)* policies contained in the NHS Plan have been costed. [52276]

Mr. Hutton: The funding made available in spending review 2000 was sufficient to deliver the targets and policies up to and including the current financial year, and the funding recently announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be sufficient to deliver the policies and targets up to 2007–08.

Health Care Provision (Cheltenham)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what effect the Budget of 17 April will have on the provision of health care in Cheltenham. [52939]

Mr. Hutton: As a result of the Budget, the national health service in England will receive an annual average real terms growth in resources of 7.4 per cent. for the five years from 2003–04 to 2007–08. Local allocations to primary care trusts will be announced later this year.

Organ Donation

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are registered as organ donors. [52453]

Jacqui Smith: There are currently 9.166 million people registered on the NHS Organ Donor Register.

Lung Cancer

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when a decision will be made on whether a pilot trial of spiral CT scanning as a screening test for lung cancer will be undertaken; [53533]

(2) if he will make funding available for a pilot study of spiral CT scanning as a screening test for lung cancer. [53531]

Yvette Cooper: The Medical Research Council (MRC), which is funded through the Department of Trade and Industry, is currently considering a proposal for the pilot trial of lung cancer screening using spiral computed tomography. The MRC expects to make a decision on funding at the council meeting in July.

Food Supplements

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the potential impact that a low maximum permitted level for nutrients in food supplements would have on *(a)* the viability of United Kingdom specialist food manufacturers and *(b)* consumer choice in the UK for food supplement products. [53431]

Yvette Cooper: Setting unnecessarily low maximum permitted levels for nutrients in food supplements is likely to have a detrimental impact on the viability of the United Kingdom's specialist food manufacturers and on UK consumer choice. Throughout negotiations the Food Standards Agency has insisted on sound scientific assessment of safety as the principal criterion for setting limits and will continue to do so.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the criteria for setting the upper safe level of intake of vitamins and minerals under review by the EU Scientific Committee for Foods. [53429]

Yvette Cooper: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that they would advise as suitable, criteria adopted by the expert group on vitamins and mineral (EVM), which is based on the risk analysis model developed by the food and agriculture organisation of the United Nations and the World Health Organisation. Details of this are set out in the expert group paper: "Risk Analysis in Food Safety: recent development and the respective roles of risk assessment, risk management and risk communication" (EVM/99/10/P), copies of which are available in the Library, and on the FSA's website: www.food.gov.uk. This process takes into account all relevant evidence including that from the peer reviewed human and animal studies.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure minimal cost and disruption to *(a)* consumers, *(b)* retailers and *(c)* manufacturers of food supplements resulting from the adoption of the European food supplements directive into UK law. [53433]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) argued strongly in negotiations for a safety-based approach to this directive (rather than the more restrictive approach favoured by some other member states) in order to minimise the impact on United Kingdom consumer choice and UK businesses. The FSA is now directing its energies towards arguing the case for maximum levels of vitamins and minerals in supplements to be based on thorough scientific risk assessment and forging strong links between the European Union Scientific committee on food and an expert group that it has set up to advise on acceptable levels.

The proposed directive will not immediately outlaw any products already on the UK market. Lists of permitted vitamin and mineral sources remain open pending a continuous programme of safety assessments. We intend, when implementing the directive, to take full advantage of the flexibility the UK has secured for member states to allow continued sale of products containing vitamin and mineral sources not yet on the permitted lists for up to seven years after the directive comes into force.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the timetable for the publication of the final versions of the forthcoming report from the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals; and how he plans to take the findings of that report into account when responding to the EU Scientific Committee for Foods' assessment of the Upper Safe Level (USL) of intake of all vitamins and minerals. [53428]

Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 626W.

Consultation on the report is now expected to take place in August 2002. This is to allow extra time for the group to complete risk assessments on all of the vitamins and minerals covered by the review.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the potential impact that the preparation of dossiers for submission to the EC Scientific Committee for Foods for the inclusion of additional substances in the annexes to the food supplements directive will have on *(a)* the costs and *(b)* the viability of the relevant manufacturers and retailers. [53432]

Yvette Cooper: During negotiations on this directive the Food Standards Agency consulted widely on its possible impacts among United Kingdom interest groups. Initial estimates from industry suggest that the costs of preparing safety dossiers in support of ingredients not on the positive lists in the annexes to the directive lie between £80,000 and £250,000 per dossier.

Any impact of the directive on the relevant manufacturers and retailers will depend upon future developments on the lists of permitted nutrients and maximum permitted levels in food supplements.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* discussions his Department has had with and *(b)* submissions his Department has made to the European Commission with regard to the implementation of the European food supplements directive, with particular reference to the upper safe level of intake of vitamins and minerals. [53430]

Yvette Cooper: Throughout negotiations on this directive the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has had intensive discussions with the European Commission to ensure that upper safe levels of intake of vitamins and minerals set are not unduly restrictive but are based on sound scientific assessment of safety.

In order to continue this work, the FSA is now directing its energies towards forging strong links between the European Union scientific committee on food (which will advise the commission and member states on upper safe levels) and the United Kingdom's own expert group on vitamins and minerals.

Ambulance Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) of 27 February 2000, *Official Report*, column 1421W, on ambulance staff, if he will provide information on the same basis for *(a)* the Isle of Wight and *(b)* other integrated ambulance services. [43369]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* Information on levels of reported violent incidents against national health service staff is collected centrally at whole trust level but not by integrated services within a trust.

Smallpox

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 687W, on smallpox, what recent representations he has received about smallpox vaccines. [43913]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Department of Health has received representations from industry and from the BioIndustry Association. There has been consultation with industry about its capacity and ability to deliver smallpox vaccine supplies to meet the Government's requirements.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the amount of money spent privately in the last 12 months by patients on treatments which are being assessed by NICE. [50056]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* We have made no formal assessment.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 309W, on care homes, what information he collates on the length of time it takes for a care home to be built. [50078]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* No information on the length of time it takes to build a care home is collected centrally.

Obesity

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information she has collated on the number of *(a)* adults and *(b)* children who are currently overweight or obese; and what percentage of each population that figure represents; [49310]

(2) what recent estimates she has made as to the total cost *(a)* to the national health service and *(b)* to the economy of illness, inactivity and premature death associated with overweight and obesity; [49311]

(3) if he will make a statement on his plans to combat obesity; [49312]

(4) what were the main conclusions of his Department's recent response to the Ninth report of the Committee on Public Accounts on the subject of obesity; [49313]

(5) what targets he intends to set for reductions in the levels of overweight and obesity; and what resources and strategies he will put in place to ensure that they are achieved. [49314]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Health Survey for England 2000 reported that 45 per cent. of men were overweight and 21 per cent. obese, and 34 per cent. of women were overweight and 21 per cent. obese.

The Health Survey for England 1995–97 reported that 22 per cent. of six-year-olds and 31 per cent. of 15-year-olds are overweight. The prevalence of obesity ranges from 10 per cent. at age six years to 17 per cent. at age 15 years.

The National Audit Office publication 'Tackling Obesity in England' reported that in 1998 30,000 deaths (of which 9,000 were before the age of 65 years) were attributable to obesity. There is an estimated direct cost to the national health service (NHS) of at least £0.5 billion a year, or about 1.5 per cent. of NHS expenditure. There is also an estimated direct cost of £2 billion a year to the wider economy.

Obesity is a complex condition, but is largely preventable through addressing the risk factors of diet and physical inactivity. The Government are committed to tackling this rising trend in obesity and are taking positive steps to improve prevention, treatment and management of obesity through the NHS Plan, Cancer Plan and national service frameworks.

We have put in place cross-Government work and local action is under way to promote physical activity and healthy eating and tackle overweight and obesity. Specifically, these include a national school fruit scheme, a wider five-a-day programme to increase access to and consumption of fruit and vegetables and work with industry to improve overall balance in diet, including salt, fat and diet. Among children, there has been significant investment in primary physical education (PE) and sports facilities, including £581 million from the new opportunities fund for a PE and sports programme.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has provided guidance on the anti-obesity drugs orlistat and sibutramine for the NHS. Treatment with these drugs will be supported by advice, support and counselling on diet, physical activity and behavioural strategies. NICE are also reviewing surgical interventions to treat morbid obesity, the findings of which are expected in summer 2002. Referral to NICE of further guidance topics remains under consideration.

We welcomed the Public Accounts Committee report on 'Tackling Obesity in England', published in January 2002, the official response to which was published on 21 March 2002 and has been placed in the Library.

No specific targets are set for reductions in the levels of overweight and obesity. However, the coronary heart disease national service framework sets standards and

specific milestones for action on local programmes of effective policies on reducing overweight and obesity. Meeting these standards will contribute to achieving on of the four targets set in Our Healthier Nation, to reduce deaths from coronary heart disease by 40 per cent. in people in people under 75 by 2010.

Inventures

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans Inventures has for the land it owns at Cold East hospital. [50798]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Cold East hospital is in the ownership of the Secretary of State for Health. NHS Estates of which Inventures is a part act on behalf of Ministers to dispose of property which has been declared surplus to national health service requirements. NHS Estates are currently considering a number of options with the borough council for Cold East hospital.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures have been adopted to determine if land owned and occupied by *(a)* PCTs, *(b)* acute hospital trusts, *(c)* health authorities and *(d)* his Department should be transferred to Inventures. [50797]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Under the current proposals there is no intention to transfer land owned and occupied by primary care trusts, acute hospital trusts, health authorities or the Department of Health to Inventures.

Inventures (part of NHS Estates) sole task in this regard is to assist in the disposal of the surplus estate.

Heart Valve Replacements

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy that heart valve replacements which have been manufactured in the United States of America may be used by the NHS before they have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the USA. [51428]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Artificial heart valves manufactured in the USA (or elsewhere) may be used by the national health service if they bear the CE marking, which indicates that they comply with European "essential requirements" for safety, quality and performance. Valves which do not bear the CE marking can also be used (on a restricted basis) as part of controlled clinical trials. Approval by the US Food and Drugs Administration is not a prerequisite for the use of artificial heart valves by the NHS, regardless of their country of origin.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what tests his Department carried out on the St. Jude 'Regent' range of valves prior to their use by the NHS; and when the St. Jude 'Regent' range of valves were first used by the national health service. [51430]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* My Department did not carry out any tests on the St. Jude 'Regent' range of artificial heart valves prior to their use by the national health service, because the valves were affixed with the CE marking, indicating that they complied with European "essential requirements" for safety, quality and performance. The valves received CE marking on the basis of an assessment of technical information relating to their design and safety evaluation by a Notified Body (an independent third party assessment organisation). The St. Jude 'Regent' range of artificial heart valves was first available for general use by the NHS in 1999.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what tests his Department carried out on the St. Jude Silzone coated mitral valve prior to its use by the NHS; and when the St. Jude Silzone coated mitral valve was first used by the national health service. [51429]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* The Department did not carry out any tests on St. Jude Silzone coated mitral artificial heart valves prior to their use by the national health service, because the valves were affixed with the CE marking, indicating that they complied with European "essential requirements" for safety, quality and performance. St. Jude Silzone coated mitral artificial heart valves were first available for general use by the NHS in 1997.

NHS Outcome Targets

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his outcome targets are for the NHS for *(a)* 2002–03, *(b)* 2003–04, *(c)* five years hence and *(d)* 10 years hence; and how they have changed as a result of his statement on 18 April. [51915]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* The Department's Public Service Agreement (PSA) contains a number of headline targets, such as:

> Patients will receive treatment at a time that suits them in accordance with their clinical need: two thirds of all outpatient appointments and inpatient elective admissions will be pre-booked by 2003–04 on the way to 100 per cent. pre-booking by 2005.
>
> Guaranteed access to a primary care professional with 24 hours and to a primary care doctor within 48 hours by 2008.
>
> Reduce the maximum wait for an out-patient appointment to three months and the maximum wait for in-patient treatment to six months by the end of 2005.
>
> Reduce substantially the mortality rates from major killers by 2010: from heart disease by at least 40 per cent. in people under 75; from cancer by at least 20 per cent. in people under 75; and from suicide and undetermined injury by at least 20 per cent.

Progress against PSA targets is recorded every year in the Department's annual report. The next departmental report will be published in spring 2002.

A new PSA will be published at the end of the spending review process (summer 2002).

Mental Health Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources are available for mental health in West Sussex; and what resources were available in each of the last five years. [53282]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The amount spent on mental health services in West Sussex, in the last five years for which figures are available, is shown in the table.

	£000	Percentage change
2001–02	62,523	15.3
2000–01	54,219	9.3
1999–2000	49,606	7.4
1998–99	46,209	–0.1
1997–98	46,248	7.0
1996–97	43,237	—

Notes:

1. Data taken from Q4 monitoring returns table H08, forecast outturn, except for 2001–02 using C3 return.

2. The costs of general practitioners and prescribing are not analysed to condition related groups.

Details of the location and types of mental health services across West Sussex are not held centrally.

Residential/Nursing Home Beds

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the number of *(a)* residential home and *(b)* nursing home beds in England provided by (i) local authorities (ii) the private sector and (iii) the voluntary sector. [53271]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Information on the number of places in residential and nursing care homes by accommodation type in England at 31 March 2001 is shown in the table.

Residential and nursing care places in England, at 31 March 2001

	Local authority staffed homes	Private homes	Voluntary homes
Residential care	50,858	222,970	67,347
Nursing care[1]	[2]—	171,430	4,582

[1] Excludes registered beds in private hospitals and clinics

[2] Not applicable

Source:

Department of Health annual returns

Social Services Inspection (Torbay)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of the inspection conducted in the Torbay Unitary Authority area into social services; how many officials were involved in undertaking the inspection; and what the cost was of producing a report after the inspection. [52485]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The social services inspectorate conducted an inspection of children's service in Torbay in June 2001. This was the most recent inspection in social service and involved two inspectors. The total cost including publication of the inspection report was £18,000.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 1 May 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Waste Disposal

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will issue guidance to waste disposal authorities to advise them not to enter into long-term waste disposal contracts prior to the conclusions of the review into waste policy being undertaken by the Performance and Innovation Unit. [23187]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* This should not be necessary since such contracts should be designed so as to provide sufficient flexibility to be able to take account of and respond to changed circumstances during the lifetime of the contracts, including any future statutory performance standards or new opportunities for increasing recycling and composting.

Illegal Meat Imports

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the average fine imposed on people who imported illegal meats into the country has been in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement; [51771]

(2) how many people have *(a)* been arrested and *(b)* received a fine for importing illegal meats into the country in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [51775]

Mr. Morley: Central records are not available for a 10-year period.

Last year, HM Customs and Excise arrested three people for offences under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) involving illegal meat imports. Of these, two were convicted as a CITES offence, both received prison sentence of four months. The third person was acquitted but convicted under a separate Animal Health charge resulting in a penalty of a conditional discharge for one year and costs of £100.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if radioactive waste material is used to produce *(a)* consumer goods and *(b)* other products within the UK; and which manufacturing sectors use radioactive waste in the production of their products. [51979]

Mr. Meacher: Radioactively contaminated metal, such as that recovered from decommissioned nuclear plant, is sometimes sold on to the scrap metal market after it has been treated to reduce its radioactivity content. In order to allow the metal to be sold, its radioactivity level must be below the 0.4 Becquerel/gram regulatory exemption level set out in Schedule 1 of the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 and the Substances of Low Activity (SOLA) Exemption Order. The material is then no longer considered to be radioactive. Once it has been sold on to the scrap metal market, it is not possible to identify the products or manufacturing sectors in which it is used.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many net additional staff her Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52424]

Mr. Morley: The number of net additional staff recruited in DEFRA between June 2001 and March 2002 is shown in the table.

June to December 2001

	Executive officer level		*Administrative level*	
Type of staff	*Headcount*	*FTE*	*Headcount*	*FTE*
June 2001				
Permanent	0	0.07	–9	–7.29
Casual	111	108.95	131	129.57
Total	111	109.02	122	122.28
July 2001				
Permanent	2	2.39	3	5.59
Casual	83	82.46	227	223.82
Total	85	84.85	230	229.41
August 2001				
Permanent	–7	–7.00	–8	–5.61
Casual	27	26.92	22	23.03
Total	20	19.92	14	17.42
September 2001				
Permanent	3	3.00	19	19.60
Casual	5	4.46	–24	–26.65
Total	8	7.46	–5	–7.05
October 2001				
Permanent	5	4.95	1	0.97
Casual	99	99.00	66	65.25
Total	104	103.95	67	66.22
November 2001				
Permanent	14	14.00	10	10.43
Casual	–99	–98.41	10	11.47
Total	–85	–84.41	20	21.90
December 2001				
Permanent	13	13.00	–7	–5.94
Casual	–76	–75.46	–5	–4.22
Total	–63	–62.46	–12	–10.16

January to March 2002

	Executive officer level		*Administrative level*	
Type of staff	*Headcount*	*FTE*	*Headcount*	*FTE*
January 2002				
Permanent	8	8.59	–27	–26.97
Casual	–21	–21.00	–39	–39.24
Total	–13	–12.41	–66	–66.21

January to March 2002

Type of staff	*Executive officer level* *Headcount*	*FTE*	*Administrative level* *Headcount*	*FTE*
February 2002				
Permanent	12	12.05	23	23.46
Casual	–25	–24.20	6	6.20
Total	–13	–12.15	29	29.66
March 2002				
Permanent	19	19.19	35	34.39
Casual	–43	–42.02	–10	–10.00
Total	–24	–22.83	25	24.39
Totals				
Permanent	69	70.24	40	48.63
Casual	61	60.70	384	379.23
Total	130	130.94	424	427.86

The high increase in the number of casual appointments between June and October 2001 is due to the additional staff required to deal with the foot and mouth disease outbreak.

The figures for June to December 2001 relate to the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food only. Information relating to the divisions of the former Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions that transferred to DEFRA could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Veterinary Laboratory (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will establish a dedicated veterinary laboratory for Scotland. [52953]

Mr. Morley: The State Veterinary Service in Scotland have access to a range of existing laboratory facilities throughout Great Britain in addition to those in Scotland and have no plans to establish a dedicated facility of their own.

Horticultural Research

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the breakdown is of Government-financed horticultural research, by crop. [52914]

Mr. Morley: Total Government spend on horticultural R and D by commodity is as follows:

£ million

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Bulbs	0.3	0.3	0.4
Cross commodity	0.4	0.4	0.9
Field vegetables	3.3	4.0	4.2
Hardy nursery stock	1.2	1.2	1.3
Herbs	0.08	0.08	0.05
Hops	0.4	0.3	0.3
Mushrooms	1.0	1.0	[1]0.7
Outdoor flowers	0.2	0.2	0.2
Potatoes	4.7	5.4	5.7
Protected crops	2.0	1.8	1.5
Soft fruit	2.7	2.3	2.2
Top fruit	1.9	1.7	[1]1.6

[1] Information from Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland not available.

DEFRA's records are kept by commodity and not by crop. To provide a breakdown by crop could not be done without incurring disproportionate cost.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial support for horticultural research the Government have provided in each year since 1990. [52912]

Mr. Morley: Government funding for horticulture R and D, including potatoes, for the last 10 years is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1992–93	7.0
1993–94	8.0
1994–95	[1]18.1
1995–96	[1]18.9
1996–97	[1]19.3
1997–98	18.4
1998–99	17.4
1999–2000	17.1
2000–01	17.8
2001–02	[1]18.1

[1] Does not include funding from Department of Agricultural and Rural Development for Northern Ireland, for which information is unavailable.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs through which organisations Government support for horticultural research is provided. [52913]

Mr. Morley: Government support for Horticulture R and D is provided by DEFRA, SEERAD and DARDNI. Government-funded horticultural research is currently provided through a range of research institutes, universities and other research providers, as listed.

ADAS Consulting Ltd.
British Potato Council
Canterbury Christchurch College
Central Science Laboratory
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, NI
Dove Associates Ltd.
Harper Adams Agricultural College
Higgins (formerly Gordon and Innes)
Horticulture Research International
Institute of Arable Crops Research
Institute of Food Research
John Innes Centre
Macauley Land Use Research Institute
Moredun Research Institute
Rowett Research Institute
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
Scottish Agricultural College
Scottish Crops Research Institute
Silsoe Research Institute
Mylnefield Research Services Ltd.
Nottingham Trent University
University College of North Wales
University of Aberdeen
University of Brighton
University of Bristol
University of Durham
University of Glasgow
University of Hertfordshire

University of Lancaster
University of Leeds
University of London (Wye College)
University of Newcastle
University of Nottingham
University of Reading
University of Wales
University of West of England
Writtle College.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the research and development budget is for horticulture in the next three years; and if she will make a statement. [53085]

Mr. Morley: The DEFRA budget for horticulture R and D for 2002–03 is £9.854 million. The horticulture R and D budget for future years will be set in the light of inter alia the outcome of spending review 2002, the recent review of horticultural R and D and the forthcoming review of DEFRA's science strategy.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of Government financed horticultural research is initiated by her Department. [52915]

Mr. Morley: In 2000–01 (the most recent year for which details are available), DEFRA funding amounted to approximately 65 per cent. of the total Government funding for horticulture R and D.

Agro-chemical Businesses

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she is making in respect of EU plans to review active ingredients in agro-chemical products; and if she will make a statement on the impact that rapid phasing out active ingredients will have on small UK agro-chemical businesses. [52615]

Mr. Morley: The Department has played an active role in supporting the EU review programme for older pesticides. We believe that it is vital to ensure that all active ingredients used in pesticides meet modern standards of human and environmental safety.

I recognise that a significant number of pesticide products will be withdrawn as a result of the review process and this will have an impact on some small agro-chemical companies. I believe that there will also be new opportunities particularly for companies developing environmentally friendly alternative methods of plant protection including certain microbial products. In developing the EU pesticides regime we will endeavour to ensure that the regulatory requirements for such products are proportionate to the risks they pose.

Common Land

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the consultation on greater protection and better management of common land in England and Wales. [53022]

Alun Michael: Due to the number and complexity of the issues raised, progress has been slower than hoped. We expect to announce our proposals for future action and to publish a detailed report on the responses to the consultation paper soon.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in how many cases in England and Wales common land grazing rights have been sold separately from the land they were previously associated with since 1972. [53021]

Alun Michael: There is no requirement in the Commons Registration Act 1965, or other legislation, for the Commons Registration Authorities to be notified when grazing rights are separated from the land with which they were previously associated. Consequently no figures on the number of cases are available.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the implications of the House of Lords ruling in the case Bettison v Langton and others for the future management and protection of common land. [53020]

Alun Michael: The Bettison v Langton judgment made it conclusive in law that rights of common of grazing, registered for a fixed number of animals as required by the Commons Registration Act 1965, could be severed from the common land to which they were originally attached. This judgment could have significant implications for the management of common land.

We have already issued guidance to the Commons Registration Authorities on how to record severance on the register of common land if they are notified it has taken place. In the consultation document "Greater Protection and Better Management of Common Land in England and Wales" we invited views on the idea of preventing severance. We expect to announce our conclusions soon.

Fruit

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ban imports of fruit treated with Carbaryl (Thinsec); and if she will make a statement. [52601]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Department has no plans to ban imports of fruit treated with carbaryl. Carbaryl has been withdrawn from use in the UK because it was not supported by any agrochemical companies, when the relevant approvals were reviewed. However, it remains approved in other countries including some in the EC.

Residues of carbaryl in imported fruit are controlled through the Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Crops, Food and Feeding Stuffs) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 (as amended).

Fruit which complies with the Maximum Residue Levels set in these Regulations may be imported into the UK.

New Forest

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (1) pursuant to her answer of 10 April, *Official Report*, column 281W, on the

New Forest, what criteria will inform her decision on whether to call a public inquiry regarding the establishment of a national park in the New Forest; [53253]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 10 April, *Official Report*, column 281W, on the New Forest, what discretion she has in calling a public inquiry into the establishment of a New Forest National Park if statutory bodies and local authorities have objected; and if she will make a statement. [53252]

Alun Michael: As set out in paragraph 2(2) of Schedule 1 to the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, it is a statutory requirement to hold a local inquiry if an objection is duly made by a local authority and not withdrawn, Otherwise, if any representation or objection duly made, for example by a statutory body or a member of the public, is not withdrawn, the Secretary of State has the discretion either to cause a local inquiry to be held or to afford any person who has made a representation or objection the opportunity of being heard by a person appointed for the purpose. As well as whether or not to hold an inquiry, the Secretary of State has some discretion to determine its scope. An announcement will be made soon.

Fishing Industry

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many meetings officials from her Department had with representatives of the Cornish fishing industry in *(a)* March and *(b)* April. [53206]

Mr. Morley: The Department provides the Secretariat to the Objective 1 Fisheries Priorities Management Group in Cornwall which includes a wide representation of the Cornish fishing industry. It met on 18 March and on 22 April. Apart from that representatives of their industry, among others, participate from time to time in meetings with officials on various subjects.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the effects multilateral consultation will have on the legislative power of sea fisheries committees; and if she will make a statement; [53208]

(2) what assessment she has made of the financial implications for local government of future additional control responsibilities for sea fisheries committee resulting from the 2002 Common Fisheries Policy review; and if she will make a statement. [53207]

Mr. Morley: As I have previously said, the time to take stock of all the aspects of the role and activities of Sea Fisheries Committees will be once we know the outcome of the review of the Common Fisheries Policy. That means when we have not only the overdue proposals on the CFP from the Commission but also a conclusion in the negotiations that will follow in the Council of Ministers. It would be premature to draw any conclusions in relation to Sea Fisheries Committees in advance of that.

Farming Industry

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* bankruptcies and *(b)* people employed there were in the farming industry in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–2002; and what was the average income in the industry in each of these years. [51293]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 April 2002]: (a)* Data on bankruptcies are available for England and Wales combined, and are given in the table.

Number of bankruptcies[1] in the agricultural and horticultural sector: England and Wales 1999–2001

	1999	*2000*	*[1]2001*
Bankruptcies of self-employed individuals	183	173	136
Company[2] insolvencies	75	67	67
Total	258	240	203

[1] First three quarters only
[2] Including partnerships
Source:
Department of Trade and Industry

(b) Data on the labour force in agriculture and average income for England are given in the table.

Total labour force in agriculture and total income from farming per whole-time person equivalent.

	1999	*2000*	*2001*	*2001*
Total labour force	397,700	373,900	[1]368,300	[2]387,800
Total income from farming per annual work unit of farmers, partners and those with an entrepreneurial interest[3] (£)	13,203	8,159	9,059	—

[1] These results exclude the effect of the register improvement in England and are directly comparable with June 2000.
[2] These results include the effect of the register improvement in England and are not directly comparable with June 2000.
[3] An annual work unit (AWU) represents the equivalent of an average full-time person engaged in agriculture.
Sources:
June Agricultural and Horticultural Census
Agriculture in the United Kingdom

British Beef

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the French ban on British beef. [53033]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that we expect France to lift its ban as soon as possible. It is for the Commission to take action to enforce EU law and it has asked France for an explanation of its failure to comply with the ruling of the European Court of Justice

(ECJ). This is the first stage in a process which may lead to a further ECJ case against France and the imposition of penalties for failure to comply with the Court's Judgment in December 2001 that the French ban on imports of UK beef exported under the Date-based Export Scheme is illegal.

Bristol Channel

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government are taking to monitor the illegal dumping of waste by shipping in the Bristol channel. [53421]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Waters around the UK are regularly patrolled by surveillance aircraft equipped to detect pollution. The data held for 2001–02 by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) indicate that more than 150 such flights were made under arrangements put in place by the MCA and that more than 20 per cent. of these flights covered the west or south-west of the UK and would therefore have covered part of the Bristol channel. In addition, civil and military pilots are encouraged to report sightings of pollution. Every incident spotted, or reported, is investigated and, whenever possible, those parties responsible for committing pollution offences are prosecuted.

The UK also has legislation in place to ensure a properly planned system of waste reception facilities in ports, in order to leave no excuse for ships to resort to the unacceptable practice of discharging their waste at sea. The MCA has approved 36 waste management plans for ports or parts of ports around the Bristol channel, an area of coastline stretching from Milford Haven to Newquay. In 2000, the European Community adopted a directive to establish a port waste reception facilities system across the Community; like other member states, the UK is working on the implementation of this directive, which will come into force in December of this year.

Rural Proofing

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the timetable is for implementing the range of rural proofing measures set out in the Rural White Paper and referred to on page 26 of the Countryside Agency's report, "Rural Proofing in 2001–02". [53312]

Alun Michael: Implementing rural proofing is an on-going process across Government. Individual Departments and the Countryside Agency are working together to develop rural proofing strategies and to rural proof individual policies. DEFRA officials are also involved. As the agency's first annual report recommends, the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Rural Renewal will review progress in the autumn, and take a close and continuing interest in the subject generally. The Countryside Agency will report again next year on progress with rural-proofing, so there is a regular external monitoring and evaluation process.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible in each of the last five years. [50295]

Mr. Bradshaw: The salary costs for each of the FCO's NDPBs have been as follows:

British Council (UK appointed staff only, excluding national insurance contributions. Salary costs for locally appointed staff cannot be collated in the time available)

1999–2000—£27,890,986

2000–01—£28,753,593

2001–02—£29,400,401

Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission

No salary costs (the salaries of the Secretariat are paid by the Association of Commonwealth Universities)

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

1997–98—£214,398

1998–99—£260,607

1999–2000—£315,192

2000–01—£331,179

Great Britain China Centre

1997–98—£119,555

1998–99—£133,713

1999–2000—£137,719

2000–01—£144,545

British-Russia Centre

1999–2000—£127,591

2000–01—£115,639

2001–02—£106,616

British Association for Central and Eastern Europe

1999–2000—£124,238

2000–01—£137,533

2001–02—£138,788

Diplomatic Service Appeals Board

No salary costs (chairman and members are paid per diem and travel allowances)

Government Hospitality Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine

No salary costs

Wilton Park Academic Council

No salary costs (travel expenses only are paid)

Foreign Compensation Commission

Employs one person, salary band: 2001–02—£20,240-£29,732.

The above are the figures presently available. In some cases the 2001–02 figures are not yet available, and in some, earlier figures could not be located in the time available.

Private Simon Jeans

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in the last three years consular staff in *(a)* London and *(b)* Zagreb have offered help to the family of Private Simon Jeans. [51739]

Mr. Bradshaw: Since the tragic death of Private Simon Jeans, our consular staff in London and Zagreb have offered full consular assistance to his family. It is difficult to be precise on the exact numbers of contacts and representations made with them, but there have been many. We approached the Croatian courts on numerous occasions for information about the case, and attended all court hearings with Private Jeans' family. Our consular division in London last spoke with Simon Jeans' father, Terry, in May 2001, and our pro-consul in Split last met with Mr. Jeans in August 2001, when he visited Croatia.

The hon. Member will be aware that Private Jeans was a serving member of the British Army at the time of his death. As such, the Ministry of Defence was and continue to be the lead Department in this case. Private Jeans' family are aware there is very little our consular staff can do with regards to the case in Croatia, as it is now a legal matter. Under international law we are unable to get involved in the judicial process of other countries. Nevertheless, Mr. Jeans and the MOD have been in regular touch.

Germany

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken since 1 January to assist Catherine Meyer regain custody of her sons through the German courts. [51503]

Mr. Bradshaw: Catherine Meyer is currently pursuing legal proceedings before the German constitutional court to be reunited with her sons. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has provided consular support and assistance to Catherine Meyer with her case in the past. As with any child abduction case, we continue to provide consular assistance whenever we can.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many net additional staff his Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52435]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has recruited the following net additional permanent staff since June 2001.

Month	*Executive officer level*	*Administrative level*
June 2001	−2	19
July 2001	−3	20
August 2001	0	15
September 2001	0	25
October 2001	11	28
November 2001	6	17
December 2001	−4	−1
January 2002	6	22
February 2002	−1	21
March 2002	5	22
April 2002	1	23
Total	19	211

Diplomatic Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of *(a)* the Diplomatic Service and *(b)* British ambassadors and high commissioners attended (i) Oxford or Cambridge universities and (ii) independent schools. [53234]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answers given to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollock (Mr. Davidson) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 611W and 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 725–26W.

European Commission (Phase-in Proposals)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's position is on the European Commission's phase-in proposals for the receipt by newly admitted member states of the European Union of *(a)* funds due under the Common Agricultural Policy and *(b)* structural funds. [51623]

Peter Hain: *(a)* The Government consider that agricultural spending should support restructuring in the candidate countries to modernise their agricultural economies. The Government therefore welcome the emphasis on rural development in the Commission's proposals as this is the most effective way to help new member states restructure agriculture sectors. As regards the proposal to phase in direct payments, the Government note the arguments provided in the Commission's issues paper about the damaging effects of high direct payments in the new member states. The Government consider it important to evaluate fully all relevant aspects, including whether other options may better help restructuring.

(b) The Government welcome the emphasis within the overall financing proposals on Structural and Cohesion Funds, to tackle the new member states' restructuring and developmental needs. The sums provided will need to respect the budget ceilings agreed at Berlin in 1999, as well as the needs and the absorption capacity of the new member states.

Czech Republic

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether the Benes decrees in the Czech Republic are compatible with the acquis communautaire. [51625]

Peter Hain: The European Commission has made it clear that the Benes decrees are part of history and that those decrees relating to citizenship and property are no longer of legal consequence, and are therefore not an issue for EU accession negotiations. The Commission and Czech Republic are reviewing the other decrees to clarify their legal status.

Slovakia

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will remove the visa requirements imposed on Slovak nationals for travel to the UK; and if he will make a statement. [51932]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on 3 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1063W.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Chartered Engineers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many chartered engineers there are in her Department; and what grades they are. [52471]

Dr. Howells: There are no chartered engineers currently employed within my Department.

ITV Digital

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the future of ITV Digital. [53218]

Tessa Jowell: In my statement on ITV Digital on 26 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 594, I promised that I would continue to keep the House updated in coming weeks. Since then, the administrator has surrendered the three multiplex service licences held by ITV Digital, and the pay services are no longer available.

As I suggested would happen in my statement last week, the Independent Television Commission is now beginning a re-tendering process, on an accelerated time scale with a view to awarding licences at the end of a six-week period. I understand that, during this period, the ITC will liaise with the administrator and broadcasters providing the digital terrestrial free-to-air services with a view to ensuring that ITV Digital subscribers will continue to be able to receive these channels, including the five main terrestrial channels, through their set top box. We expect that companies interested may wish to use the ITV Digital assets, and that they will liaise with the administrator to do so. There is a real opportunity to benefit from the expertise and technical experience now existing, enabling a successful business to emerge, and ensuring we maintain our world leadership in digital television.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what level of financial support Granada and Carlton have received from her Department for introducing digital services. [53603]

Dr. Howells: My Department gives no financial support to Granada and Carlton. To promote the availability of digital free-to-air television services, the Government have set the percentage of qualifying multiplex revenue payable by digital terrestrial licensees at nil for the duration of their licences. This means that the ITV companies do not make payments to the Treasury on the proportion of their advertising revenue attributed to viewing in homes that have digital television.

Pride of Place

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many copies of "Pride of Place" have been *(a)* sent to end recipients and *(b)* sold. [52987]

Dr. Howells: "Pride of Place" was released towards the end of March and the Arts Council is still sending out the 3,500 complimentary copies to projects who received awards over the past six years. No copies have as yet been sold.

West Coast Main Line

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the effect on tourism in the north-west of proposed closures of the west coast main line; and if she will make a statement. [53120]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Any disruption of tourism will be unwelcome, but weekend closures, while disruptive to tourism, are unavoidable if essential work is to take place. Any closures are considered by Railtrack, train operating companies, the relevant rail passenger committees and the Strategic Rail Authority. I am advised the weekend closures are preferable to closures during the week which would cause wider disruption for business as well as leisure travellers. The closures have been planned to avoid the Commonwealth games. The tourism industry, like other business sectors, will be looking forward to benefiting from the main line upgrade. Improved rail services are essential to ensure the long-term health of the tourism industry in the north-west.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what buildings owned by her Department have solar panels installed. [53498]

Dr. Howells: All DCMS buildings are leased rather than owned freehold and none presently has solar panels.

Sport (Female Participation)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action the Government are taking to increase female participation in sport. [53422]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are determined to ensure that there is equal opportunity for all. Our policy is aimed at encouraging everyone, including women and girls, into sport. Sport England provides over £6 million of exchequer funding to sports governing bodies and all are required to ensure that they have proposals for the development of women as a condition of funding. Sport England also fund the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) which is the only organisation in the UK that is solely committed to improving and promoting opportunities for women and girls in sport at every level. More women than ever are finding that regular physical exercise can lead to improvements in health, self-confidence and well-being. Women's team sports such as football and rugby are among the fastest-growing sports in the country.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will place in the Library copies of each version of the internal guidance which have been drawn up by his Department since 1 January 1999 to assist staff in his Department to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. [53387]

Dr. Howells: A copy of the following documents will be placed in the Library:

Acceptable Use of E-mail and Internet Policy

Data Protection Guidance for Personnel

Guidance Note on Public Appointments and Subject Access

Principles of Data Protection.

DEFENCE

RAF Benson

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many married quarters there are at RAF Benson; and how many of them are *(a)* under repair and *(b)* waiting repair; [50818]

(2) if he will make a statement on married quarters at RAF Benson; [50820]

(3) what representations he has received about relations between the Defence Housing Executive and RAF Benson. [50819]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* There are 599 family quarters at RAF Benson. Of the few that are vacant, two cannot be occupied until repairs are completed. One of the two will be converted for a special needs family.

Approximately 42 per cent. of the properties managed by the Defence Housing Executive (DHE) have repairs raised against them at any one time. These can embrace a wide range of jobs, from major refurbishment such as re-roofing, down to the replacement of a tap washer.

I have received no specific representations about the DHE from RAF Benson, but the DHE is aware of the need continuously to improve the service it provides to all service families. In the area in question, the DHE has changed the firm contracted to provide works service management.

Arms Sales (Africa)

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the value of arms sales to individual countries in Africa in each year since 1997. [51578]

Dr. Moonie: The data requested are set out in the table.

	£ million				Total
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*country*
Egypt	0.94	0.49	2.21	7.48	11.12
Morocco	0.31	0.05	0.30	0.94	1.60
Tunisia	0.01	0.03	0.03	—	0.07
Libya	—	—	0.01	—	0.01
Botswana	2.96	1.65	1.71	0.74	7.06
Ghana	0.14	3.39	0.01	0.19	3.73
Kenya	0.02	2.15	0.48	0.54	3.19
Malawi	0.02	—	—	—	0.02
Mauritius	0.01	0.01	0.04	—	0.06
South Africa	0.11	1.27	1.89	1.40	4.67
Zambia	0.02	0.13	0.02	—	0.17
Zimbabwe	0.22	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.37
Cameroon	—	0.02	—	—	0.02
Central African Republic	—	0.01	—	—	0.01
Gambia	—	—	0.27	—	0.27
Nigeria	—	0.17	0.26	1.55	1.98
Swaziland	—	0.01	—	—	0.01
Tanzania	—	1.51	—	—	1.51
Sierra Leone	—	—	0.37	1.06	1.43
Total	4.76	10.94	7.66	13.94	37.30

These figures are derived from table 1.13 of the Ministry of Defence publication "UK Defence Statistics 2001". The information is also published in Part III of the Government's annual report on "Strategic Export Controls". Copies of both documents are available from the Library of the House.

Figures for 2001 are not yet available.

Parachute Training

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many training jumps from *(a)* balloons and *(b)* aircraft recruits to the Parachute Regiment are required to make as part of their training; [52592]

(2) what aircraft are used by the Royal Air Force to provide parachute training for recruits to the parachute regiment; and if he will make a statement on the adequacy of capacity to provide this basic training. [52593]

Mr. Ingram: Recruits to the parachute regiment are required to complete a minimum of eight jumps from aircraft in order to qualify as a military parachutist. The use of balloons ceased in 1995. Basic parachute training is carried out from RAF Brize Norton and the aircraft used are a Skyvan, for an initial familiarisation jump, and a C130 Hercules, for the remaining qualifying jumps. During the last financial year, four basic parachute courses were cancelled due to Hercules aircraft unavailability, caused by operational commitments. Although this has had no effect on the ability of the regiment to carry out its assigned duties we are currently looking at how greater use of the Skyvan could reduce the Hercules requirement to support the basic parachute course to the essential minimum number of jumps that must be done from the operational platform.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* titles and *(b)* classmarks are of documents placed in the Public Record Office by his Department since 1972 regarding an official inquiry in 1970 into allegations that the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment Porton Down had experimented on old people for germ warfare purposes; and if he will make a statement. [53349]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 23 April 2001 *Official Report*, column 96W. These documents are still in the process of being transferred to the Public Record Office.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates between 1 January 1997 and 1 January 1999 the Independent Ethics Committee overseeing human experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down discussed the question of the possible long-term effects of nerve gas on humans during its meetings. [53385]

Dr. Moonie: The Independent Ethics Committee overseeing the conduct of the Service Volunteer Programme at Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Porton Down has not discussed the possible long-term effects of exposure to nerve agents during any of its meetings between 1 January 1997 and 1 January 1999.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report produced by the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down in 1987 entitled 'A Quantitative Investigation into the Effects of Pupil Diameter and Defocus on Contrast Sensitivity for an Extended Range of Spatial Frequencies in Natural and Homatropinized Eyes'. [53364]

Dr. Moonie: No report with that title has been produced by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Porton Down or its predecessors. I believe the hon. Member is referring to a report published in the journal *Ophthalmic Physiology Optics* by a research group from the university of Glasgow (Ophthal. Physiol. Opt. Volume 7, numbers 1, 21–30, 1987).

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report produced by the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down in 1985 entitled 'Evaluation of Pyrodostigmine Bromide as a Pretreatment for Nerve Agent Poisoning in Man'. [53363]

Dr. Moonie: Yes.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the protocol drawn up by the Chemical Defence Establishment for the experiment which was recorded in 1973 in the report entitled "A Comparative Study of Central Visual Field Changes Induced by GB Vapour and Physostigmine Salicylate Eyedrops". [53345]

Dr. Moonie: In the early 1970s formal protocols did not exist in the form which is recognised today. The details of the proposals would be recorded within the minutes of the committees overseeing the research undertaken within the Service Volunteer programme.

I am withholding these minutes in accordance with Exemption 2b of the Code of Practice to Access to Government Information, relating to internal advice and discussion.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 316W, regarding Porton Down, if he will place in the Library a copy of the protocol drawn up by the Chemical Defence Establishment for the experiment which was recorded in 1973 in the report entitled "The Effects of a Chemical Agent on the Eyes of Aircrew"; on what dates the Ethics Committee overseeing the human experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down scrutinised this experiment; and if he will place in the Library copies of the papers of the Committee which relate to the discussion of this experiment. [53412]

Dr. Moonie: In the early 1970s formal protocols did not exist in the form which is recognised today. The details of the proposals would be recorded within the minutes of the committees overseeing the research undertaken within the Service Volunteer programme.

The research study referred to is detailed in the minutes of the 78th meeting on 31 January 1972 of the Committee on Safety of Human Experiments. I am withholding these minutes in accordance with Exemption 2b of the Code of Practice to Access to Government Information, relating to internal advice and discussion.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates since 1 January 1999 the Independent Ethics Committee overseeing human experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down has discussed the question of the possible long-term effects of *(a)* mustard gas and *(b)* pepper gas on humans during its meetings. [53384]

Dr. Moonie: The Independent Ethics Committee overseeing the conduct of the Service Volunteer Programme at Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Porton Down has not discussed the possible long-term effects of exposure to either mustard gas or pepper gas during any of its meetings between 1 January 1997 and 1 January 1999.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of the documents held by his Department relating to a meeting on 5 February of representatives from his Department and the Medical Research Council Liaison Group regarding the epidemiological study into the health of service personnel who took part in experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down. [53348]

Dr. Moonie: Requests for the release of papers relating to the meetings of the Medical Research Council (MRC) Liaison Group should be addressed to the MRC. The Ministry of Defence has not produced any documents relating to this meeting and holds no papers, except the invitation and meeting agenda.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 72W, regarding Porton Down, which agencies conducted the searches of his Department's archives; what the locations were of the archives which were searched; and if he will make a statement. [53414]

Dr. Moonie: Searches of the Department's archives at the Public Record Office, the Imperial War Museum, the Ministry of Defence main archive at Hayes, and documents held by MOD in London and at Porton Down, have been conducted by staff at MOD and Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Porton Down.

In addition, two signals have been sent requesting service units to search their own archives for relevant documents. The first, in February 2001, was sent to all service units world wide. The second, in April 2002, was sent to all RAF units in the United Kingdom. Both signals were sent in collaboration with the Wiltshire police as part of Operation Antler, their investigation of the Porton Down Service Volunteer programme.

The Wiltshire police have also conducted independent searches of the Department's archives.

Primary Casualty Receiving Ship

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress with the introduction of the primary casualty receiving ship. [53515]

Dr. Moonie: Work is progressing to plan. The Ministry of Defence is considering options for meeting the requirement as part of initial assessment work. The primary casualty receiving ship capability remains on target to enter service later this decade.

Nuclear Weapons

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 23 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 194W, on nuclear weapons, upon what evidence he relies for his statement on the wide agreement regarding the transparency of the UK with regard to its holdings of nuclear weapons. [53467]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* Moves in the Strategic Defence Review to increase transparency on nuclear weapons issues were widely welcomed. For an instance of support for the example set by the UK in this area, I refer the hon. Member to remarks quoted by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs in their Eighth Report of Session 1999–2000 (HC 407) at paragraph 122. Commendation of the UK's transparency was also offered by some of those giving written evidence to that inquiry.

Depleted Uranium

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in developing a test for depleted uranium for Gulf and Balkans veterans; and if he will make a statement. [54185]

Dr. Moonie: Contracts have been placed with five laboratories to carry out a pilot study to determine a test that will identify the presence of depleted uranium in urine. The pilot exercise will examine a number of different methods and establish whether a suitably accurate, precise and sensitive test is available. Following assessment of the results of the pilot exercise, arrangements for the main voluntary testing programme will be put in place. If a suitable test is identified, the voluntary test is likely to be available in October 2002.

It is extremely important that the method of testing be credible to all parties. This pilot exercise is a vital step in ensuring that the correct test is chosen so that both veterans and the Ministry of Defence can have confidence in the results of the voluntary testing programme.

Prisoners (Afghanistan)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance has been issued to United Kingdom armed forces undertaking *(a)* Operation Jacana and *(b)* Operation Fingal with regard to the status of prisoners taken as part of these operations; and if he will make a statement. [52111]

Mr. Hoon: Any prisoners taken by Operation Jacana forces during offensive operations will be treated as prisoners of war. Operational Fingal forces, who are part of the International Security Assistance Force providing security assistance to the Interim Administration in Kabul, are not expected to be involved in operations that may involve the taking of prisoners.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Offices

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the effect that Post Office redundancies will have on the communities in Lancashire; and what the Government will do to help those people who will lose their jobs. [48603]

Mr. Alexander: The Consignia board decided that the company's costs needed to be reduced to stem its losses and improve its performance. At the moment it is not immediately clear what the effect in Lancashire will be. It is understood that up to 140 jobs will eventually be affected, although it is not known at this stage how many of these will actually be job losses. The company will offer as many of those affected as possible the option of continued employment with a different part of the business or a voluntary redundancy package.

The Government will do everything we can through the Jobcentre Plus and other agencies to provide support, assistance and new opportunities to those people losing their jobs.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the effect that Post Office redundancies will have on the communities in Wales; and what the Government will do to help those people who will lose their jobs. [48604]

Mr. Alexander: The Consignia board decided that the company's costs needed to be reduced to stem its losses and improve its performance. At the moment it is not immediately clear what the effect in Wales will be. It is understood that up to 125 jobs will eventually be affected, although it is not known at this stage how many of these will actually be job losses. The company will offer as many of those affected as possible the option of continued employment with a different part of the business or a voluntary redundancy package.

The Government will do everything we can through the Jobcentre Plus and other agencies to provide support, assistance and new opportunities to those people losing their jobs.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* urban and *(b)* rural post offices are facing closure in Northern Ireland. [51947]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Post office closures are an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. The programme of urban restructuring has not yet begun.

The Government are committed to the maintenance of a nationwide network of post offices. We are also committed to providing transitional assistance to rural post offices and are developing proposals in the light of advice from Postcomm.

Consignia

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department has had talks with the Dutch postal company TPG in the past year. [49945]

Mr. Alexander: The Department has met representatives of the Dutch postal company, TPG, on a limited number of occasions to examine specific aspects of a possible merger of Consignia's postal activities with them. No satisfactory agreement was reached between the companies on a merger and Ministers therefore agreed with the company that discussions should cease.

Since the Government have given Consignia commercial freedom, within the public sector, it is entirely appropriate that Consignia has been considering its commercial strategy, including the possibility of relationships or joint ventures with other operators.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she was notified by the management of Consignia of negotiations which have taken place within the last 12 months regarding a potential sale of an equity share in the business. [51244]

Mr. Alexander: In the last 12 months, Consignia notified the Department about its intention to explore the possibility of a merger of its postal activities with the Dutch Post Office (TPG) in June last year. Talks commenced in July but have ceased as no satisfactory agreement was reached.

Postcomm

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what negotiations have taken place with Postcomm on the sale of postal services. [51380]

Mr. Alexander: Postcomm's document "Proposals for effective competition in UK postal services" issued on 31 January has been a public consultation and the Government have consistently encouraged stakeholders to make their views known to Postcomm.

We believe it is important now for stakeholders to engage in an effective dialogue and to reach a common understanding. This is the nature of a consultation process and we would expect Postcomm to take due account of all the views expressed and to consider their implications. We will obviously be following these discussions closely.

The Budget

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes the Budget of 17 April will make to business in Herefordshire. [51653]

Nigel Griffiths: I am pleased to support the Budget measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 17 April. I expect the Budget changes to help businesses in Herefordshire become more competitive and productive. Herefordshire has an above-average number of small businesses, which will benefit from a reduction in the starting rate of corporation tax from 10 per cent. to zero and a 10 per cent. cut in the small companies' rate; a reduction in the red tape and compliance costs imposed by the VAT and payroll administration systems; and a new £30 million training fund to bring small businesses up to the Investors in People industry standard. Further details of these measures, and of other measures to benefit businesses of all sizes, can be found on www.budget.treasury.gov.uk. The Hereford and Worcester Chamber of Commerce and Business Link (on 0800 104010) can also provide advice on the impact of the Budget on business activity.

Business Promotion (Schools)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been done since 1997 in the West Midlands to promote business in schools. [51482]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 24 April 2002]:* Key programmes in schools include: Enterprise Insight and the Enterprising Schools initiative.

Since 1997, activities have included getting children of primary school age to experience the world of work, and the funding of local Education Business Partnerships so that pupils could undertake work placements.

The Excellence in Cities initiative has provided learning mentors from the world of business who act as role models when they visit schools.

The DfES Teacher Placement Service helps teachers to spend time in industry.

I am encouraging local successful entrepreneurs to return to their school and talk about the exciting opportunities and challenges in business.

Newspaper Supply

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when the Office of Fair Trading will publish its response to the consultation on the review of the Newspaper Supply Code of Practice; [53007]

(2) how many responses the Office of Fair Trading received from *(a)* retailers, *(b)* wholesalers, *(c)* publishers and *(d)* other bodies, relating to the review on the Code of Practice for the Supply of Newspapers. [52999]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Director General of Fair Trading has not yet concluded his work on the review. The numbers of responses will be included when the review is published.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what training is available to new entrants to the sub-post office network *(a)* prior to them taking on a business, and *(b)* following the acquisition and start of that business with respect to funding by her Department. [52328]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Training sub-postmasters is a management matter for Post Office Ltd. The small business service and business links are open to the business community including sub-postmasters.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters. [52327]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* I met Colin Baker, the General Secretary of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters on 24 April.

Motor Accident Repairs

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints have been received by the Office of Fair Trading concerning the motor accident repair market since January 2001. [52243]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The OFT compiles figures on the number of consumer complaints received by trading standards departments in the UK.

19,588 complaints were received between 1 January and 30 September 2001. Later figures are not yet available.

Supermarkets

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on how each of the points in the OFT's letter of remedy on supermarket/supplier relations is met in the code of practice issued in October 2001; [52931]

(2) when the code of practice on supermarket relations with suppliers was issued; and on what dates between the publication of the Competition Commission's report on

the subject and the issuing of codes her Ministers and officials met *(a)* representatives of supermarkets and *(b)* representatives of agricultural and horticultural producers; [52930]

(3) what consultation took place with *(a)* consumers' representatives and *(b)* members of the public on the code of practice on supermarket/supplier relations; whether a draft code was issued; and how many representations she received on the code (i) before and (ii) after its publication. [52932]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 18 December 2001 that, following an adverse report by the Competition Commission under the Fair Trading Act 1973, she had accepted undertakings from the four main supermarket chains that they would abide by a Code of Practice concerning their relations with their suppliers.

Normally undertakings are negotiated by the Director General of Fair Trading with the parties who will be asked to sign them; there is no third party involvement. Exceptionally, at the recommendation of the Competition Commission, supplier organisations were in this case given the opportunity to comment on a draft.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry received around 35 representations on the Code before it was issued on 18 December, and around five afterwards.

The Code came into force on 17 March 2002. The Director General of Fair Trading will monitor the operation of the Code.

Motor Body Repairers

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many insurance company-owned motor body shop repairers there are in England and Wales. [53065]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This information is not collected by the Department. However, according to data collected by the Retail Motor Industry Federation (RMIF), there are 21 insurance company owned motor body shop repairers in England and Wales.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many independent motor body repairers there were in England and Wales in each year since 1997. [53064]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information required is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1997	12,700
1998	11,300
1999	10,000
2000	8,000
2001	6,500
2002	5,800

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of employees who will not receive payment for the forthcoming Queen's Golden Jubilee bank holiday. [53339]

Alan Johnson: The autumn 2001 Labour Force Survey indicates that 17 per cent. of workers are not paid for bank holidays generally. There are no specific estimates covering the Queen's Golden Jubilee bank holiday.

TRIPs Agreement

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans there are to revise the WTO TRIPs agreement to allow staple food crops to be patented; [53354]

(2) if she will make a statement on the patenting of staple food crops. [53353]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The TRIPs agreement allows the Governments of WTO member states to decide for themselves whether to allow the patenting of plants in their own countries. However, the agreement does require WTO member states to protect plant varieties by other legal means if patents are not available. The UK supports this flexibility in the agreement and there are no plans to remove it.

The TRIPs agreement also confirms the internationally established principle that it is not possible to be granted a valid patent for something which is already known. According to this principle, neither traditional varieties of staple food crops nor related traditional knowledge can be patentable in themselves, even in countries where the patenting of plants is allowed.

EU Trade

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the United Kingdom's *(a)* visible and *(b)* invisible imports come from the European Union; and what their value was in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [51621]

Ms Hewitt: According to information published by the Office for National Statistics on 27 March 2002, in 2001 the EU accounted for 52 per cent. of UK imports of goods and 53 per cent. of UK imports of services. UK imports of goods from the EU were worth £115.5 billion while UK imports of services from the EU were worth £34.5 billion.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportions of the United Kingdom's *(a)* visible and *(b)* invisible exports go to the European Union; and what their value was in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [51620]

Ms Hewitt: According to information published by the Office for National Statistics on 27 March 2002, in 2001 the EU accounted for 58 per cent. of UK exports of goods and 40 per cent. of UK exports of services. UK exports of goods to the EU were worth £110.8 billion while UK exports of services to the EU were worth £31.0 billion.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals the Government are putting

to the European Commission on structural funds in the European Union for its third report on structural funds. [51624]

Alan Johnson: The Government have not yet put any formal proposals to the European Commission for its Third Report on Economic and Social Cohesion, which is not due to be published until late 2003 or early 2004. However, from my statement at the Namur Informal Council on Regional Policy in July 2001, the Commission will be aware of the Government's view that the next reform of the Structural Funds must ensure that they contribute better to the Lisbon agenda of improving Europe's competitiveness and modernising its economies. Improvements are needed in both the effectiveness of the funds and the means to evaluate their impact and added value. Also, greater efforts must be made to simplify the funds and remove unnecessary bureaucracy, while maintaining proper financial control.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to inform *(a)* business and *(b)* the public about the implications of EU enlargement for the United Kingdom. [51622]

Ms Hewitt: EU enlargement is vital to the future peace, prosperity and strength of Europe and will directly benefit the British public and business. My Department has published papers on EU enlargement for British business, such as "EU Enlargement and the Single Market: Opportunities for Business" published in September 2000, which focused both on the enlargement process and the commercial opportunities. I have placed a copy in the Libraries of the House. As well as regular contacts between my officials and business players, we are planning, in conjunction with the FCO, an expanded programme of activities for 2002, including speaking events, newsletters and a new enlargement section on DTI's website.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office lead on the wider public diplomacy strategy, aimed at informing the British public about EU enlargement. They provide general information on enlargement through publications like "Britain: A Champion of EU Enlargement", their website and by providing speakers for and organising events.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Sixth Forms and Colleges

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many A-level pass certificates were awarded to students in *(a)* sixth forms in mainstream schools and *(b)* colleges of further education in England in each year from 1995 to 2001; [52585]

(2) how many students completed A-level courses at *(a)* sixth forms in mainstream schools and *(b)* colleges of further education in England and Wales in each year from 1995 to 2001. [52589]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested for England is shown in the table.

	(a) Mainstream schools	*(b) FE sector colleges*
Number of 17-year-olds entered for GCE A-levels		
1994–95	89,868	54,284
1995–96	91,796	57,636
1996–97	100,281	62,308
1997–98	105,855	62,582
1998–99	106,857	60,328
1999–2000	108,134	59,168
2000–01	111,141	59,133
Number of GCE A-levels resulting in a pass[1]		
1994–95	231,709	122,603
1995–96	247,198	133,503
1996–97	274,574	149,929
1997–98	293,596	153,805
1998–99	298,692	151,447
1999–2000	303,762	150,627
2000–01	314,274	157,179

[1] Grades A-E

The information for schools and colleges in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Education Statistics

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what corrections have been made to the Statistics of Education in England *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001 editions; if she will list the tables that needed correcting with amendments after each of the volumes were published; and what steps were taken to notify those who received the volumes of such corrections. [44400]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* No errata were issued in 1999, 2000 or 2001 for the following volumes:

Local Labour Force Survey

Public Examinations GCSE/GNVQ and GCE/AGNVQ in England

Student Support England and Wales

Higher Education Statistics in the UK

National Curriculum Assessments of 7, 11 and 14-year-olds by local education authority.

Education Statistics for the United Kingdom

In 1999 and 2001 there were typographical errors in the volume titled, "Education Statistics for the United Kingdom" and in 2000 there were errors with three single figures. These referred to time series data. The first was in table 2.1 (1990–91 figures), the second in table 3.1 (1998–99 figures) and the third in table 3.24 (1995 figures).

No erratum notes were issued for these errors. They were, however, noted and corrected in the volume the following year.

Schools in England

In 1999 there was an error in the Schools in England volume on table 12. The column listing the pupils' ages was incorrectly labelled for the three and four-year-olds. No erratum was issued.

There were no amendments to the volume for 2000.

In the 2001 volume, tables 13, 36, 47a, 47b and 48 contain incorrect data. This was due to a programming error which was not identified until after the volume was published. A note has been placed on the DfES Statistical website informing customers of the errors.

Teachers in England

There were several errors detected in the "Teachers in England 2001" volume as follows:

General:

There are no footnotes stating that totals may vary due to rounding.

Tables 7(i), (ii) and (iii):

The total rows for men and for women (though not for men and women) have not been correctly tabbed, so that they appear in the wrong columns

Table 12:

The calculation of the London turnover and wastage rates originally used an incorrect definition of Inner and Outer London. The actual figures differ slightly from those published.

Table 14:

The 1999 entry for Education elsewhere: Qualified teachers currently reads 3060, whereas it should read 3950

Table 24:

The headings on the right hand page (53) are the same as those on the left, and need correcting as follows:

Existing heading	*Required heading*
Education	Social studies
Medicine	Language studies
Technology	Arts other than languages
Agriculture	Music, drama and visual arts
Mathematics	Other
Other Science	Total all subjects

Table 25:

The left table (p. 54) has the sub-headings 'Special and PRU' and 'Total'. The right table (continued) headings should correspond: they currently read 'Special' and 'All Sectors'. Some of the sub-headings in the right table are not in bold.

Table 39:

The left table (p. 72) has the sub-heading 'Special and PRU'. The right table (continued) heading should correspond: it currently reads 'Special'.

Table 48:

The title should read Retirements: Type of award by last known sector of service and grade: 2000–01 rather than ... grade: 1999–2000.

These volumes are issued by the Stationery Office rather than the Department. Corrected version can be downloaded free of charge from the Department's website.

Teenage Pregnancies

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of girls excluded from full-time education were pregnant, broken down by regions in each of the last 10 years. [51532]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information on the number of pregnant girls excluded from school is not collected centrally.

Public-private Partnerships

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) for what reason she rejected Surrey county council's PPP application; [52513]

(2) if she will list the local education authorities which received backing from her Department for PPP schemes in the past 12 months; and for what purpose those applications were made; [52534]

(3) if she will list the LEAs which have applied for PPP funding in the past 12 months, and the purposes for which those applications were made. [52535]

John Healey: The application from Surrey local education authority (LEA) for PFI credits in 2003–04 was not supported as it did not meet the criteria, as set out in the guidance issued to LEAs on 31 July 2001, to the same extent as those applications from other authorities which were supported. Officials from the Department are arranging to meet with officers from Surrey LEA to provide detailed feedback and to explore how the application might be strengthened for future years.

Details of those authorities that were prioritised for provisional PFI credit support were announced in a Press Notice on 26 March, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

53 bids were received in the recent PFI capital round, with a total value of over £3 billion and an average value of over £56 million. In exercises of this nature, there are inevitably some worthwhile potential projects which do not receive funding. However, officials from the Department are responding to requests for advice on how these applications can be strengthened for the future. It would incur disproportionate costs to provide details of every LEA which applied for funding, successful or otherwise, and the full purposes of their applications.

Teachers' Pay

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what cost of living allowances will be paid, over and above basic salaries, to teachers in *(a)* Surrey and *(b)* London in this financial year. [52523]

Mr. Timms: Teachers working in inner London, outer London and the London fringe areas are paid mandatory London allowances at the following values:

Inner London: £3,105

Outer London: £2,043

Fringe: £792.

Teachers working at schools in inner London, and the outer London boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Ealing, Haringey, Merton, and Newham receive the inner London allowance. Teachers working in all other outer London boroughs receive the outer London allowance. Teachers in all areas of Surrey outside the metropolitan area receive the fringe allowance.

In addition, schools may pay recruitment and retention allowances to individual teachers of up to £5,262 per annum.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to encourage entry into the teaching profession in areas where the cost of living is high. [52574]

Mr. Timms: The Government have introduced a number of measures, including training bursaries and "golden hellos", to boost teacher recruitment nationally. These are already having an effect, and there are nearly 10,000 more teachers in post now compared to January 2001—the largest increase in a single year since the 1970s.

We have also reformed the teachers' pay system to ensure that those teachers who perform well are well rewarded. The introduction of the threshold for experienced teachers, leading to the upper pay scale, has provided a career structure which will allow our best classroom teachers, in time, to earn over £32,000 at today's rates, excluding additional allowances. And we have implemented cost of living pay rises at above inflation rates for all teachers in each of the last four years.

All teachers working in the London area are paid mandatory London allowances on top of their basic salary. These allowances were increased last year by 30 per cent. and are currently inner—£3,105; outer—£2,043; and fringe—£792. In addition, schools are able to pay recruitment and retention allowances to individual teachers of up to £5,262 per annum. Schools can decide to pay this as a lump sum covering up to three years.

It is open to local authorities to help teachers with housing, relocation and travel costs through the Recruitment and Retention Fund established by my Department. We have made £77 million available to 2003 for this purpose. And we have made £250 million available to 2004 to help key public sector workers, particularly nurses, teachers and police, to buy homes in or near the communities they serve through our starter home initiative scheme.

South Middlesbrough Academy

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 519W, what conditions have been attached to the sponsorship by Sir Peter Vardy of the proposed South Middlesbrough Academy. [53401]

Mr. Timms: We understand that the sponsors have agreed with Middlesbrough LEA that the City Academy should have a Christian ethos and serve pupils aged 11–18. The proposals that the partnership have developed reflect those preferences.

Specialist Status Schools

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the targets agreed by Sir John Cass's Foundation Redcoat School, London borough of Tower Hamlets local education authority, at the time of its acquisition of specialist status, identifying those not yet achieved. [53454]

Mr. Timms: Sir John Cass's Foundation Redcoat School has been operating as a language college since September 2000. The information requested is being collated. I will therefore write to the hon. Member as soon as possible giving a full reply to the question raised.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the targets agreed by Millais School, West Sussex local education authority, at the time of its acquisition of specialist status, identifying those not yet achieved. [53455]

Mr. Timms: Millais School has been operating as a language college since September 1996. The information requested is being collated. I will therefore write to the hon. Member as soon as possible giving a full reply to the question raised.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* new requirements placed on and *(b)* requirements removed from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in the last year for which information is available. [53456]

Mr. Timms: New requirements placed on HM Chief Inspector of Schools during the financial year which ended on 31 March 2002 were as follows:

to inspect and report at specified intervals on educational provision for students up to age 19 in further education colleges, education or training for 16 to 19-year-olds provided outside the further education sector which is wholly or partly funded by the Learning and Skills Council for England, the Connexions service, and training of teachers or lecturers of further education funded by the Learning and Skills Council for England or Higher Education Funding Council for England;

to conduct area-wide inspections of education and training for 16 to 19-year-olds and report on them, taking account where appropriate of the views of the Chief Inspector for Adult Learning; with the Adult Learning Inspectorate, to agree and publish a Common Inspection Framework; to conduct inspections jointly with the Adult Learning Inspectorate where the education or training to be inspected falls within both inspectorates' remits;

to keep the Secretary of State informed about quality, standards and management in the education and training brought within his remit by section 60 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and, on request by the Secretary of State, to provide advice about that education and training or inspect and report on any education or training within his extended remit;

to state whether he agrees with a registered inspector's judgment that a school has an inadequate sixth form;

to regulate child minding and day care provision under the Children Act 1989, including registration of providers and securing the inspection of registered child minders and day care providers at specified intervals;

to keep the Secretary of State informed about quality and standards of child minding and day care provision and provide advice about that provision as requested by the Secretary of State; and

to include an account of the exercise of those functions transferred to him under the Care Standards Act 2000 in his annual report.

During that period, HM Chief Inspector's responsibilities in respect of adult and community education provided by local education authorities were transferred to the Adult Learning Inspectorate.

Sector Skills Councils

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what steps she is taking to ensure that delays in the establishment of sector skills councils do not result in the loss of key staff of national training organisations to the training sector; [53523]

(2) when *(a)* the sector skills councils for the construction, engineering and hospitality sectors and *(b)* all sector skills councils will be fully operational. [53524]

John Healey: The ending of Government recognition of national training organisations (NTOs) and the licensing of sector skills councils are separate issues.

Organisations formerly with NTO status are independent bodies led by employers, often with responsibilities wider than those which were required for NTO recognition. The continued funding and operation of these organisations is therefore a decision for the board of each body. New contracts have been awarded by my Department to 62 former NTOs from April 2002 for the delivery of specific essential work in support of occupational development. These contracts will conclude on 31 August 2002. The new Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA), working with other public agencies, will make arrangements for the delivery of essential work to support occupational development from September 2002.

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) represent a new deal with employers across the UK to improve skills and productivity performance in significant industry and business sectors. SSCs provide the opportunity for collective action by employers, in partnership and with the support of Government, to identify sector skills priorities and lead action to meet them. There is no timetable for introducing the new network as the decision to form a SSC rests with employers. Where employers want to form a SSC, and can meet the published SSC standard for the award of a licence, my Department will supplement employers' investment by contributing up to £1 million each year to support the Council's core work.

Employers in the construction, engineering and hospitality sectors have yet to make a formal expression of interest to the SSDA about forming a SSC for their sectors. Informal discussions have been taking place and formal expressions of interest from these sectors are expected in the next few weeks when invited by the SSDA.

Barcelona European Council

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what resources have been allocated to implement the conclusions for education made by the Barcelona European Council in March; and what timetable has been set for the implementation of the Council's proposals for *(a)* ensuring transparency of diplomas and qualifications, *(b)* the teaching of at least two foreign languages from a very early age, *(c)* the establishment of internet twinning with partner schools in Europe and *(d)* the promotion of the European dimension in education. [53525]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Work is already underway to take forward the Barcelona conclusions on education:

(a) The UK higher education sector is taking forward work on credit transfer and progress files to ensure transparency of diplomas and other qualifications. This is part of the Bologna process, which aims to build a new European higher education area by 2010. The UK National Academic Recognition Information Centre, part of a European-wide network, exists to offer clear advice on mutual recognition and comparability of all higher education awards.

EU member states are also working together on a broad strategy to make vocational qualifications better understood across Europe. The strategy includes work on certificate supplements and developing a common format for CVs for mobile workers to use if they wish to. We are funding the National Reference Point on Vocational Qualifications in Cheltenham to pilot work this year and next to test the Certificate Supplement approach.

(b) We support the aspiration to improve opportunities for language learning. Currently we are developing a national language strategy that will identify what we need to deliver and how we will deliver it, taking account of resources available and our existing policy commitments. The strategy will be published in the autumn. Currently language learning is a requirement for all 11–16 year olds. Our ambition is that all primary school children will be entitled to study languages by 2012.

(c) The European Commission is undertaking a feasibility study to identify options for helping secondary schools to establish or enhance an internet twinning link. The Commission will report to the Seville Council in June, and we expect decisions about implementation to be taken by the Council in the light of the options identified.

(d) Pupils in England are already taught about Europe and the European Union at secondary school. They are taught about the history of Britain in its European and wider context within National Curriculum History. They will learn about the world as a global community, the role of the European Union and the UK's relations in Europe, including the European Union in National Curriculum Citizenship as a statutory National Curriculum subject in secondary schools this September. We have spent just over £1 million to date to support the production of resource materials for teaching citizenship and we will spend about £500,000 in 2002–03.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her Department's publication of figures relating to teacher vacancies, how many vacancies there are at Key Stages *(a)* one and two and *(b)* three and four. [53665]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* The information is not available in the form requested. In January 2002 there were 1,700 vacant teacher posts in maintained primary schools and 2,440 vacant teacher posts in maintained secondary schools in England. These figures are provisional.

The vacancies recorded had been advertised and were for full-time permanent appointments or full-time appointments of at least one term's duration, which existed at the survey date and which the local education authority or school concerned intended to or had unsuccessfully attempted to fill.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers left the profession in each of the last five years, broken down by the reason given for leaving. [53667]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* The numbers of teachers leaving regular full or part time service in the maintained schools sector in England were as follows. The latest provisional data available are for 31 March 2000.

	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000
Age retirement	1,900	1,700	1,900	1,900	2,300
Ill health retirement	4,600	4,800	3,400	2,300	2,300
Premature retirement	8,600	10,300	11,200	3,800	4,300
Other leavers	20,300	18,800	22,500	23,600	26,100
Total	35,400	35,600	39,000	31,600	34,900

Many of the teachers leaving the profession in these years will come back into service.

Some 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-timers are not recorded on the Teachers' Pension Scheme, from which the data are obtained.

Teaching Pay Initiative

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if funding for the teaching pay initiative will continue beyond 2003–04. [54153]

Margaret Hodge: TPI is an important initiative designed to help modernise FE Pay arrangements and recruit and reward teachers as part of the drive to improve teaching and learning. I recognise that it is an ongoing commitment for colleges and funding will continue beyond 2003–04. Many colleges have felt able to consolidate TPI payments and I hope others will follow suit.

Young People's Services

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the Government promotes innovation in services for young people. [46326]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

Promoting innovation is a key element of the Government's agenda for the modernisation of public services. Through partnerships between the statutory, voluntary and community sectors in initiatives such as the Children's Fund, Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Partnerships and Quality Protects we are bringing new experience and innovative thinking to the delivery of services for children and young people and we are committed to mainstreaming these approaches.

Central to this approach is listening to the views of young people and involving them in service design, implementation and evaluation. The Government's core principles for the involvement of children and young people, published by the Children and Young People's Unit, will help ensure that the contribution of young people continues to bring new thinking and innovation into services designed to meet their needs.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many children under 16 are living in bed and breakfast accommodation; what steps are being taken to reduce the numbers of children living in bed and breakfast accommodation; and what steps he has taken to increase the supply of affordable accommodation. [53036]

Mr. Byers: Information relating to the number of children aged under 16 living in bed and breakfast is not collected centrally. However we estimate that there are 6,500 homeless households with children living in B&B accommodation.

I recently announced a £35 million programme to reduce the number of homeless families with children in B&B hotels. Changes have also been made to housing benefit subsidy arrangements, worth an estimated £10 million, to encourage authorities to place homeless households in self-contained temporary accommodation. The Bed and Breakfast Unit is working with authorities with high levels of B&B use to produce individual action plans to ensure that, by March 2004, homeless families with children are placed in B&B hotels only in emergencies, and even then for a maximum of 6 weeks.

My Department has significantly increased funding for new affordable housing. Investment through the Housing Corporation will rise to over £1.2 billion by 2003–04, almost double 2000–01 levels. This will help deliver our target of 100,000 new affordable homes by 2004, and we will ensure these funds are distributed more in line with local and regional priorities so that investment matches local needs.

We are also providing £250 million through the Starter Home Initiative to help some 10,000 key workers in high demand areas to purchase a home.

In addition, the Affordable Housing Unit is working closely with partners and stakeholders to increase delivery of affordable housing in high demand areas across the country over the next three years and to contribute to longer term thinking on the development of new housing capacity.

Planning

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the number of times an applicant can delay consideration of a planning appeal. [53509]

Ms Keeble: It is our policy that all parties to an appeal should be discouraged from delaying its consideration. On 1 August 2000 revised statutory procedures were introduced to speed up the handling of planning appeals by inquiry, hearing, and written representations and enforce the stricter deadlines in the procedures. Where an inquiry is to be held the Planning Inspectorate's aim, in every case, is to fix as early an inquiry date as possible. Each principal party to an appeal is only permitted one refusal of a date offered for the inquiry before a date, time and place for the inquiry is fixed.

Right to Buy

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 46W, on right to buy, who has been commissioned to undertake the research projects into the right to buy scheme; what the terms of reference are of each project; and when work on each will be completed. [53018]

Ms Keeble: The information is as follows:

(i) the impact of the February 1999 changes to limits on right to buy discounts:

undertaken by a team from the universities of Bristol and Birmingham:

to examine the effect of the reduction (from £50,000 to £22,000-£38,000 varying by region) in the maximum cash limit on the RTB discount that came into force in February 1999 and to estimate the likely effects of further changes in the RTB discount:

expected completion date: July 2002.

(ii) exploitation of the right to buy scheme by companies:

undertaken by Heriot-Watt university:

to examine the scale, nature and impact of the misuse of the right to buy policy by companies:

expected completion date: November 2002.

(iii) a review of the system for valuing properties for right to buy purposes:

undertaken by College of Estate Management:

to examine the variation in valuations of RTB properties by local authorities and by the Valuation Office Agency, identifying the criteria and procedures used and the appeals process and attempt to explain any variances between valuations of the same properties:

expected completion date: June 2003.

Construction Industry

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost will be to small businesses within the construction industry of complying with self-certification schemes following the introduction of the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2002. [53003]

Dr. Whitehead: The four new schemes recognised in the regulations are voluntary, and offer small businesses the opportunity, should they wish to take it up, to save money through not having to go through local authority building control. This is particularly important in relation to replacement glazing where as a result of changes we made to Part L of the regulations—that part dealing with the conservation of fuel and power, it became controlled fitting and subject to building control.

The Fenestration Self Assessment Scheme (FENSA) was introduced to ease the burden of this change. We estimate that the typical cost of going through local authority building control for replacement glazing would be about £120 for a contract with a value of less than £2,000. Overall we have estimated the cost of not introducing self-certification to be £106,400,000 in the first year, and the overall financial benefit to be £104,685,000.

Replacement Windows

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in relation to statutory instrument No. 440, regulation 16A, what assessment he has made of the direct cost to individual house owners when they install replacement windows; what consultation has taken place over the introduction of this regulation; what requirements there will be to demonstrate compliance on the sale of a house; how home owners will be able to prove that windows were installed before commencement of the instrument on 1 April; what steps he will take to publicise these regulations widely; and whether notices will be sent to relevant *(a)* retailers, *(b)* builders and *(c)* merchants. [53250]

Dr. Whitehead: From the figures in the regulatory impact analysis we undertook prior to making statutory instrument No. 440, we estimate that the average saving per window installation contract would be around £117 compared to using local authority building control. In relation to consultation I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on Tuesday 23 April 2002, to my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas), *Official Report*, columns 179W-80W.

There will be no requirement to demonstrate compliance with these regulations prior to the sale of a house. However, prior to the sale of a property, a search may reveal that the installation of a window has taken place without either the issue of a certificate from a person registered with the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme (FENSA), or evidence of a building notice given to a local authority. This though is highly unlikely to prevent the sale of a house, although in some circumstances it could delay the process. Householders would be advised in any event to keep receipts and other such records necessary to ensure a smooth transition during the sale of any property. In relation to publicity, I am pleased with the level of public awareness in relation to the changes so far. However, I will keep the situation under review and if there is evidence that more publicity is required, we shall provide it. I do not, at this stage, see any need for direct mailing of merchants, builders or retailers.

Millennium Dome

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what stage negotiations have reached with Meridian Delta on the sale of the Millennium Dome; when negotiations will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [52614]

Ms Keeble: The negotiations with Meridian Delta Ltd are on course to reach a conclusion in May.

Playing Fields

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to require local planning authorities to inform *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the DCMS monitoring group on playing field sales of the outcome of all applications to build on playing fields. [51918]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* All local planning authority decisions are currently placed on the planning register and are open to public inspection. The Minister for Sport and I propose to invite Sport England to conduct a periodic survey of the outcome of those planning applications for development affecting playing fields to establish the outcome in those cases where Sport England has objected to the planning application.

Low Demand Housing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which wards of the city of Newcastle upon Tyne are included in the pathfinders study of housing in low demand. [52126]

Ms Keeble: The proposed intervention area for the Tyneside pathfinder project has not yet been confirmed but is being discussed with the local authorities concerned. I would also expect the local authorities concerned to consult the relevant Members of this House.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much residual debt has been written off in each of the local authorities where housing stock transfers have taken place. [53526]

Ms Keeble: The overhanging debt payments made to date are £21 million in respect of Burnley borough council, £78.9 million in respect of Blackburn with Darwen borough council, £64.59 million in respect of Calderdale metropolitan borough council and £111.68 million in respect of Coventry city council.

Local Council Elections

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to lay regulations enabling local authorities to switch to alternative year elections where they have reduced the number of councillors representing wards from three to two. [53266]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* In the White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" the Government said that they would invite the Electoral Commission to propose options to simplify the current cycle of local elections. Meanwhile, we will, before the summer recess make regulations under Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000 to introduce elections by halves in a number of authorities that following periodic electoral reviews have two-member wards, and have requested such a change.

Local Government Finance

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he will take to ensure that the new finance system for local authorities provides an effective framework within which councils can initiate new and innovative ways of delivering customer-focused services and lead their communities. [53639]

Mr. Raynsford: Our comprehensive agenda for reform of the local government finance system was set out in last December's White Paper "Strong Local leadership—Quality Public Services". Our finance reforms will give councils more space to innovate and respond in ways that are appropriate to local circumstances by providing local authorities with greater freedom to borrow, invest, trade, charge and set spending priorities. Our White Paper implementation plan is available on the DTLR website at http://www.dtlr.gov.uk/local-regions/sll/implement/plan/index.htm.

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what total external support is received in 2002–03 by *(a)* local authorities covering the Waverley area and *(b)* the unitary authority of Bracknell. [53519]

Mr. Raynsford: Local authorities have reported the following information.

Total external support, 2002–03

£ million

	Waverley Area			*Bracknell Forest UA area*	
	Waverley	*Surrey County Council*	*Surrey Police Authority*[1]	*Bracknell Forest Unitary Authority*	*Thames Valley Police Authority*[2]
Revenue support grant	0.579	143.921	1.525	22.784	24.425
Redistributed non-domestic rates	4.866	287.019	26.916	34.180	52.997
Ring-fenced grants inside AEF[3]	0.174	102.080	5.257	9.139	n/a
Police grant	0	0	54.443	0	122.387
Total revenue support	5.619	533.020	88.141	66.103	n/a
Basic credit approvals	0	35.604	0	0.116	0
Supplementary credit approvals	0	11.614	n/a	11.614	3.152
Grants from central Government	0.299	9.479	n/a	2.522	0
National lottery	0	0	n/a	0.071	0
Total capital support	0.299	56.697	n/a	14.323	3.152
Total external support	5.918	589.717	n/a	80.426	n/a

n/a = not available

[1] Surrey Police Authority have not yet returned their capital estimates return form.

[2] Thames Valley Police Authority have not yet returned their general fund revenue account form.

[3] Aggregate external finance (AEF) is central Government support towards total standard spending. It comprises revenue support grant, redistributed non-domestic rates, and certain ring-fenced grants.

Sources:

2002–03 General Fund Revenue Account and Capital Estimates returns

Local Government Finance Final Settlement

Disability Facilities

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the reports he receives from local councils on the use of the financial support which he gives for disability facilities grants. [53313]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities provide returns to the Department on their total annual expenditure on Disabled Facilities Grant. The Department pays a grant to each local authority to cover 60 per cent. of their expenditure. Figures showing the Government's grant allocations and local authorities' expenditure over the last five years were placed in the Libraries of the House in January.

Local authorities do not provide detailed information to the Department on the type of housing adaptations supported by the programme but as part of the annual Housing Investment Programme Review, Government offices for the regions will review local authorities' performance in managing the DFG programme.

Electronic Voting

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what means, when voting electronically, a voter can ascertain whether his vote has been recorded and counted. [52928]

Dr. Whitehead: The arrangements being piloted for electronic voting provide for voters to receive electronic confirmatory messages when their votes have been successfully received.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when he will notify applicants for electronic votes in the May elections whether their proposals have been authorised; [52927]

(2) in which areas he is considering applications for electronic voting in May; [52925]

(3) what the latest date is by which he will consider applications for electronic voting in May. [52926]

Dr. Whitehead: In October 2001, local authorities were invited to apply by 31 December to run electoral pilots in the May 2002 local elections. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions announced on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 829–31W, those authorities whose pilots had been approved. On 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 402W, he announced the approval of one further authority.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements will be in place to prevent personation of persons voting electronically. [52929]

Dr. Whitehead: Within the electronic voting pilots there are a range of measures in place to guard against impersonation. This will include the use of voter specific PIN numbers and passwords and real time electronic registers to cast and record votes. The systems will also prevent an electronic vote being cast where the PIN number and password have been used previously.

National Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost to *(a)* county councils, *(b)* district councils and *(c)* borough councils of the 1 per cent. increase in employers' national insurance contributions. [52359]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Andrew Turner) on Monday 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W.

Disabled Access

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what adjustments have been made to his Department's premises following the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and what the cost of these adjustments was as a proportion of the Department's budget. [53029]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Records of expenditure relating to adjustments made to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) are not, as a matter of course, held separately across the DTLR estate. In some instances DDA related adjustments have been carried out by landlords, and in others as part of on-going maintenance works.

In the DTLR headquarter buildings £217,000 (excluding VAT) has been spent on improvements following a review by specialist advisers on accessibility.

As a comprehensive record of DDA related expenditure is not available, it is not possible to express this as a percentage of DTLR's budget.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many net additional staff his Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52433]

Dr. Whitehead: The following table provides the figures requested.

	Administrative level		*Executive officer level*	
Type of staff	*FTE*	*Headcount*	*FTE*	*Headcount*
June 2001				
Casual	6.68	7.00	—	—
Permanent	−1.65	−1.00	4.00	4.00
Total	5.03	6.00	4.00	4.00
July 2001				
Casual	6.00	6.00	1.00	1.00
Permanent	16.00	16.00	—	—
Total	22.00	22.00	1.00	1.00
August 2001				
Casual	−4.00	−4.00	—	—
Permanent	4.65	4.00	5.00	5.00
Total	0.65	—	5.00	5.00

Type of staff	Administrative level FTE	Administrative level Headcount	Executive officer level FTE	Executive officer level Headcount
September 2001				
Casual	3.00	3.00	1.00	1.00
Permanent	7.35	8.00	–2.00	–2.00
Total	10.35	11.00	–1.00	–1.00
October 2001				
Casual	–2.00	–2.00	2.00	2.00
Permanent	5.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
Total	3.00	3.00	5.00	5.00
November 2001				
Casual	6.00	6.00	–2.00	–2.00
Permanent	8.00	8.00	–2.25	–2.00
Total	14.00	14.00	–4.25	–4.00
December 2001				
Casual	—	—	1.00	1.00
Permanent	2.00	2.00	7.00	7.00
Total	2.00	2.00	8.00	8.00
January 2002				
Casual	5.00	5.00	1.00	1.00
Permanent	1.00	1.00	12.00	12.00
Total	6.00	6.00	13.00	13.00
February 2002				
Casual	–2.00	–2.00	—	—
Permanent	3.00	3.00	3.78	4.00
Total	1.00	1.00	3.78	4.00
March 2002				
Casual	–2.41	–3.00	—	—
Permanent	6.00	6.00	18.00	18.00
Total	3.59	3.00	18.00	18.00
April 2002				
Casual	3.00	3.00	1.00	1.00
Permanent	19.73	20.00	22.54	23.00
Total	22.73	23.00	23.54	24.00

Complaints

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many complaints were registered against his Department and its predecessor Departments in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in those periods. [51223]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Complaints and suggestions may be received at many different points in the organisation and it is the Department's policy to address these as near to the point of delivery and as soon as possible. Central records are not kept of the number of complaints.

Figures relating to PCA investigations against the Department (including its predecessor Departments) between 1990 and 2002 are set out in the table:

	1990 to 1996	*1997 to 2002*
Complaints taken up by PCA	108	71
Complaints upheld by PCA	63	31
Outstanding cases	0	8

Public Transport Workers (Assaults)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action the Government have take since 1997 to protect *(a)* bus workers and *(b)* other public transport staff from assaults at work. [53641]

Ms Keeble: Since 1997 the Department has produced a number of good practice guidance documents for transport operators on what actions they can take to protect their staff from assaults at work. The guidance covers the training of staff, the recording and monitoring of incidents, and management practices which could help staff who have been assaulted. For example, earlier this month we published guidance and a good practice case studies report on improving personal security in bus travel for passengers and staff.

The Health and Safety Commission has agreed a three year programme of work (2000–03) to help employers from all sectors tackle the increasing problem of work-related violence. The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for taking the programme forward.

More generally, the Government are taking action to reduce all violent crime through a number of measures, based on a concerted strategy of targeted policing, effective punishment and interventions to address the underlying conditions which breed violence.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to ban members of the public from using public transport if they assault staff. [53643]

Ms Keeble: Powers are already available to individual transport operators and the criminal justice system to ban those convicted of violence while using public transport systems from using public transport.

Channel Tunnel

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that rail freight facilities through the channel tunnel return to the pre-November 2001 levels. [53437]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport to the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on 18 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1170W.

Track Safety Certificates

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 24 April, ref. 52041, about Railtrack's random checks of personal track safety certificates, what

action is taken *(a)* by Railtrack and *(b)* by railway employers in the 2 per cent. of cases where staff do not hold a valid certificate; and what action is being taken to reduce the percentage of staff without a valid certificate. [53251]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack advise that they carry out a series of comprehensive spot checks every three months and supplement this with additional random spot checks. Railtrack log all the information they receive and use it to monitor the provision of staff by agencies and contractors. If anyone does not hold the correct accreditation they are removed immediately from site.

Croxley Rail Link

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of the proposals for the Croxley Rail Link. [52521]

Ms Keeble: I am pleased that this proposal has satisfied the economic appraisal set by the Department. The issues yet to be resolved are to do with its deliverability. My officials are expecting a paper on these issues from Hertfordshire county council's consultants shortly. We recognise the importance of the Croxley Rail Link and look forward to making progress on this scheme.

Railways

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions the Government have had with *(a)* Connex South Eastern and *(b)* other rail operators to discuss the extension of services during the night. [53645]

Mr. Jamieson: Any such proposal would be a matter for the train operating companies to take forward with the Strategic Rail Authority.

Deep-sea Port Traffic

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the level of deep-sea port traffic expressed in containers per annum has been in each of the last 10 years. [51182]

Mr. Byers: Information on the numbers of containers entering or leaving the UK that were transported from or to deep-sea ports (excluding Europe and the Mediterranean) in each of the last 10 years to 2000 is published in "Maritime Statistics" annual reports for the years 1991 to 2000 inclusive, which are produced by my Department. Copies of these reports are held in the Libraries of the House.

Roads (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what additional resources he will make available to Gloucestershire county council to maintain the A40 following de-trunking; and if he will make a statement. [52934]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Nigel Jones dated 1 May 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about future funding of the A40 in Gloucestershire.

We are discussing with the County Council the additional resources to be transferred to them to maintain the A40 following its detrunking. The basis for those discussions is the methodology, agreed between the Local Government Association and DTLR, for transferring routine maintenance resources to local authorities.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he proposes to make regulations under the Transport Act 2000 to amend the transfers of liability to vehicle hirers for fixed penalty charge notices for bus lane contraventions under the London Local Authorities Act 1996. [52973]

Ms Keeble: Our target is to make London bus lane enforcement regulations under section 144 of the Transport Act 2000 this autumn.

Night Buses

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals the Government have to increase the number of night buses and night bus routes. [53644]

Ms Keeble: Whether to provide night bus services is primarily a matter for commercial operators outside London, and for Transport for London. Local authorities outside London may however subsidise the provision of a service where they consider it necessary. There are already night bus services operating in a number of towns and cities.

Bus services in London are the responsibility of the Mayor and Transport for London. They have already made significant improvements in night bus services and more are planned. For example, 16 new night bus routes have been introduced since April 2000, and frequencies have increased on many others. There has also been a 20 per cent. growth in the number of night bus passengers in London in the last year.

As a devolved matter under the Scotland Act 1998, bus services in Scotland are primarily a matter for the Scottish Executive. I understand that the frequency of night bus services in Glasgow will be increased from 26 May.

Vehicle Registration

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 29 April 2002, ref. 53199, on processing by the DVLA, what the average time taken was to process replacement vehicle registration documents in the last 12 months. [54057]

Mr. Jamieson: For the year 2001–02 in respect of registration documents issued in response to customers notifying changes to their own or the vehicle's details, the agency processed 95 per cent. of all transactions within 8.4 days.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many NDPBs have ceased to exist since 1997. [52501]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Records of the numbers of public bodies which are created and which cease to exist each year are not currently collected centrally. However, the total number of public bodies in existence each year is published in Annex B of the Cabinet Office publication, "Public Bodies 2001", a copy of which is held in the Library, and which is available on the internet.

In 1979, the first year in which the total number of public bodies was recorded, there were 2,167 public bodies. In 1997, this had decreased by 48 per cent. to 1,128. The total as at 31 March 2001 was 1,025 a further reduction of 9 per cent. In parallel with the continuing commitment to reduce the number of NDPBs, the Government also remain committed to ensuring that new NDPBs and other bodies are set up only where it can be demonstrated that this is the most cost-effective and appropriate means of carrying out the function concerned.

"Public Bodies 2002", giving details of public bodies in existence as at 31 March 2002, will be published in due course.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the Afghans who landed at Stansted in February 2000 in a hijacked aircraft are in Britain; and what their immigration status is. [52922]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* Of the 170 people who arrived on the aircraft, 81, including the flight crew, returned to Afghanistan. Thirteen of the passengers, together with their 21 dependants, have asylum applications that are still undecided. This group includes the convicted hijackers. Thirty passengers with five dependants were refused asylum but remain in the United Kingdom pending the outcome of their appeal to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal. Six passengers and 12 dependants have been granted refugee status. Two passengers who previously indicated that they wished to return to Afghanistan have now indicated that they no longer wish to do so and their status is under consideration.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many dependants joined applicants for asylum after an initial decision on their case and are not included in the published total of asylum seekers in each of the years from 1995 to 2001; [52762]

(2) how many dependants are identified in the administrative records as joining asylum seekers after the initial decision on their cases in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [52761]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* I regret that the information requested is unavailable and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Administrative records for applicants for asylum do not necessarily record how many dependants join applicants following initial decisions for a number of reasons. Some applicants leave the United Kingdom following the initial decision and are subsequently joined by dependants outside the United Kingdom, who would not be included in the published total. Some dependants may apply for asylum as principal applicants and therefore not be identifiable as dependants of existing or former applicants, but would be included in the published total. Some dependants may apply to enter the United Kingdom for temporary purposes (for example, as a visitor) or apply for settlement within the United Kingdom without either identifying that they wish to join a former or current asylum applicant or applying for asylum. These dependants would not be included in the published total of asylum seekers.

Information on asylum applications and initial decisions is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are taken to ensure that those who are refused asylum and who agree to depart voluntarily do so. [52764]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* A voluntary departure is where an asylum seekers withdraws their asylum claim before all appeal rights have been exhausted and wishes to leave the United Kingdom. In all cases they are asked to sign a disclaimer confirming that they wish to leave prior to the conclusion of their application.

Some individuals make themselves known to the immigration service at the point of embarkation, for example, in order to collect ticketing and other documentation. The immigration service will conform with the carrier that individuals have departed from the United Kingdom.

If an individual does not inform the immigration service of his intentions and obtains his/her own documents, we may not be aware that he/she has departed from the United Kingdom.

Where a person is voluntarily leaving the United Kingdom under the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme (VARP), operated on behalf of the Home Office by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), they will be assisted at the airport by the IOM. Before the flight leaves, the individual is required to sign a disclaimer confirming that the departure is voluntary. The IOM's London office advises IOM offices in the destination country and any transit country of the departure and notifies the Home Office.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applicants have been dealt with under the backlog clearing exercise; and how many of them were granted *(a)* asylum and *(b)* exceptional leave to remain. [52766]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* Record levels of initial decisions in 2000 and 2001 led to a reduction in the number of cases awaiting an initial decision—from 119,700 cases at the end of December

1999 to 39,400 at the end of December 2001. Initial decisions continue to outstrip applications, so the number of outstanding cases continues to fall.

The data requested are shown in the table. This information relates to cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre-1996 asylum application backlog during 1999 and 2000.

Asylum cases considered under the backlog clearance exercise[1,2]
Principal applicants only

	1999	*2000*[3]	*Total*
Total cases	12,415	11,660	24,075
Granted asylum under backlog criteria	945	305	1,250
Granted ELR under backlog criteria	10,195	10,020	20,215
Refused under backlog criteria[4]	1,275	1,335	2,605

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest 5, and exclude dependents.
[2] Some cases decided under the backlog criteria may not be included, as they may be included in the figures showing cases considered under normal procedures.
[3] Provisional data
[4] Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds.

Information on initial decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the period up to March 2002, and will be available from 30 May 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Government Departments provided support for asylum seekers in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [52768]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* In 1999–2000 support for asylum seekers was provided by the Department for Social Security (now Department for Work and Pensions), the Department of Health and the Home Office. The Department of Social Security (DSS) provided support to those asylum seekers who made their application for asylum at a port of entry until such time as an initial decision was made on the claim. But the costs of support provided by the DSS were met by the Home Office. The Department of Health was responsible for funding the support costs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The Home Office was responsible for payment of grant to local authorities who were supporting asylum seekers who had either applied for asylum in country or who, having applied at a United Kingdom port of entry, had received an initial negative decision on their claim and were appealing against that decision.

In 2000–01 support for asylum seekers was mainly provided by the Home Office. Support was provided either directly by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) or by grant paid to local authorities to meet the direct costs of those supported under the interim provisions. In 2000–01 the grant to social services departments caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children was also met by the Home Office. The DSS provided support for those asylum seekers who applied for asylum at a port of entry prior to 3 April 2000 and who had not received an initial decision on their claim. Again these costs were met by the Home Office.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applicants were *(a)* finally refused and *(b)* removed in (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [52769]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* Information on final decisions is not readily available and could be obtained only by examining individual case files to obtain information on the outcomes of initial decisions, of subsequent appeals to the Immigration Appellate Authority and the Tribunal, and of cases which have been reconsidered, which would incur disproportionate cost.

Information on initial decisions which refused asylum and Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) during these years is shown in the table. This table represents principal applicants only.

Initial decisions to refuse asylum and ELR, 1999–2000 and 2000–01[1,2]

	1999–2000	*2000–01*
Total initial decisions	52,040	132,840
Refused asylum and ELR under normal procedures[3]	23,720	97,040
Refused asylum and ELR under backlog criteria[4,5]	1,490	1,110

[1] Data are rounded to the nearest 5 and exclude dependants.
[2] Provisional data.
[3] Cases considered under normal procedures may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[4] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre-1996 asylum application backlog.
[5] Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds.

The number of failed asylum applicants removed in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is shown in the table. This table represents principal applicants only.

Asylum seekers[1] *removed*[2,3]

Year	*Number*
1999–2000	7,915
2000–01	[4]8,930

[1] Persons who had sought asylum at some point, excluding dependants.
[2] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[3] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under the Assisted Voluntary Returns Programme run by the International Organisation for Migration.
[4] Provisional figure.

Removals in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 do not necessarily relate to refusals in the same period.

Information on initial decisions and the number of asylum seekers removed from the United Kingdom is published on a quarterly basis on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of accommodating asylum seekers and those already granted asylum and exceptional leave to remain in the financial year 2000–01. [52770]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* Home Office expenditure on supporting destitute asylum seekers, including unaccompanied minors, in 2000–01 was £751 million.

Those granted refugee status and exceptional leave to remain are entitled to work and to mainstream benefits and figures for the costs are not available.

Arranged Marriages

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if an entry clearance officer who has grounds to suspect that a proposed marriage is primarily for the purpose of evading immigration controls has the power to refuse the issue of an entry clearance certificate to either party on those grounds. [52767]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* The primary purpose rule, which required an applicant to prove that the primary purpose of the marriage was not to obtain admission to the United Kingdom, was abolished in June 1997. However, an entry clearance officer can refuse to issue an entry clearance if he is not satisfied that the marriage is genuine and that each of the parties intends to live permanently with the other as his or her spouse after the marriage.

Refugee Convention

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps would be necessary for Britain to withdraw from the 1951 Refugee Convention and from subsequent related commitments. [52763]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* Article 44 of the 1951 Convention states that any contracting state may denounce the Convention at any time by a notification addressed to the Secretary General of the United Nations. The Convention would cease to extend to such territory one year after the date of receipt of the notification by the Secretary General. All relevant legislation would need to be amended to give effect to denunciation of the Convention.

However, the Government are committed to ensuring that this country adheres to its obligations under the Convention, and that those who are fleeing persecution are given the protection they need. Equally the Government are determined that those who attempt to abuse this country's immigration and asylum system are dealt with quickly and removed.

Resource Allocation

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he will use the additional resources allocated to his Department in the Budget statement. [53947]

Mr. Blunkett: Working in partnership with colleagues in Departments, agencies and services throughout the criminal justice system, I am taking forward a major programme of work to reduce crime and deal more effectively with offenders at every stage of the criminal justice process. The recent additional allocation of resources will enable us both to intensify and accelerate existing plans in key areas as well as to enhance our counter-terrorist response.

In his Budget statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the allocation of new resources to the Home Office of £180 million, including £110 million from the Reserve for 2002–03. He also announced that we would be drawing down on a further £100 million from the Criminal Justice Reserve. In addition, I will be re-prioritising £68 million from existing Home Office resources. This will make possible substantial new investment in key Home Office priorities as follows:

£67 million to bring forward and intensify the Street Crime Initiative which is a targeted programme to reduce street robbery in the 10 metropolitan areas which together account for 82 per cent. of the national total. This comprises:

	£ million
Police operations and community support officers	36.0
Video identity parades	7.6
Probation/resettlement and drugs	10.0
Additional Crown Prosecution Service and courts costs	13.8

£194 million for measures to deal with offenders on remand and after sentence and in particular provide effective measures to tackle persistent juvenile offending.

	£ million
2,300 prison places (including 600 for juveniles)	171.0
Bail tagging for juveniles	7.5
Extending intensive supervision schemes	6.5
Local authority secure unit and secure training centre places	9.0

£87 million to enhance our defences against terrorism including additional resources for police activity and technical and operational support for counter-terrorist activity.

	£ million
Police activity	63.0
Technical and operational support	24.0

Sentence Review

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to inform members of the public of their right to ask the Attorney-General to review unduly lenient sentences under the Criminal Justice Act 1998. [51991]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Information about the power of the Attorney-General to refer a sentence to the Court of Appeal for review has been incorporated in a number of Home Office publications, including the Victims Charter. This has been distributed widely throughout the criminal justice system and is publicly available through Libraries and on the Home Office website, and the 'Information for Families of Homicide Victims' pack.

If a person believes that the sentence passed is unduly lenient, they can discuss this with the local office of the Crown Prosecution Service, who have put in place systems by which potentially unduly lenient sentences can be brought to the attention of the Attorney-General.

Young Prisoners

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what minimum daily calorie level is recommended for juveniles held in prisons and courts. [52138]

Beverley Hughes: The Youth Justice Board monitors the performance of secure training centres (STCs) and local authority secure children's homes against their respective contracts and service specifications. These specify that each service provider should provide three wholesome, nutritious, varied good quality meals per day to each young person. At least one meal should be hot and there should be a choice available for the main meal.

Prison Service establishments holding juveniles are subject to Prison Service Order 5000, Annexe 20, which states that the estimated average calorific requirement for the 15 to 18-year-old age group is 2,755 kcal for males and 2,110 kcal for females.

Looked-after Children

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles in prisons are looked-after children. [52140]

Beverley Hughes: The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) is responsible for commissioning and purchasing secure accommodation for juveniles, and for setting and monitoring standards.

The information requested is not currently collected systematically. However, the YJB is now putting in place a system to do this. The YJB is also in the process of commissioning research into the numbers and needs of looked-after children in custody.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued since their inception in *(a)* Hampshire, *(b)* Fareham, *(c)* Gosport and *(d)* Portsmouth. [53434]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* Antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) were introduced from 1 April 1999. The data given in the table covers the period up to the end of December 2001.

Number of antisocial behaviour orders issued as from 1 April 1999 to 31 December 2001 within Hampshire by area

Area	*From 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000*[1]	*From 1 June 2000 to 31 December 2000*	*From 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001*	*Total*
Police force area/MCC[2]				
Hampshire	1	2	4	7
Local government authority				
Fareham BC	[3]—	—	—	—
Gosport BC	[3]—	—	—	—
Portsmouth, City of	[3]—	—	1	1
Southampton, City of	[3]—	2	3	5

[1] Total figure only available for Hampshire police force area within this period. Local government authority not known.
[2] MCC—Magistrates courts committee area.
[3] Not available.

Firearms Certificates

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his target is for police forces to deal with applications for *(a)* new and for *(b)* variations of firearms certificates; and what the average time taken by each police force is. [53466]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* No central target is set by the Home Office. It is for each police force to establish its own targets for dealing with applications for new firearms certificates and for variations to existing ones. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1999 all forces are required to carry out a five year rolling programme of best value reviews of all areas of business, including firearms licensing.

The average times taken for each force to undertake these functions are not centrally recorded, but we understand that most forces would aim to deal with the majority of currently completed applications within four to eight weeks.

Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many contracts were let by his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33851]

Angela Eagle: The available information on the number of contracts let by the Home Department to *(a)* Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Anderson for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to date indicating the remuneration made in each case is as follows:

Company	Numbers of contracts	Remuneration
1997–98		
Ernst and Young	1	10,665
KPMG	2	100,774
1998–99		
Ernst and Young	1	35,250
PricewaterhouseCoopers	2	37,440
KPMG	3	226,955
1999–2000		
PricewaterhouseCoopers	5	2,728,372
KPMG	1	25,000
Ernst and Young	2	311,000
Deloitte and Touche	1	130,000
2000–01		
PricewaterhouseCoopers	4	2,284,258
Ernst and Young	2	1,166,913
2001 to date		
PricewaterhouseCoopers	4	2,489,251
Deloitte and Touche	1	15,800
Ernst and Young	1	429,000

Notes:
Contracts were awarded following civil service rules.
The Home Office has not awarded any contracts to Anderson for the period in question.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff left the service of his Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many his Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37549]

Angela Eagle: I am sorry for the delay in answering this question. Information on the number of staff who have left, and where the Home Office and its agencies have assumed responsibility for the early departure costs is set out in the tables.

Staff who left in the 12 month period before 31 March 2002

	Number of staff who left the Department: in the year ended 31 March 2001	Number of staff who left the Department: before the formal retirement age
United Kingdom Passport Agency (UKPA)	15	14
Forensic Science Service (FSS)	173	169
Fire Service College (FSC)	30	29
Main Home Office	1,030	986
Prison Service	3,685	3,165
Total	4,933	4,363

Note:
All methods of leaving the Department/agencies are included here.

Number of staff where the Department has responsibility for early departure costs until retirement age

Department/agency	Number
Home Office	19
Prison Service	45
United Kingdom Passport Service	2
Forensic Science Service	2
Fire Service College[1]	1
Total	69

[1] Responsibility for Fire Service College transferred to Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) as part of the machinery of Government changes in June 2001.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41071]

Angela Eagle: The estimated costs of hotel accommodation for staff working away from home are contained in the table:

Year	Cost £
1998–99	28,220
1999–2000	249,462
2000–01	504,815
2001–02[1]	685,818

[1] To date

Fully accurate information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The increase in expenditure is largely due to the expansion of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and the activities carried out by the National Asylum Support Service which has necessitated increased travelling for staff and stays away from home. It had been anticipated and included in budgets. A programme of regional recruitment is under way to manage down the number of staff who are posted to areas that require hotel stays.

Mr. Mustapha Sekhi

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to make a decision on the asylum application of Mr. Mustapha Sekhi, reference B1039408. [43209]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* My right hon. and noble Friend Lord Rooker wrote to the hon. Member on 9 April 2002.

Criminal Offences

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the criminal offences which have been *(a)* created in each year since 1997 and *(b)* abolished. [44995]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* A comprehensive and exhaustive list of new and abolished offences could be provided only at disproportionate cost. We can, however, provide the following information about Home Office measures which have been enacted since 1 May 1997.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 created two new offences: breach of antisocial behaviour orders and breach of sex offender orders. It also created nine racially-aggravated offences (amended by the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 to "racially or religiously aggravated offences"), but these are based on existing offences and do not render unlawful behaviour which would otherwise have been lawful. The Data Protection Act 1998 created four new offences.

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 created 12 new offences. The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 created four new offences. The Football (Offences and Disorder) Act 1999 created one new offence.

The Terrorism Act 2000 created 38 new offences. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 created four new criminal offences. The Football (Disorder) Act 2000 created two new criminal offences. The Licensing (Young Persons) Act 2000 created one new criminal offence. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 created three new criminal offences.

The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 created 69 new criminal offences. The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 created three new criminal offences. The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000 created two new criminal offences. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 created six new criminal offences.

The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 created 15 new criminal offences. The Vehicle (Crimes) Act 2001 created 12 new criminal offences. The Private Security Industry Act 2001 created 10 new offences. The Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 created 19 new offences.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what class of offences bail is *(a)* automatically refused and *(b)* automatically allowed. [52943]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* There are no classes of offences for which bail is either automatically granted or refused. The Bail Act 1976 establishes a presumption in favour of bail and then sets out exceptions to this presumption, so that the defendant need not be granted bail where he or she presents a bail risk. For example, where there are substantial grounds for believing that if released on bail the defendant would fail to return to court, would commit an offence, interfere with witnesses or otherwise obstruct the course of justice. Each decision is at the discretion of the courts and each case is considered on its own merits.

Jury Service

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the exemption of medical professionals from jury service; and what plans he has to alter this. [47867]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The issue was considered by Sir Robin Auld as part of his independent review of the criminal courts. He recommended that no one should be excusable from jury service as of right, only on showing good reason for excusal. The Government are giving careful consideration to all the representations received on Sir Robin's review and will be announcing its response in the forthcoming Criminal Justice White Paper.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what process there is to enable monitoring to take place concerning the speed and methods of transit of appeal bundle files from UK missions overseas to their initial destinations at the Appeals Support Service in this country; and what period of time it should take for an appeal bundle to reach the Immigration Appellate Authority for consideration from the date of initial recording with the Appeals Support Service. [48862]

Angela Eagle: The target time for despatch of explanatory statements from entry clearance posts to the Home Office is one month from receipt of the notice of appeal for non-settlement applications and three months for settlement applications. Information on the actual time for despatch is not available.

There is no target governing the period between the receipt of an appeal bundle in the Home Office and its receipt in the Immigration Appellate Authority.

Leave to Remain Applications

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals have made applications this year for leave to remain in the UK; how long an application for leave to remain in the UK takes to be processed by the Home Office from the time of submission; what Department deals with overstayer applications; and if he will make a statement on special reasons that prevent a decision being made in order to complete a case within a period of six months from date of application. [48860]

Angela Eagle: Statistics on the number of applicants seeking an extension of leave to remain in the United Kingdom are not available.

Our aim is to decide 65 per cent. of all straightforward applications on initial consideration within three weeks. Due to the exceptionally high number of applications received over the past year, and process changes which are being introduced to improve our longer term performance, it is at present taking up to six weeks to decide an application on initial consideration. We are working to reduce this to three weeks or less as soon as possible. For the same reasons some applications which need further inquiries or more detailed consideration can take up to nine months to consider. Every effort is being made to reduce this period. Information on expected processing times for general immigration cases is provided to applicants on the Immigration Nationality Directorate (IND) website at http://194.203.40.90/default.asp?PageId=113

A special unit within the Integrated Casework Directorate has been set up to consider applications made under the Regularisation of Overstayers Scheme.

Prisons

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of *(a)* prisoners and *(b)* re-offending prisoners in UK prisons were excluded from school while of school age. [49971]

Beverley Hughes: A 1998 survey found that around half of all male prisoners and a third of female prisoners had been excluded from school. A more recent survey carried out in a sample of young offender institutions between September 2001 and February 2002 found that 84 per cent. of respondents have been excluded from school. Neither survey distinguishes between prisoners in custody for a first or repeat offence.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in his Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions he has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within his Department. [50480]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The Home Department has a number of areas of business where smart card technology may be relevantly applied. In their work on drafting a consultation paper on entitlement cards and other methods for dealing with identity fraud which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 872W, my officials have discussed the use of smart card technology with trade associations and some private companies as set out in my answer to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) on 1 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1587W.

In the Passport Service and the Criminal Records Bureau smart card technology is not currently used, however, the Passport Service is currently investigating the potential use of electronic data storage in passport books and in a card form of the passport issued along side a passport book. The primary aim of this technology would be to improve document security by the addition of a machine readable biometrics templates. Smart card technology would be one option for data storage. Other options are optical memory, 2D bar codes and magnetic strip. The use of smart card (i.e. microcomputer chip) technology would be expensive but would also provide the opportunity to develop other applications, particularly if used on a passport card. These investigations have centred on technology standards and the experience of other Governments and organisations using electronic data storage for biometric templates. There have been no direct discussions about a smart card passport design with private sector companies supplying smart card technology.

In the Immigration and Nationality Directorate smart card technology is being used in the context of the Asylum Fingerprinting System and has been developed by the incumbent supplier of services.

In respect of internal operational business requirements smart card technology is part of proposals currently being made by incumbent Home Office Private Finance Initiative (PFI) suppliers to support security of mobile computing.

Technology decisions in the context of PFI contracts would not involve the Department in direct discussions with smart card suppliers.

The Home Office continues to liaise with the Office of the e-Envoy (OeE) on appropriate opportunities and uses of such technology and will respond to the proceedings and findings of the OeE Smart Card Working Group.

Appeals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the ASS of his Department forwarded the papers in the case of Fuzal-Ur-Rahman post ref ISB-/E425 to the IAA. [50702]

Angela Eagle: There is no target governing the period between the receipt of an appeal bundle in the Home Office and its receipt in the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA).

Our records indicate that the appeal papers have been processed and the bundle has been dispatched to the IAA. The IAA will advise the appellant of the date for the hearing in due course.

Child Safety/Parenting Orders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* child safety and *(b)* parenting orders have been made to date in each police force area in England and Wales; how many have been (i) discharged and (ii) breached; and if he will make a statement. [51829]

Beverley Hughes: The number of parenting orders and child safety orders imposed in England and Wales between April 2000 and December 2001, are set out in the table. This information comes from the Youth Justice Board. I will write to the hon. Member with police force area breakdowns as soon as they are available. 40 of the parenting orders imposed following a crime by the child have resulted in breach action. Discharge and other breach statistics are not routinely collected.

England and Wales

	Parenting order	*Child safety order*
Crime	1,268	—
Education	274	—
Other	236	—
Total	1,778	12

Cyclists (Fixed Penalties)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many substantive fixed penalties were issued against cyclists in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001, by police force, broken down by the reasons of issue. [51806]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 April 2002]:* Available information for the year 2000, taken from a special exercise undertaken to monitor fixed penalties issued against pedal cyclists, are given in the table.

The exercise has not been repeated for 2001.

Fixed Penalties—Number of substantive tickets issued for pedal cycle offences by offence and police force area, January to December 2000

Police force area	*Carrying more than one person on pedal cycle*	*Cycling on the footway (pavement)*	*Total*
Avon and Somerset	1	34	35
Bedfordshire	'—	'—	'—
Cambridgeshire	'—	'—	'—
Cheshire	'—	14	14
Cleveland	1	5	5
Cumbria	'—	20	20
Derbyshire	'—	8	8
Devon and Cornwall	6	34	40
Dorset	'—	17	17
Durham	1	11	12
Essex	4	55	59
Gloucestershire	2	47	49

Fixed Penalties—Number of substantive tickets issued for pedal cycle offences by offence and police force area, January to December 2000

Police force area	Carrying more than one person on pedal cycle	Cycling on the footway (pavement)	Total
Greater Manchester	4	78	82
Hampshire	7	52	59
Hertfordshire	—	6	6
Humberside	6	64	70
Kent	1	44	45
Lancashire	4	20	24
Leicestershire	1	5	6
Lincolnshire	1	4	5
London, City of	—	3	3
Merseyside	—	20	20
Metropolitan Police	—	66	66
Norfolk	—	14	14
Northamptonshire	—	7	7
Northumbria	1	27	28
North Yorkshire	1	16	17
Nottinghamshire	—	1	1
South Yorkshire	—	34	34
Staffordshire	1	4	5
Suffolk	—	30	30
Surrey	1	1	2
Sussex	—	9	9
Thames Valley	2	6	8
Warwickshire	1	3	4
West Mercia	—	17	17
West Midlands	3	9	12
West Yorkshire	—	2	2
Wiltshire	1	23	24
Dyfed-Powys	—	3	3
Gwent	—	1	1
North Wales[2]	—	1	1
South Wales	1	6	7
Total	51	821	872

[1] Not available
[2] Motoring offences of driving on footway (pavement) included within cycling on the footway (pavement).
[3] October to December 2000 only

Raves

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will amend the definition of raves under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to give police more powers to prevent and stop such events by *(a)* lowering the requisite number of attendees and *(b)* including events under cover. [52290]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We are currently considering the effectiveness of the current legislation (Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994) on raves.

Animal Experimentation

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in the establishment of a Royal Commission into animal experimentation; and if he will make a statement. [51666]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 599W.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the procedure is for vetting visitors to remand prisoners held in the special secure unit at HMP Belmarsh; what the target is for number of days required to process a prisoner application; how many applications have been processed since October 2001; how many applications are still pending; how many days each completed application took to process; and how many and what proportion of applications have been rejected. [52466]

Beverley Hughes: The facility at Belmarsh is designated as a High Secure Unit. Any person wishing to have an open visit with a category A prisoner, irrespective of whether that prisoner (convicted or on remand) is located in the Unit or elsewhere at Belmarsh, is required to submit to the prison an application form and two passport sized photographs of themselves. A security check is then undertaken, generally by the relevant police authority. Once those checks are complete, a decision on whether to allow the applicant to have open visits is then made.

The 33 prisoners currently located in the High Secure Unit have made a total of 196 applications for visitors to be made 'approved visitors' and receive open visits. Of this number 72 visitors have been cleared for open visits, 16 are currently receiving discretionary closed visits and 108 are awaiting clearance.

Applications from the prisoner for a person to become an approved visitor are normally processed within 24 hours of receipt by the issue of the appropriate form for the visitor to complete. Returned forms from the visitor are normally processed within 48 hours of receipt and passed to the relevant police authority. Upon completion of police checks, a final decision is then taken by the prison, normally within 48 hours. Time taken for visitors to return application forms and for the police to complete appropriate checks is beyond the control of the prison.

Information on each separate application could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made for the maintenance of family relationships of *(a)* convicted and *(b)* remand prisoners held in the special secure unit at HMP Belmarsh; how many (i) hours for family visits and (ii) minutes for telephone contact each prisoner has been permitted in each of the last four weeks for which figures are available; and what restrictions were put on (A) the visit and the visitors and (B) the phone call and recipient of phone calls. [52465]

Beverley Hughes: The facility at Belmarsh is designated as a High Secure Unit (HSU). All prisoners in the unit can arrange visits as set out in the guidelines of Standing Order 5 and subject to those visitors being on the Approved Visitors Scheme. Convicted prisoners receive two visiting orders per month, plus a further visiting order should they be on the enhanced level of the incentive and earned privileges (IEP) scheme. Those prisoners held on remand receive two visiting orders per week, plus a further visiting order should they be on the enhanced level of the IEP Scheme.

All visits are up to a maximum of two hours in length. During Monday to Friday visits are available either in the morning or afternoon. At weekends, visits are available in the afternoon only. For the present number of prisoners in

the HSU there are available each week 48 sessions of two hours duration. That availability could be increased to 72 sessions per week in the event of extra demand.

All prisoners in the HSU are able to use the telephone subject to the recipient of the call being an approved visitor or in the process of becoming an approved visitor.

The computer managed telephone system allows for the duration of calls to be no more than 15 minutes. However, there is no limit to the number of calls any prisoner may make during the association period. Each prisoner may have a maximum amount of credit in his telephone account of £60 on which to spend on calls, except for those classed as foreign nationals, where no maximum limit exists.

Telephone calls may be made in any association period or, on application, if the timing of association is not convenient for either the family or legal advisers. During the last week of March and the first three weeks of April 2002 approximately 42 hours of facility time during which to make use of the telephone system.

Details of individual prisoner use of visits and the telephone can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what education and training facilities are available for *(a)* remand and *(b)* convicted prisoners held in the special secure unit at HMP Belmarsh; how many hours in each of the last four weeks for which figures are available each prisoner has been able to use these facilities; and what was the average hours per day for which figures are available in the last month that prisoners were locked in their cells. [52464]

Beverley Hughes: The facility at Belmarsh is designated as a High Secure Unit. All prisoners (whether on remand or convicted) may apply to the education department for assistance and advice on educational matters. Work is undertaken on a self study basis, although there are no vocational training courses. A basic skills analysis has also been undertaken to identify the individual needs of prisoners which also took into account the fact that a number were foreign nationals. Prisoners have access to computer facilities, which may be used whenever they are unlocked and on association.

The regime of the unit varies daily, but the average number of hours a prisoner may be locked up in any period of 24 hours is 17.5 hours.

Details of facilities available on an individual prisoner basis can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are held in each special secure unit, stating *(a)* the number of prisoners held on remand and the nature of crimes for which convicted prisoners were sentenced, *(b)* the national origin or citizenship of the prisoners, *(c)* the religion of the prisoner, *(d)* their special category status, *(e)* how long the prisoner has been housed in a special secure unit and *(f)* on what date each prisoner was last examined medically. [52461]

Beverley Hughes: Currently there is only one special secure unit (SSU) in operation which is located at Whitemoor prison. The eight prisoners in the SSU have all been convicted by the courts. Their nationality is British (five), Turkish (two) and Brazilian (one). Three of those held in the SSU have been convicted of murder with the other five having been convicted of drug related charges.

The declared religion is Church of England (three); Muslim (two), Roman Catholic (one). The remaining two prisoners decline to state their religion. All those held in the SSU are Category A 'Exceptional Risk' prisoners.

The periods of time the prisoners have been held in the SSU is as follows: 0–6 months (four); six-12 months one; 12–18 months (0), 18–24 months (two) and over two years (one).

Every prisoner in the SSU is medically examined on a quarterly basis. The last occasion each was examined were on 1 March 2002 (one), 6 March 2002 (six) and 14 March 2002 (one). Every prisoner is, of course, able to consult a doctor or nurse when required.

Prison Pay Review Body

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the recommendations of the Prison Pay Review Body are; and when they will be implemented. [52944]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend (Huw Edwards) on 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 480W.

PRIME MINISTER

Visit (North Down)

Q17. **Lady Hermon:** To ask the Prime Minister if he plans to visit North Down in 2002. [51714]

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 1 May. [51707]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Organised Crime

4. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress there has been in the past six months in the fight against organised crime in Northern Ireland. [51670]

Jane Kennedy: We are beginning to make a real impact in disrupting and dismantling the organised crime gangs in Northern Ireland with a further 60 recruits. Just last Friday, the police foiled another armed robbery against a security firm and released a hostage in a daring, well executed, operation.

27. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent action has been taken to tackle *(a)* smuggling and *(b)* other forms of organised crime. [51694]

Jane Kennedy: In September 2000 the Government established an Organised Crime Task Force in Northern Ireland. The task force, which I chair, bring the various agencies that can make a difference, such as the police service of Northern Ireland and HM Customs and Excise to agree crime types for concerted multi-agency action. The agencies have scored a number of notable successes against smuggling gangs and other organised criminals over the past year, including the largest ever UK seizure (over 42 million) of smuggled cigarettes at Warrenpoint in November 2001. In February 2002 the police broke up a heroin distribution network and charged 15 people with serious drug offences.

Tolerance and Inclusivity

6. **Mr. Luke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in meeting his objective of promoting tolerance and inclusivity in Northern Ireland since the Belfast agreement. [51672]

Mr. Browne: The conclusion, and the continuing implementation, of the agreement itself are great achievements for inclusivity, drawing into Government people from across both major traditions. Northern Ireland can be proud of them. But it is the responsibility for all in public life in Northern Ireland to ensure that no part of either community there feels left behind by the process, and that all aspirations are fully respected.

School Anti-drugs Campaigns

7. **Mr. Lyons:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the anti-drugs campaigns being mounted in schools by the police service of Northern Ireland. [51673]

23. **Valerie Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the anti-drugs campaigns being mounted in schools by the police service of Northern Ireland. [51690]

Jane Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to highlight the efforts being made in Northern Ireland by the PSNI to get the "don't do drugs" message across to children in our schools. It is an essential part of the overall anti-drugs strategy, with education at one end of the spectrum allied to detection and prosecution at the other. The PSNI recognises the value of including the anti-drugs message in the Citizenship and Safety Education (CASE) Programme which provides a platform for them to work in partnership with teachers and parents. The overarching aim is to encourage responsible behaviour in young people and empower them to live safely and that must include avoidance of drugs.

It is of course impossible to say precisely how effective the incorporation of the drugs education programme is in terms of numbers deterred from drug abuse, but the theme is "Education", recognising that it is better to education the young on prevention than simply to concentrate on catching offenders.

Community Safety Strategy

8. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Government's proposed community safety strategy. [51674]

Mr. Browne: The Government published a draft community safety strategy for consultation on 10 April 2002. The strategy sets out a broad framework for action at a local level to address local concerns about crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. It will require close co-operation from a wide range of agencies in both the devolved and non-devolved Administrations.

17. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on community safety campaigns being mounted in schools by the police service of Northern Ireland. [51684]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland recognises the importance of education in promoting individual safety for young people and families and to help create safer communities. The Citizen and Safety Education (CASE) Programme has been developed in an attempt to establish close links between the police and the school community through the central themes of Protection, Education and Prevention. CASE provides a platform for police to work in partnership with teachers and parents. Together, they seek to present information and promote skills, attitudes and values, which encourage responsible behaviour in young people and empower them to live safely.

The issues covered in the programme include the role of the police, vandalism, bullying, peer pressure, stranger danger, road safety, internet safety, abuse, respecting others, young people and the law, underage drinking, solvent abuse and drugs and the law. Over 80 officers are involved in the CASE programme and it is hoped to significantly increase that number for the next academic year. Of the 1,182 schools in Northern Ireland, PSNI is currently working in 940, focusing on pupils at Key Stages I, II and III.

25. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the promotion of crime prevention and community safety in Northern Ireland. [51692]

Mr. Browne: The Government have taken forward a number of crime prevention campaigns in Northern Ireland with appropriate partners. In addition, a draft community safety strategy for consultation was published on 10 April 2002. The strategy sets out a broad framework for action at a local level to address local concerns about crime, the fear of crime and antisocial behaviour.

Devolved Institutions

9. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [51675]

20. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the operation in the past 12 months of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. [51687]

Dr. John Reid: The devolved institutions have already embarked on a wide ranging process of review and reform. Since last November a new stability has been achieved. I believe that, under the able leadership of the First and Deputy First Ministers, the institutions offer the potential for greatly improved public services, through local decisions by local people reflecting local circumstances.

22. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress with the decommissioning of weapons by paramilitary groups. [51689]

Jane Kennedy: The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported, on 8 April 2002, that it had witnessed an event in which the IRA leadership has put a varied and substantial quantity of ammunition, arms and explosive material beyond use. The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning confirmed that they have made an inventory of the arms concerned.

The process is on-going and we now need to see loyalist groups commence decommissioning. There needs also to be a decommissioning of mindsets. Terrorist groups must end all forms of paramilitary activity and dismantle the apparatus of terrorism.

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the effectiveness in the past year of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. [51677]

Dr. John Reid: The devolved institutions have already embarked on a wide-ranging process of review and reform. Since last November a new stability has been achieved. I believe that, under the able leadership of the First and Deputy First Ministers, the institutions offer the potential for greatly improved public services, through local decisions by local people reflecting local circumstances.

Decommissioning

10. **Helen Southworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest act of decommissioning by the IRA. [51676]

Jane Kennedy: The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported, on 8 April 2002, that it had witnessed an event in which the IRA leadership has put a varied and substantial quantity of ammunition, arms and explosive material beyond use. The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning confirmed that they have made an inventory of the arms concerned.

11. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to bring about further decommissioning of weapons. [51678]

Jane Kennedy: The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported, on 8 April 2002, that it had witnessed an event in which the IRA leadership has put a varied and substantial quantity of ammunition, arms and explosive material beyond use.

The process is on-going and we now need to see loyalist groups commence decommissioning. There needs also to be a decommissioning of mindsets. Terrorist groups must end all forms of paramilitary activity and dismantle the apparatus of terrorism. The timing of any future decommissioning events is a matter for the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and the representatives of the various paramilitary organisations.

16. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been made of the amount of IRA weapons recently put beyond use as a proportion of the estimated total IRA weapons arsenal. [51683]

Jane Kennedy: The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported, on 8 April 2002, that it had witnessed an event in which the IRA leadership has put a varied and substantial quantity of ammunition, arms and explosive material beyond use. The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning confirmed that they have made an inventory of the arms concerned. It has not been possible at this time to assess the percentage of the Provisional IRA's weaponry involved.

The Commission's mandate under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement is to facilitate the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms. The Government have every confidence in General de Chastelain and his colleagues and respect their wishes on how best to proceed to fulfil their mandate.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many weapons the IRA has put beyond use; when this process was completed; what confirmation he has received from General John de Chastelain that the process is on-going; and if he will make a statement on the process of decommissioning. [42913]

Dr. John Reid: The second IRA act of decommissioning on 8 April 2002 demonstrates that the IRA is committed to the continuation of the decommissioning process.

The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning have confirmed they have made an inventory of the arms concerned—the British and Irish Governments will be provided with this when the task is completed.

International Terrorism

12. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on links between terrorist groups in Northern Ireland and terrorist organisations in other countries. [51679]

Jane Kennedy: We are aware that various terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland have been linked to international terror groups at various points over the last 30 years, and this is a matter of concern.

The peace process in Northern Ireland is not perfect. There are still issues to be resolved. This will only come about through dialogue and parties fulfilling their responsibilities under the Belfast Agreement.

Fugitives

13. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about his policy on fugitives from justice. [51680]

Dr. John Reid: At the talks at Weston Park last summer, both the Irish and UK Governments recognised that there is an issue to be addressed, with the completion of the early release scheme, about supporters of organisations now on ceasefire against whom there are outstanding prosecutions, and in some cases extradition proceedings, for offences committed before 10 April 1998. Such people would, if convicted, stand to benefit from the early release scheme. The Governments accept that it would be a natural development of the scheme for such prosecutions not to be pursued. Consideration continues of the best way to discharge this commitment.

Prisoner Releases

14. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners have been released under the Good Friday agreement; and what groups those prisoners have been affiliated with. [51681]

Jane Kennedy: To date (23 April 2002), 447 individuals have been released early under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998.

Information is held, for management purposes, in relation to the perceived paramilitary association of prisoners in Northern Ireland. The table sets out details of the perceived association of the 447 individuals granted early release.

Perceived association	*Total*
PIRA	206
INLA	24
Former INLA	8
Republican Association	3
UDA	87
UFF	14
UVF	67
RHC	3
LVF	17
Loyalist Association	6
Criminal or No Association	12
Total	447

Saville Inquiry

15. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost has been to date of the Saville inquiry. [51682]

Mr. Browne: The cost of the Bloody Sunday inquiry to the Northern Ireland Office, as at 31 March 2002, is £57.9 million. This figure does not include costs to other Departments such as the Ministry of Defence.

United States (Community Support)

18. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with the US Government on US support for communities in Northern Ireland. [51685]

Dr. John Reid: I have discussed this issue with the US Government and a range of US organisations during my visits in February and March. I am grateful for the support the United States gives to Northern Ireland. I am also grateful to organisations like the Irish American Partnership and the Ireland Funds for what they have done for Northern Ireland over the years.

Competition Policy

19. **Andrew Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the action he has taken in the last 12 months on competition policy in financial services in Northern Ireland. [51686]

Dr. John Reid: This matter has been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and is no longer a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Police Service

21. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on community safety campaigns being mounted in schools by the police service of Northern Ireland. [51688]

Jane Kennedy: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) ref. 51684.

Fireworks

24. **Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what regulations cover the sale of fireworks in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [51691]

Jane Kennedy: At present the sale of fireworks is governed by the Explosives Act 1875 and Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. The Explosive (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002 which has been laid before Parliament will then prohibit the purchase, possession, sale and use of garden fireworks except under licence and will come into effect from 6 May 2002.

Terrorist Finance

26. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the Government are taking to tackle the financing of terrorism in Northern Ireland. [51693]

Jane Kennedy: The Government's strategy for tackling terrorist crime in Northern Ireland is two fold. First, the police must have available to them robust legislative powers. The Terrorism Act 2000 contains a number of financial provisions for seeking information and restraining assets. These powers were supplemented by the Anti-Terrorist Crime and Security Act 2001, passed in the wake of the events on 11 September.

Second, in September 2000, the Government established an Organised Crime Task Force for Northern Ireland. The task force, which I chair, brings the various agencies that can make a difference, such as the police service of Northern ireland and HM Customs and Excise to agree crime types for concerted multi-agency action. The agencies have scored a number of notable successes over the past year, including the largest ever UK seizure (over 42 million) of smuggled cigarettes at Warrenpoint in November 2001. In February 2002 the police broke up a heroin distribution network and charged 15 people with serious drugs offences.

Terrorist Amnesty

28. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his policy is on amnesty for convicted terrorists at large. [51695]

Dr. John Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), ref. 51680.

Proceeds of Crime

29. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions his Department has had with the Criminal Assets Bureau regarding Government co-operation initiatives on the recovery of the proceeds of crime. [51696]

Jane Kennedy: My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), and officials have visited the Criminal Asset bureau and the Northern Ireland Office has regular contact with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on a range of issues including policy on the recovery of proceeds of crime. PSNI and other UK law enforcement agencies have successful operational links with a wide range of bodies in the Republic of Ireland, including the Criminal Asset Bureau.

District Policing Partnership Boards

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects the establishment of the District Policing Partnership Boards in Northern Ireland; and what the reason for the delay in their establishment has been. [53214]

Jane Kennedy: District Policing Partnerships will be established when the appointment process, which includes the appointment of the independent members, has been completed. The statutory code of practice governing the appointment members is currently out for consultation. The consultation process is scheduled to conclude on 22 May 2002.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what buildings owned by his Department have solar panels installed. [53492]

Dr. John Reid: My Department has no buildings with solar panels installed.

Oversight Commissioner

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish the latest report received from the Oversight Commissioner. [53945]

Jane Kennedy: In accordance with section 68(4)(a) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, I have today laid a copy of the Oversight Commissioner's first statutory report for the year 2002 before this House.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will instruct Government Departments to investigate how they might increase the number and value of fair trade products that they purchase. [36081]

Clare Short: Through the Department for International Development, the Government have supported fair trade (FT) initiatives for a number of years, both in developing countries and in the UK. This support forms part of a wider dialogue with the private sector and civil society to encourage the adoption of more socially responsible and ethical trade practices. As companies and consumers become more aware of the connection between the way business is done and its impact on the livelihoods of people in developing countries, so the pressure for positive change grows.

To this end, DFID has provided £250,000 this year to support the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). The ETI is a consortium of UK retail companies (with a combined annual turnover of nearly £100 billion), NGOs and trade unions committed to working together to identify and promote best practice in the implementation of codes of labour. ETI corporate members are required to report compliance down their supply chains against a base code founded on the ILO convention.

In addition, we are providing £120,000 to the Fair Trade Foundation over three years (2001–03) in support of its efforts to target new consumers through its annual Fair Trade Fortnight campaigns. The fortnight is designed to highlight the positive developmental impacts of FT and the range of FT products on offer.

With regard to direct purchasing of FT products by Government Departments, value for money considerations and the limited number of commodities for which internationally agreed FT standards exist, currently make it impractical to link Government purchasing policy to the FT mark.

Departmental Overseas Visits

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in her Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36817]

Clare Short: None.

Israel

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contingency plans she has to replace DFID-funded projects in the west bank and Gaza Strip damaged by Israeli attacks. [40623]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 683W.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on energy costs incurred by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42440]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 268W.

Palestine

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 994W, on Palestine, what assessment she has made of the cost of damage as a result of military action during the last 12 months to each of the projects listed. [52961]

Clare Short: Our latest firm information is that two projects have sustained direct damage. A vehicle provided to support primary health care management development at Bir Zeit University was damaged during an aerial attack on Ramallah. A community centre funded through the Save the Children Fund managed water and sanitation project in Rafah has also been damaged. The total cost of the damage has not yet been confirmed.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47151]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 222W.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many special advisers there were in her Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46955]

Clare Short: At any one time there are no more than two special advisers employed in my Department. With reference to the salaries of special advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many times Ministers in her Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47107]

Clare Short: Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 31 April 1999. Details for travel undertaken in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published soon.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years; [46848]

(2) how much was spent by Ministers in her Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [47051]

Clare Short: In the last five years total entertainment costs for the top management in DFID breaks down as follows:

	£
2001–02	12,904
2001–03	8,976
2001–04	5,440
2002–03	1,203

It is not possible to provide a breakdown as asked in the question.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are part-time employees. [47172]

Clare Short: Of the 1,597 staff who are employed in DFID headquarters in London and East Kilbride, 123 staff work part-time. This equates to 7.7 per cent. of our HQ work force.

Palestinian Territories

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information she has collated concerning the destruction by Israeli military forces of aid projects *(a)* funded and *(b)* supported by her Department in the Palestinian territories. [49267]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 11 March 2002, Official Report, column 683W. I have also placed in the Library of the House a list of EC funded infrastructure projects which have been destroyed which were part funded by DFID.

Overseas Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Project Management Agency Support for Regional Trade Negotiating Machinery in the Caribbean region. [49158]

Clare Short: My department undertook a review of its support to the Regional Negotiating Machinery in March 2001. In consequence from June 2001 we improved the management arrangements and now support the Regional Negotiating Machinery directly.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Transmission Institutional Strengthening Project in India; [49202]

(2) what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Power Sector Reform Institutional Strengthening Distribution Project in India; [49185]

(3) what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Andhra Pradesh Power Sector Reform Institutional Strengthening Project in India. [49177]

Clare Short: Power sector reform is a key development challenge for India. In many states, power subsidies take a large proportion of the government budget, squeezing out expenditure on anti-poverty programmes. A high quality power supply is also critical for economic growth.

DFID is supporting the reform and restructuring of the power sector in three states, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Power sector reform is highly complex and also new to India, and assistance has been requested from DFID and other donors to help design and carry forward the structural changes needed to reform the sector and place it on a proper commercial footing.

In all three states, DFID is making available assistance, including experts with international experience of successfully carrying out similar work, following competitive tendering processes to ensure maximum value for money. Most of the support so far has been provided by Indian experts, even when international companies have been engaged. Expatriate inputs are limited to specialist areas where international experience is of greatest benefit and local expertise is not available. These are long term projects, designed to respond flexibly to local needs. They are reviewed regularly, including market comparisons to ensure that value for money is maintained.

In Andhra Pradesh, considerable progress has been made in helping the state government achieve its objectives on power reform, but the process has been more difficult and has taken longer than originally envisaged.

In Orissa, DFID assistance to the state grid company finished when the company was privatised. We continue to support the Orissa Electricity Regulatory Commission and also the Orissa Transmission Company. Both of these programmes are making good progress.

In Madhya Pradesh, DFID has been asked to provide assistance with power sector reform and competitive tendering process is underway to identify suitable expertise.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Support for Improving Corporate Services and Management in the Rwanda Revenue Authority Project. [49201]

Clare Short: Since 1997 my Department has committed almost £11 million in support of the Rwanda Revenue Project. This particular project began in September 1999 and finished in March 2002, with a budget of £2.3 million.

In April 2000, DFID concluded that management capacity problems in the RRA were more severe than at first thought and DFID inputs were increased accordingly. By the end of the project, we had succeeded in reforming the corporate services and management of the RRA. Proper financial organisation had been put in place; and information technology strategy had been developed and implemented; training in internal audit procedures had been completed; the RRA were acting on the recommendations made in an organisation and staffing review; and the RRA had a corporate plan in place against which they were measuring their own performance.

Our assessment is that this project has achieved good value for money. The management reforms are significant and have contributed to a major improvement in revenue collection More still needs to be done at senior and middle management level, but the basic corporate structures are now in place.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Rural Access Programme in Nepal. [49163]

Clare Short: The Rural Access Programme in Nepal is an ambitious programme of rural transport infrastructure and related activities aimed at eliminating rural poverty. It is being implemented over a six year period that has only just started. It is therefore too early to judge the value for money achievements of the whole programme at this time.

An inception review of the programme was completed in April. This review took into account the current conflict situation in Nepal and the impact on programme implementation; how more immediate impact can be achieved for communities affected by conflict; and the approach to the provision of technical assistance.

The outcome of this review is that there will be improved modalities for working in conflict affected areas and on conflict issues. This will include working with organisation with an established local presence and by strengthening and empowering existing groups and adopting working methods that bridge the divides giving rise to the current conflict. Also, there will be a reduction in the numbers of international consultants without compromising quality and supervision, through a more rapid localisation of key positions in the technical assistance team.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Technical Co-operation Training-Nigeria, Cameroon and the Gambia Project. [49171]

Clare Short: The Technical Co-operation Training Programmes (TCTP) for these three countries came under DFID's global TCTP, which provided a centrally administered mechanism for giving training awards to overseas candidates linked to our individual country programmes. The programmes in these countries have now ended. Value for money considerations were taken into account when the contract for running the global programme was awarded to the managing agent. The impact of the training in terms of contribution to individual project objectives in Nigeria, Cameroon and the Gambia was assessed as part of our regular project monitoring procedures.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Improving Rural Livelihood in North and East Uganda project. [49187]

Clare Short: An independent project review of DFID's support to the Improving Rural Livelihood in North and East Uganda project was undertaken in May 2001. It reported that, overall, the project outputs were likely to be largely achieved. In particular, the capacity for client-oriented research, technology transfer, and the development of technology approaches and systems have improved. A further review will be conducted in June 2002.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Support for Improving Tax Administration in the Rwanda Authority project. [49193]

Clare Short: Since 1997 my Department has committed almost £11 million in support of the Rwanda Revenue project. The specific project referred to in the question began in September 1999 and finished in August 2001, with a budget of over £2 million.

An improvement in revenue collection became clear from late 2000. During the last year of the project the VAT department exceeded its revenue targets, the RRA modernised its tax and customs departments and revenue collections were also on target. It is our assessment that this project has achieved good value for money, initially through rebuilding the capacity of the Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA) which had been shattered by the genocide, and then through significant improvements in revenue collection.

The Rwandan Minister of Finance has described the project as DFID's most important support to Rwanda. However, more work remains to be done if the RRA's improved performance is to be sustained. DFID has therefore extended its support to the RRA through a new project, which runs from October 2001 to December 2003.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Technical Assistance for Public Enterprise Reform in Orissa project in India. [49195]

Clare Short: Technical Assistance for Public Enterprise Reform in Orissa is a component of the Orissa Public Sector Reforms project, the purpose of which is to help the Government of Orissa allocate increased resources to the needs of the poor and improve the effectiveness of its resource use in order to reduce poverty. The assistance has been provided by international consultants selected following a competitive tendering process; Indian experts are also involved. An independent evaluation of the project was conducted in November 2001. It included both value for money considerations and technical review. It concluded that the project had progressed well and was providing value for money.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Technical Assistance for the Introduction of Value Added Tax in Andhra Pradesh Project in India. [49199]

Clare Short: Introduction of VAT is a complex and difficult process and DFID was asked for technical assistance to help the Government of Andhra Pradesh ensure that they were ready to implement the new system by the original target date of April 2002.

International consultants have been utilised in designing the process in areas where local expertise was not available. They were selected through a competitive tendering exercise to ensure maximum value for money. Much of the assistance has been provided by Indian experts.

DFID has regularly monitored the project. The last annual review in December 2001 concluded that the project was completely on track, resulting in Andhra Pradesh being one of the few states in India ready for the target date. The Government of India has since decided to delay VAT implementation to April 2003 as many states were not ready.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Western India Rainfed Farming Project Phase II. [49159]

Clare Short: Phase 1 of the Western India Rainfed Farming project gave an economic rate of return of about 40 per cent. and had a substantial impact in reducing the poverty of over 50,000 poor tribal people. Phase II, which began in 1999, is expanding the coverage to over 500,000 people.

The 2002 annual review of Phase II found that the project is well on the way to achieving its objectives, and is having a significant impact on the lives of the poor in the project area. An independent mid-term evaluation is planned for 2003. This will look further at a number of issues, including those relating to value for money.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Russian President's Management Training Initiative: Main Phase. [49179]

Clare Short: DFID awarded a three-year contract for the management of the Russian President's Management Training Initiative (Main Phase) to the British Council under a waiver of competition in March 1999. The waiver was granted at that time, as the British Council was the only UK company with the necessary expertise to undertake this work. In order to ensure the key consideration of value for money, a Project Compliance Investigation was undertaken prior to contracting which confirmed that the British Council costs offered value for money. A comprehensive review of the performance of the project was undertaken by DFID's Eastern Europe and Central Asia Department in June 2001. The review team concluded that the project has been going well and its purpose "to achieve improvements in the performance of 540 enterprise managers" was likely to be completely or largely achieved and still offered value for money.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Provision of Technical Co-operation Training Services Project in Kenya. [49165]

Clare Short: There is no Provision of Technical Co-operation Training Services Project in Kenya. Training is included as a component in many projects funded by my Department in Kenya. Its value for money is routinely assessed as part of DFID's monitoring and evaluation of each project.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Smallholder Dairy Project Phase II in Kenya. [49161]

Clare Short: The last assessment of the Smallholder Dairy Project Phase II was made in March 2002. Its preliminary findings were that the project is on target to achieve its goal of giving poor dairy farmers improved access to goods, services and markets; and other farmers access to agricultural knowledge services.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Bulgaria: Solid Waste Management Project. [49167]

Clare Short: This project was formally reviewed in June 2001 and has been monitored on a regular basis since then. It is an institutional building project at municipal level to improve the management and delivery of municipal services. DFID assessments have been very positive and have shown that the project has provided value for money in terms of (i) its impact on the two focus municipalities of Kardjali and Lom to help strengthen their management capacity to deal with municipal planning, and budgeting and also a wider impact of strengthening links between central Government and the municipal authorities and (ii) successfully providing the Kardjali authorities with technical assistance and expertise in support of the development of a multi-million euro ISPA (Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-accession) project which is expected to be approved by the EC and its IFI partners in the near future.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Privatisation and Capital Market Development Project in Bosnia. [49169]

Clare Short: The project ended in March. We are arranging a final review.

The project was last reviewed in October 2001. This was one of a series of regular reviews arranged to monitor progress on the project and to agree modifications to it as appropriate. The project's original objectives of supporting capital markets development were affected by the failure of the entities to proceed with large company and mass privatisation. We have also attempted to fill gaps in assistance caused by the failure of other donors to provide agreed inputs.

This was a complex project operating in difficult circumstances. We shall make a judgment on its overall value for money in the light of the planned review.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Caribbean Overseas Territories Government Accounting Reform Project in Anguilla. [49203]

Clare Short: The project aims to modernise financial and accounting policies, systems and procedures in support of better management of Government business and improved accountability, transparency and effectiveness of Government activity. In Anguilla, up-to-date financial accounting systems were successfully commissioned in the Treasury Department and the Ministry of Finance in January 2001; and we are considering further possible support to provide on-line access for other Anguillan Government Departments. The real test of project success will be the extent to which the information and data that it provides is used effectively. It is too early properly to assess this, but we shall be monitoring progress carefully.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Technical Co-operation Training Programme, 1999–2000 and 2001–02 in Jamaica. [49157]

Clare Short: The Technical Co-operation Training Scheme for Jamaica came under DFID's global TCTP, which provided a centrally administered mechanism for giving training awards to overseas candidates linked to our individual country programmes. The programme in Jamaica ended in 1998. Value for money considerations were taken into account when the contract for running the global programme was awarded to the managing agent. The impact of the training in terms of contribution to individual project objectives in Jamaica was assessed as part of our regular project monitoring procedures.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Adult Morbidity and Mortality Project Phase II in Tanzania. [49175]

Clare Short: The Adult Morbidity and Mortality Project (Phase 2) provides quality health and poverty data from four selected districts, which is used to inform national public policies. In Tanzania, like many low income countries, vital registration systems are barely used, and large scale surveys can only be undertaken every five years or so. An independent review in August 2001 confirmed the viability and cost-effectiveness of the model.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Jamaica Performance Improvement Project. [49208]

Clare Short: As with all DFID funded initiatives, the Jamaica Performance Improvement Project is subject to regular review. The next review is scheduled to take place in May 2002.

The project has been recently extended and in order to ensure value for money we have put out components to competitive tender whenever it is practical to do so.

India

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is giving to help reconstruction in the Gujarat region of India following the earthquake in January 2001. [53676]

Clare Short: DFID's priority was to ensure that those who survived the earthquake were cared for until normal services could be restored, for which we set aside £10 million. The Government of India developed plans for the rehabilitation and reconstruction, which are being largely funded by the World bank and the Asian Development bank. DFID is not directly financing reconstruction work.

Bangladesh

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Financial Management Academy Project in Bangladesh. [49189]

Clare Short: The objective of this project is to improve the financial management capacity of the Government of Bangladesh by helping it to institutionalise effective training in financial management. The project commenced in May 1999.

In addition to close monitoring by the DFID office in Bangladesh, the project was independently evaluated in August 2001. The evaluation concluded that the project had made good progress in its first two years towards building FIMA into a national resource for financial management training.

West Bank and Gaza

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Assistance to the Palestinian Negotiations Affairs Department Project in the west bank and Gaza. [49205]

Clare Short: The purpose of this project is to help build Negotiations Affairs Department capacity and ensure effective preparation for final status talks with Israel. It is a key component in supporting the middle east peace process. We are in regular contact with both the project managers and the Palestinian Authority to review and ensure its continued progress. This is being achieved through a flexible and responsive approach to the timing of specific inputs, taking account of the changing political situation. A number of international partners have commented positively on the dynamism and quality of the project staff.

Uganda

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Integrated Lake Management Project in Uganda. [49180]

Clare Short: An independent project review of DFID's support to the Integrated Lake Management Project was undertaken in September 2001. The review reported that overall, the project outputs and purpose, in terms of an integrated Lake Management Plan and supporting institutional frameworks, are likely to be achieved on Lake George. Lake Kyoga is a more complex system. However, there are early, encouraging signs that the project purpose can also be achieved on this Lake. A further review will be conducted in September 2002.

Debt

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what discussions she has had with developing country Governments during the last six months regarding definitions of debt sustainability; [53658]

(2) how her Department defines debt sustainability. [53659]

Clare Short: There is no single definition of debt sustainability, which can be applied to all developing countries. For the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC), the international community has agreed two transparent thresholds: the net present value (NPV) of external debt should be below 150 per cent. of export earnings and 250 per cent. of Government revenues.

We regularly discuss these issues with developing countries. We have also funded two meetings this year at which representatives from the HIPC countries debated these issues and fed their views into the on-going evaluation of the HIPC initiative by the Operations Evaluation Department of the World bank.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the debts owed by heavily indebted poor countries constitutes debts owed to the IDA. [53625]

Clare Short: The share of the estimated costs attributed to the World bank group (including IDA) for the HIPC initiative is US$8.1 billion in 2001 net present value terms, out of the total costs of US$36.4 billion.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what action her Department is taking to ensure that the costs of the structural adjustment programmes of the HIPC Initiative are not borne disproportionately by the poor; [53616]

(2) what evidence her Department has collated on the impact that the structural adjustment programmes of the HIPC initiative has had on economic growth rates of each of the HIPC countries; [53618]

(3) what contribution the structural adjustment programmes of the HIPC Initiative has made to the good of poverty reduction. [53620]

Clare Short: The enhanced heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative, which was agreed in September 1999, provides deeper debt relief to poor countries committed to eradicating poverty. Up to $100 billion debt could be written off for the 42 HIPC countries, reducing their debts by more than two thirds. On average, the 26 countries that have already qualified for HIPC relief will spend three times more on the social sectors in 2002–05 than on debt service over the same period.

An important feature of the HIPC initiative is the recognition of the link between debt relief and poverty reduction in order to ensure the poor benefit from debt relief. Governments are developing national poverty reduction strategies, involving civil society and international donors, specifying how resources, including savings from debt relief, will be spent. As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) approach, the World bank and IMF have committed to undertaking poverty and social impact analysis (PSIA) of major macroeconomic and structural reforms likely to have significant impact on the poor. The World bank and IMF are leading a programme of work on PSIA and are realigning their programmes with PRSPs in these countries. We are supporting this work by piloting PSIA studies in six countries. We are also working with partner countries on their PRSPs, through our bilateral programmes.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what assessment she has made of the impact of falling commodity prices on debt sustainability; and whether she has changed her assessment of debt sustainability levels of heavily indebted poor countries accordingly; [53657]

(2) how levels of debt sustainability calculated by the HIPC Initiative were changed by the events of 11 September. [53587]

Clare Short: We have been following closely the impact of falling commodity prices on developing countries since well before the events of 11 September. At the annual meetings of the World bank and IMF in Ottawa last November, we raised this concern and asked bank and fund staff to revisit the debt sustainability analyses of all commodity dependent low-income countries, including HIPCs. The IMF and World bank analysis, published last month, shows that, although the situation varies from country to country, the external debt indicators for most HIPC countries have deteriorated, and several HIPC countries now face unsustainable debt burdens. Following UK pressure, the World bank and IMF boards have agreed to provide additional relief to countries in this situation. This was reconfirmed at the spring meetings last month.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what recent discussions she has had with World bank officials regarding the structural adjustment programmes of the HIPC initiative; [53617]

(2) what recent discussions she has had with the heavily indebted poor country Governments regarding the structural adjustment programmes of the HIPC initiative. [53619]

Clare Short: At last month's spring meetings of the IMF and World bank apart form my attendance at the Development Committee which is also attended by many World bank officials, I also met James Wolfensohn, president of the World bank, to discuss among other things progress on the enhanced heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative and the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) process. The international community remains committed to vigorous implementation and full financing of the initiative. It has been recognised that support is needed to integrate poverty and social impact analysis (PSIA) into national poverty reduction strategies. The bank and fund are leading a programme of work on PSIA and are aligning their programmes with PRSPs in the poorest countries. My Department is supporting this work by piloting PSIA studies in six countries.

I regularly meet Ministers from HIPC countries to discuss key issues affecting their development, including debt relief.

Budget Allocations

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will break down her Department's budget for 2000 and 2001 into the amount allocated for *(a)* the HIPC initiative, *(b)* bilateral aid and *(c)* multilateral aid. [53024]

Clare Short: Detailed figures for expenditure by calendar year are not readily available. Allocations for the 2000–01 and 2001–02 financial years were as follows:

£ million

	2000–01[1]	*2001–02*[2]
Total DFID development budget	3,252.5	3,581.0
of which:		
Bilateral assistance	1,388.0	1,734.1
Multilateral assistance	1,776.5	1,737.2
of which:		
HIPC initiative	28.0	24.5
Administration and other	88.0	109.7

[1] Outturn
[2] Estimated
Source:
DFID departmental report 2002

DFID's expenditure on the HIPC initiative as detailed in the table includes an element of technical co-operation as well as our direct contribution to the HIPC trust fund for the international costs of debt relief. Our share of EC payments to the HIPC trust fund over the past two years amounts to an additional £46.0 million—this expenditure also counts as part of DFID's multilateral assistance, but a breakdown by year is not yet available.

The majority of the Government's expenditure on HIPC is in relation to the cancellation of commercial debts, and is not my Department's responsibility, although it does count towards our oda/GNI figure.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will place in the Library copies of each version of the internal guidance which have been drawn up by her Department since 1 January 1999 to assist staff in her Department to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. [53380]

Clare Short: Guidance for staff on all aspects of the Data Protection Act 1998 was produced by the Department for International Development in July 2001 and is available on the Department's intranet. A copy will be placed in the Library.

African Development Bank

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the directors of the African Development bank regarding their lending policy. [53624]

Clare Short: Discussions with directors are conducted at official level. The lending policy of the bank is being reviewed and discussed by officials representing the UK and other donors in the context of the ninth replenishment of the African Development Fund, negotiations on which are currently under way.

Chechnya

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department gives to aid agencies working in Chechnya. [53052]

Clare Short: DFID has proved the following assistance to aid agencies work in Chechnya:

Aid agencies	*Amount committed 2001 (£)*	*Purpose*
Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)	144,285	To cover shortfall for 2001.
Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD)	142,857	To support an additional field security officer.
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	280,000	To enable UNICEF to continue to strengthen its activities, which are focused on education, mine action and water and sanitation.
World Health Organisation (WHO)	800,000	To provide support to WHO activities through the United Nations Consolidated Appeal Process 2001.
International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC)	1,000,000	An additional contribution to its programmes in the region, focused on essential humanitarian support.
World Food Programme (WFP)	400,000	To support with the current pipeline problems.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the conditions in Chechen refugee camps in Ingushetia. [53057]

Clare Short: My Department closely monitors the humanitarian situation in the North Caucasus, including Ingushetia. Assessments by UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Ingushetia of the situation in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) indicate that the situation for IDPs resident in Ingushetia is stable in terms of morbidity and mortality, and that there are no major outstanding humanitarian needs. But agencies agree that a full package of humanitarian assistance will continue to be required in light of the highly dependent nature of this population, and that the quality of assistance provided through humanitarian agencies within the Republic needs to be improved. We are addressing these needs through constant dialogue with, and through financial support to, the UN agencies and INGOs working in the region.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of health needs in Chechnya, with special reference to the prevalence of tuberculosis. [53053]

Clare Short: According to research by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) food, clothing and shelter are the top priority needs for internally displaced people (IDPs) and vulnerable persons in Chechnya. Tuberculosis is not currently listed as a priority.

Basic health care is provided in numerous small health care centres, but the level of care is not known. ICRC's recent street survey showed that in Grozny out of 1,913 persons, 86.6 per cent. said they were in good health and in the rural areas out of 2,248 persons, 89.6 per cent. said they were in good health. The cost of drugs and health care has frequently been mentioned as a problem in ICRC focus groups.

Aid agencies are reluctant to start tuberculosis programmes in Chechnya when there is so much movement by IDPs because effective treatment requires continuing treatment which is very difficult to provide to shifting populations.

Bilateral Aid

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of total UK bilateral aid each low-income country received in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01; and how much each received in 1999–2000. [53059]

Clare Short: The information requested in given in the table. The figures have been provided in respect of calendar years as this is the basis on which statistics on official development assistance are collected.

Bilateral official development assistance to low income countries

£million

Recipient	*UK oda*	*Percentage of total UK oda*
1999		
Afghanistan	3.72	0.3
Angola	2.20	0.2
Armenia	0.82	0.1
Azerbaijan	0.74	0.1
Bangladesh	71.02	5.1
Benin	0.97	0.1
Bhutan	0.01	0.0
Burkina Faso	0.30	0.0
Burma	0.71	0.1
Burundi	0.47	0.0
Cambodia	4.64	0.3
Cameroon	6.84	0.5
Central African Republic	0.01	0.0
Chad	0.00	0.0

Bilateral official development assistance to low income countries

£million

Recipient	*UK oda*	*Percentage of total UK oda*
China	36.62	2.6
Comoros	0.02	0.0
Congo Democratic Republic	1.50	0.1
Congo Republic	3.20	0.2
Cote d'Ivoire	0.86	0.1
Eritrea	0.43	0.0
Ethiopia	7.44	0.5
Gambia	1.20	0.1
Ghana	56.73	4.1
Guinea	0.54	0.0
Guinea-Bissau	0.01	0.0
Haiti	0.00	0.0
Honduras	2.05	0.1
India	81.39	5.9
Indonesia	25.13	1.8
Kenya	34.01	2.4
Kyrgyz Republic	0.98	0.1
Laos	0.55	0.0
Lesotho	2.71	0.2
Liberia	0.67	0.0
Madagascar	0.53	0.0
Malawi	47.76	3.4
Mali	0.74	0.1
Mauritania	0.20	0.0
Moldova	0.66	0.0
Mongolia	0.42	0.0
Mozambique	30.55	2.2
Nepal	16.33	1.2
Nicaragua	3.62	0.3
Niger	0.79	0.1
Nigeria	12.97	0.9
Pakistan	24.40	1.8
Rwanda	16.40	1.2
Sao Tome and Principe	0.00	0.0
Senegal	0.45	0.0
Sierra Leone	10.59	0.8
Somalia	1.29	0.1
Sudan	8.15	0.6
Tajikistan	0.08	0.0
Tanzania	54.78	3.9
Togo	0.35	0.0
Turkmenistan	0.10	0.0
Uganda	59.57	4.3
Viet Nam	5.16	0.4
Yemen	1.09	0.1
Zambia	39.30	2.8
Zimbabwe	16.29	1.2
2000		
Afghanistan	8.36	0.5
Angola	5.46	0.3
Armenia	1.82	0.1
Azerbaijan	0.50	0.0
Bangladesh	68.28	3.8
Benin	0.09	0.0
Bhutan	0.01	0.0
Burkina Faso	0.30	0.0
Myanmar (Burma)	0.69	0.0
Burundi	1.15	0.1
Cambodia	8.61	0.5
Cameroon	5.33	0.3
Central African Republic	0.01	0.0
Chad	0.27	0.0
China	55.12	3.1
Comoros	0.02	0.0
Congo Democratic Republic (Zaire)	5.30	0.3
Congo Republic	0.03	0.0
Cote d'Ivoire	0.72	0.0
Eritrea	0.75	0.0
Ethiopia	7.50	0.4

Bilateral official development assistance to low income countries

£million

Recipient	*UK oda*	*Percentage of total UK oda*
Gambia	1.39	0.1
Ghana	52.79	2.9
Guinea	0.26	0.0
Guinea-Bissau	0.10	0.0
Haiti	0.01	0.0
Honduras	0.63	0.0
India	134.87	7.5
Indonesia	22.37	1.2
Kenya	48.30	2.7
Kyrgyz Republic	1.44	0.1
Laos	1.40	0.1
Lesotho	2.97	0.2
Liberia	2.17	0.1
Madagascar	1.40	0.1
Malawi	64.01	3.6
Mali	0.66	0.0
Mauritania	0.65	0.0
Moldova	0.73	0.0
Mongolia	0.50	0.0
Mozambique	54.61	3.1
Nepal	15.20	0.8
Nicaragua	1.14	0.1
Niger	1.05	0.1
Nigeria	15.12	0.8
Pakistan	15.67	0.9
Rwanda	34.79	1.9
Sao Tome and Principe	0.00	0.0
Senegal	1.58	0.1
Sierra Leone	45.13	2.5
Somalia	0.72	0.0
Sudan	3.79	0.2
Tajikistan	0.05	0.0
Tanzania	100.89	5.6
Togo	0.28	0.0
Turkmenistan	0.09	0.0
Uganda	143.07	8.0
Viet Nam	5.24	0.3
Yemen	3.02	0.2
Zambia	73.60	4.1
Zimbabwe	13.36	0.7

Source:
DAC Online database.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions; [49152]

(2) what the cost was to her Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated. [49110]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

Middle East

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures she is taking to ensure that Palestinians are able to access essential medical care and treatment during the current crisis. [49728]

Clare Short: We have made clear to Israel at the highest level that we expect them to ensure that medical and humanitarian organisations and consular staff have

uninterrupted access to those in need. The Foreign Secretary has stressed these concerns to Israeli Foreign Minister Peres on several occasions.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and if the target was met. [49643]

Clare Short: My Department is responsible for three non-departmental public bodies. They incur no substantial running costs other than reimbursement of the travel expenses of members attending meeting which are essentially fixed costs. Targets for efficiency savings are therefore unnecessary.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many members of staff at his Department are justices of the peace; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace. [44556]

Mr. Wills: There are currently 16 members of staff in my Department who are Justices of the Peace. My Department fully supports those who are appointed as magistrates. All members of staff are entitled to 18 days special leave to undertake their duties as a magistrate, if they are appointed. The National Strategy for recruitment of magistrates will seek in part to encourage employers generally to be supportive of employees who wish to be magistrates.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and if the target was met. [49642]

Mr. Wills: Of the non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) for which the Department is responsible, the majority are Advisory or Tribunal NDPBs which we support directly, not through a grant or grant in aid. Targets for efficiency savings specifically for these NDPBs would therefore not be possible as their staff are not distinct from the main Department and cannot therefore be targeted separately.

The Department is responsible for three Executive NDPBs: the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), the Legal Services Commission (LSC) and the Office of the Information Commissioner.

CAFCASS was established only in April 2001, and it would therefore not yet be appropriate to set targets for efficiency savings. It is planned that CAFCASS will have a performance measure from 2003–04.

Information about the performance of the LSC can be found it its most recent annual report, which is available in the House Library.

The Information Commissioner does not set targets for efficiency savings in relation to savings as a percentage of total running costs. She sets a target for efficiency savings in three areas of the work of her office:

The number of weighted notification transactions processed per officer day;

The number of assessments completed and complaints closed per officer day; and

The number of telephone calls received per line hour.

In each case productivity gains of 2 per cent. have been included within the target, which is set to take account of changes in legislation and working practices. Performance against these targets over the last five years for which figures are available is shown in the following tables.

Data for the Office of the Information Commissioner

	Actual	*Target*	*Target met/missed*
Weighted notification transactions processed per officer day			
1996–97	49.37	46.26	Met
1997–98	51.32	46.71	Met
1998–99	48.74	50.88	Missed
1999–2000	47.02	55.64	Missed
2000–01	52.48	50.76	Met
Assessments completed and complaints closed per officer day			
1996–97	0.82	0.81	Met
1997–98	0.81	0.82	Missed
1998–99	0.79	0.86	Missed
1999–2000	0.74	0.92	Missed
2000–01	0.87	0.92	Missed
Number of telephone calls received per line hour			
1996–97	11.75	11.75	Met
1997–98	11.77	11.81	Missed
1998–99	8.80	12.25	Missed
1999–2000	8.72	8.80	Missed
2000–01	9.06	8.82	Met

Note:

These figures are drawn from the annual reports of the Information Commissioner (previously the Data Protection Commissioner and Data Protection Registrar), which are available in the Library of the House.

1901 Census

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what trigger points exist in the contract for the 1901 Census website for the Public Record Office to end the contract with QinetiQ for failure to meet their contractual obligations. [51563]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Officials in the PRO are in very frequent contact with their contractors QinetiQ Ltd, with a view to relaunching the online service as soon as this is practicable. There are a number of trigger points contained in the contract, but at the present time the PRO is concentrating its efforts on monitoring and evaluating the enhancement and testing work being carried out by QinetiQ on the census website. The PRO's top priority is to ensure that the relaunched service provides a consistently good service to users.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate the Department has for the date for the re-launch of the 1901 Census website. [51561]

Ms Rosie Winterton: QinetiQ Ltd is continuing to work on the technical enhancements, which are intended to make the site sufficiently robust to permit general Internet access and are being conducted with a sense of urgency. Once configuring of the technical enhancements is complete, rigorous testing will be undertaken on all aspects of the system. However, the most important consideration is to ensure that the service is re-launched successfully. The system will again be made available to designated service centres as part of the general re-introduction of the site. General on-line searches will be available as soon as practicable following testing and availability at the service centres.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the availability of the 1901 Census online. [53604]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I have given on several occasions, and most recently to the hon. Member for Slough on the 12 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 647W.

King Edward VIII

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to release the remaining records relating to King Edward VIII. [53334]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Any papers relating to King Edward VIII, which have not yet been released, will need to be re-reviewed by departments. It is hoped that the results of the review will be known and put into effect by the end of the year.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been spent by her Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52710]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department has spent the following amounts on training in leadership skills for officials in each of the last five years:

	£
2001–02	451,491
2000–01	351,703
1999–2000	157,740
1998–99	[1]165,000
1997–98	Nil

[1] This is the total amount spent on training consultancy during 1998–99, which includes some expenditure on leadership skills training.

During the period 2000–02, the Lord Chancellor's Department utilised £250,000 from the Invest to Modernise Fund, established by the Cabinet Office to support training in leadership skills as part of the civil service reform programme. This amount is included in the above figures.

National Insurance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what her estimate is of the cost in the next 12 months of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* agencies of her Department and *(c)* local government carrying out functions within the responsibility of her Department. [52077]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This answer covers the headquarters of the Lord Chancellor's Department (including associated offices), the Court Service and Public Guardianship Office.

It is estimated that the changes to employers' national insurance contributions announced in the Budget will increase pay costs on average by 0.7 per cent. next year.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost has been of criminal damage to her Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44829]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department does not hold specific records of the cost of criminal damage to buildings. Any repair costs incurred are met from contingency funds allocated to cover all reactive maintenance works of which criminal damage would be only one example. It would incur a disproportionate cost to the Department to break down the volume of repairs made and allocate them to specific causes.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority (Funding) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52222]

(2) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Magistrates' Courts (Transfer of Justices' Clerks' Functions) (Miscellaneous) (Amendments) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52204]

(3) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Legal Advice and Assistance (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52171]

(4) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Crown Court (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52214]

(5) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Criminal Appeal (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52200]

(6) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Criminal Defence Service (Recovery of Defence Costs Orders) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52169]

(7) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Costs in Criminal Cases (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52202]

(8) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the European Communities (Matrimonial Jurisdiction and Judgments) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52192]

(9) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Legal Advice and Assistance (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52215]

(10) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Access to Justice Act 1999 (Commencement No. 6 and Transitional Provisions) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52217]

(11) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Membership, Committee and Procedure) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52186]

(12) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Magistrates' Courts (Children and Young Persons) (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52220]

(13) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Land Registration Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52195]

(14) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Justices of the Peace (Commission Areas) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement. [52189]

(15) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Community Legal Service (Funding) (Counsel in Family Proceedings) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52166]

(16) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Legal Advice and Assistance (Score) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52216]

(17) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Court of Protection Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52173]

(18) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the European Communities (Matrimonial Jurisdiction and Judgments) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52210]

(19) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Community Legal Service (Cost Protection) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52174]

(20) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Family Proceedings Courts (Children Act 1989) (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52179]

(21) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Magistrates' Courts (Detection and Forfeiture of Terrorist Cash) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52213]

(22) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the European Communities (Lawyer's Practice) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52194]

(23) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Record Office (Fees) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52184]

(24) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Magistrates' Courts (Amendment No. 2) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52203]

(25) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Civil Legal Aid (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52197]

(26) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Legal Aid in Family Proceedings (Remuneration) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52170]

(27) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Pensions Appeal Tribunals (England and Wales) (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52211]

(28) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Petty Sessions Areas (Divisions and Names) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52205]

(29) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Adoption (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52178]

(30) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Justices' Chief Executives (Accounts) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52208]

(31) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Conduct of Litigation and Exercise of Rights of Audience) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52187]

(32) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Family Law Reform Act 1987 (Commencement No. 3) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52181]

(33) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority (Provision of Court Houses) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52206]

(34) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Access to Justice Act 1999 (Transfer of Justices' Clerks' Functions) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52196]

(35) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Community Legal Service (Financial) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52167]

(36) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Magistrates' Courts Committee Areas (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52190]

(37) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Family Proceedings Courts (Family Law Act 1986) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52180]

(38) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Crown Court (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52199]

(39) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Solicitors' Incorporated Practices (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52193]

(40) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Access to Justice Act 1999 (Commencement No. 7, Transitional Provisions and Savings) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52168]

(41) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Magistrates' Courts (Adoption) (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52177]

(42) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Community Legal Service (Costs) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52175]

(43) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Magistrates' Courts (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52218]

(44) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Family Proceedings (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52176]

(45) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority (Accounts and Audit) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52183]

(46) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Magistrates' Courts (Civilian Enforcement Officers) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52221]

(47) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Legal Aid in Criminal and Care Proceedings (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52198]

(48) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Provision of Grants) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52188]

(49) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors (Professional Conduct) (Amendment) Rules 2001 Approval Order; and if she will make a statement; [52207]

(50) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Local government (Magistrates' Courts etc.) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52201]

(51) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Court of Protection (Enduring Powers of Attorney) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52172]

(52) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Magistrates' Courts (Forms) (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52219]

(53) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission (Procedure) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52209]

(54) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Children (Allocation of Proceedings) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52182]

(55) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Civil Procedure (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52212]

(56) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Petty Sessions Areas (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52191]

(57) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Court Funds (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement. [52185]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department makes an assessment of the costs and benefits of regulations when developing regulatory proposals. Where a regulatory proposal has an impact, in terms of costs, benefits and risks that affect businesses, charities and the voluntary sector, a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) is undertaken to inform policy development. Final RIAs are placed in the Libraries of both Houses when the regulation is presented to Parliament, but are not required for regulations where it has been assessed that no or negligible costs would be imposed or savings made, or those that increase statutory fees via a predetermined formula. Copies of final RIAs are available from the Libraries of both Houses.

WORK AND PENSIONS

European Union Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to his Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39114]

Malcolm Wicks: The following EU legislation has been implemented:

Council Directive 98/49/EC on safeguarding the supplementary pension rights of employed and self-employed persons moving within the Community was implemented ahead of the deadline of 25 July 2001.

The regulation that implements the European Social Fund (ESF) for the 2000–06 period is Regulation (EC) No.1784/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council established on 12 July 1999.

There have been three packages of Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations to Regulation (EEC) 1408/71 (Regulations (EC) 123/1998, 1399/1999 and 1386/2001). These are regular amendments to the EC regulations, which coordinate the operation of member states' social security schemes:

123/98: Administrative changes.

1399/99: Administrative changes.

1386/01: Administrative changes.

307/99: Extends the scope of the EC provisions on social security to cover students.

Information on costs to public funds and to businesses is not held in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is limited to direct administration expenditure. Departments are required to produce regulatory impact assessments for proposals likely to impose significant costs on business. None was required for the above legislation.

Community Service Orders

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have lost benefit as a result of breaching their community service orders; and what the average loss of benefit has been, broken down into claimants of *(a)* income support, *(b)* jobseeker's allowance and *(c)* training allowances. [40453]

Malcolm Wicks: The community sentence and benefits measures aim to encourage greater compliance with community orders. Therefore sanctions apply only when people receiving the relevant benefit do not comply with their orders. The number of people who have lost benefit as a result of breaching their community orders is shown in the table.

Benefit	*Number of individuals*	*Average weekly loss of benefit (£)*
Income support	16	16.31
Jobseeker's allowance	23	40.72
Training allowance	0	0
Total	39	—

Notes:
1. All figures are unrounded.
2. Data are based on clerical returns received at the DWP Information Centre between 15 October 2001 and 4 April 2002, relating to 15 October 2001 and 15 March 2002.
3. Average weekly loss of benefit has been calculated on an individual recipient basis using the jobseeker's allowance payment system (JSAPS) and the income support computer system (ISCS).
4. There are four probation service pilot areas, Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Teesside and West Midlands.

Source:
CS Stats forms 1 and 2 (Withdrawal of Benefits Pilot) Information Centre, ASD.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been spent on the pilot scheme to reduce the benefits of people who breach their community service orders. [40454]

Malcolm Wicks: As of 5 April 2002, the cost to the Department of implementing the community sentences and benefits pilots running in four probation service areas was £314,350, approximately £262,000 being one-off initial set up costs, including changes to the national computer systems. At present, excluding the set-up costs of £262,000, the cost per sanction is approximately £1,340.

Benefits Offices (Security)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* deaths, *(b)* serious injuries and *(c)* recorded incidence of verbal abuse there were in Benefits Agency offices in each of the last 10 years. [42531]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The available information on the number of incidents of verbal abuse occurring in Benefits Agency offices is in the table.

Incidents of verbal abuse in Benefits Agency offices

	Number of incidents
1999	1,624
2000	2,414
2001	2,379

During this period there have been no deaths reported. For information on the number of assaults in Benefits Agency offices I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1118W. Information is not available on the seriousness of any injuries received and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Child Poverty

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families with at least one child below the age of five years were living in poverty in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2001, defined as those living in households with below 60 per cent. of median income. [45287]

Malcolm Wicks: Such information as is available is presented in the table.

Number of families with one or more children under five years of age, living in households with below 60 per cent. of contemporary median household income

million

	Before housing costs	*After housing costs*
1996–97	0.7	1.0
1997–98	0.6	0.9
1998–99	0.6	0.9
1999–2000	0.6	0.9

Notes:
1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data set which is derived from the Family Resources Survey (FRS), which does not include Northern Ireland. The latest period for which data are available is the financial year 1999–2000.
2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors that control for tenure, council tax band and a number of other variables. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response.

The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).

3. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions.

Source:
FRS

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many children in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2001 were living in households with an income below 60 per cent. of median. [45292]

Malcolm Wicks: Such information as is available can be found in the Households Below Average Income 1994–95 to 1999–2000 National Statistics Press Release, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Family Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost was of administering family credit in its last full year. [46466]

Malcolm Wicks: The estimated cost of administering family credit in 1998–99 can be found in the "Social Security Departmental Report: The Government's Expenditure Plans 2000–01 to 2001–02", a copy of which is in the Library.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in what order existing CSA cases will be moved over to the new system once it is implemented. [47817]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 315–16.

Benefit Statistics

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families in *(a)* Alyn and Deeside and *(b)* Delyn are claiming (i) child benefit and (ii) income support. [48919]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Families in the parliamentary constituencies of Alyn and Deeside and Delyn receiving child benefit or income support—November 2001

	Alyn and Deeside	*Delyn*
Families receiving child benefit	9,900	8,600
Families receiving income support	1,500	1,300

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures for income support are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. Families are defined as benefit recipients with one or more dependants.
4. Families in receipt of income support will also be in receipt of child benefit.
5. Cases are allocated to each parliamentary constituency by matching the postcode against the Office for National Statistics Postcode Directory. Constituency boundaries are represented as at May 1997.

Source:
Child benefit computer system 100 per cent. six monthly statistical enquiry, November 2001; Income Support 5 per cent. quarterly statistical enquiry, November 2001

Council Tax

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total value was of council tax benefit payments made in Scotland in each of the past three years. [48839]

Malcolm Wicks: The latest available information is in the table.

Total value of council tax benefit payments in Scotland

	£ million
1996–97	246
1997–98	287
1998–99	303

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million.
Source:
Pre-Budget report, September 2001.

Child Benefit Centre (Tyne and Wear)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of telephone calls to the Child Benefit Centre in Washington, Tyne and Wear were charged at *(a)* national and *(b)* local call rates in the last 12 months. [51787]

Malcolm Wicks: All telephone calls to the Child Benefit Centre over the last 12 months were charged at the national call rate.

Automated Credit Transfer

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much the Government will save following the introduction of automated credit transfer for the delivery of benefits payments from 2003; and how much money the Government provide to post offices for administering benefits payments. [53130]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The move to payment directly into bank and building society accounts assures a safe, convenient, more modern and efficient way of paying benefits and pensions and will bring very substantial savings. Against this, we will incur some additional costs, including those to Post Office Ltd. for the provision of the new card account at the Post Office. The precise costs will depend on the number of card accounts.

War Veterans

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what pensions and benefits are available for war veterans. [52473]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

War veterans are entitled to claim the full range of benefits and pensions available to their civilian counterparts. In addition, war disablement pensions and armed forces pensions, in respect of ill health and retirement, are available to war veterans.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Central Office of Information

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time staff have been employed at the Central Office of Information in each year since 1997; and at what cost. [53260]

Mr. Leslie: Staffing details for Central Office of Information are set out in the table.

	Full time	*Part time*	*Part time FTE*[1]	*Total FTE*[1]	*Cost £000*
1997	325	16	10	335	9,600
1998	312	18	11	323	10,574
1999	328	26	17	345	11,686
2000	350	20	10	360	13,116
2001	380	30	20	400	14,817

[1] Full-time equivalents

Public Appointments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people since May 1997 have placed themselves on the register for public appointments maintained by the Cabinet Office; how many of these have received a public appointment since May 1997; and how many public appointments for which the above register is maintained have been made since May 1997. [52227]

Mr. Leslie: The Public Appointments Unit in the Cabinet Office is responsible for maintaining and developing the Government's central register of people who have expressed an interest in serving on a public body. The register is made available to Government Departments via the Government's secure intranet, and is a resource on which they may draw when carrying out the process of making a public appointment.

While the Public Appointments Unit does not itself make any appointments, it is consulted about several hundred appointments each year, though not approached about every opportunity that arises. Between 1 May 1997 and 24 April 2002, 2,515 people have been added to the register. The other information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Miss Begg: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his responsibilities relating to senior and public appointments; and what progress has been made towards the Cabinet Office Diversity in Public Appointments policy and targets. [48754]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Cabinet Office Ministers make appointments to the following bodies sponsored by the Cabinet Office and its agencies:

Advisory Committee on Advertising

Advisory Committee on Business Appointments

Better Regulation Taskforce

Civil Service Appeal Board

Committee on Standards in Public Life

Honours Scrutiny Committee

House of Lords Appointments Commission

Security Commission

Security Vetting Appeals Board

Senior Salaries Review Board

Women's National Commission.

Appointments to the Equal Opportunities Commission which is sponsored by the Cabinet Office are made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

In addition the Minister for the Cabinet Office, in his capacity as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, makes appointments to the Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace in Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside.

"Public Bodies: Opening Up Public Appointments 2002–05" sets out for each Department specific targets for increasing diversity on the boards of the public bodies it sponsors and the action that will be taken to ensure that the targets are met and for monitoring progress. Copies of the publication are available in the Library of the House.

Sponsorship

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 10 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 432W, on sponsorship, if he will place in the Library a copy of the internal sponsorship guidelines circulated to Departments in March 1999. [46611]

Mr. Leslie: I have placed copies of the guidelines circulated to Departments in March 1999 in the Libraries of the House. These guidelines have been superseded by "Guidance to Departments on Sponsorship of Government Activities", published in July 2000, copies of which are also available in the House Libraries.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the running costs were of *(a)* his Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff, and *(b)* his Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40982]

Mr. Leslie: The running costs of Ministers' private offices, the Cabinet Office parliamentary branch and the ministerial correspondence and support team for each financial year from May 1997 to 2001–02 are set out in the table.

(a) Ministers' private offices, the Cabinet Office parliamentary branch and the ministerial correspondence and support team

Financial year	Number of private offices	Paybill (£)	Other running costs (£)	Total Net running costs (£)
May 1997 to 1998	3	814,076	348,938	1,173,014
1998–99	3	933,122	435,740	1,368,862
1999–2000	4	992,376	473,258	1,465,634
2000–01	4	1,194,378	682,675	1,877,053
2001–02[1]	6	1,376,306	797,130	2,173,436

[1] Figures for 2001–02 are provisional and subject to audit

(b) Departmental expenditure

Information on the Cabinet Office's annual running costs is set out in its published appropriation accounts and resource accounts, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

HEALTH

Meat Products

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of spinal cord and other banned meat products have been detected in imported meat in the last three years. [46790]

Yvette Cooper: Since 1 January 2001 there have been 29 incidents involving the finding of specified risk material (SRM) in meat imported into the UK, of which 28 involved spinal cord. Prior to 1 October 2001, SRM cases were not recorded in a way that distinguished them from other breaches of import controls.

Government records of breaches of import controls relate to all products of animal origin detained at border inspection posts, and do not distinguish meat and meat products from other products of animal origin. Since 1 January 2000 there have been a total of 1,205 such breaches. These cases involved a variety of failings, including the absence of the necessary health mark, or the general deterioration of the meat during unsatisfactory means of transportation. Records prior to 2000 are not available.

The Food Standards Agency advises that the vast majority of consignments of meat imported into the UK fully meet the public health requirements for importation.

Glivec

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Scottish First Minister about Scottish NICE advice about glivec. [50822]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had any discussions with the Scottish First Minister about Scottish guidance on glivec.

Care Home Workers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures he proposes to take to overcome delays in processing applications for screening criminal records of care home workers; [53539]

(2) what action his Department proposes to take to prevent the prosecution of care home managers as a result of the screening for criminal records of care home workers not being able to be completed due to the backlog of applications for screening; and if he will make a statement. [53541]

Jacqui Smith: This Department and the National Care Standards Commission are in close contact with the Home Office and the Criminal Records Bureau about the processing of applications. In order to improve the throughput of applications the bureau is currently recruiting additional staff and redeploying others over 100 in all. The bureau is also reviewing its application processes to streamline them where possible without compromising security, for example returning incorrectly completed forms to the registered body before the application is entered onto the system.

The decision as to whether or not to prosecute a registered provider or registered manager of a care home for employing someone in the home without receiving a criminal records disclosure as required under regulation 19 of the Care Homes Regulations 2001, will be a matter for the National Care Standards Commission. We expect the commission to consider each case separately. In doing so it will need to determine what other checks the employer undertook before employing the worker and whether or not they would have been in breach of other regulations or conditions of registration relating to staff numbers, or the health and welfare of service users, if they did not fill the vacancy. Where a registered person employs someone and deliberately fails to require that person to apply for a disclosure from the bureau we would expect the commission to seek prosecution for breach of the relevant requirements.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many applications for screening for criminal records of care home workers have been *(a)* made, *(b)* completely processed and *(c)* awaiting processing, since the relevant regulations came into force; [53537]

(2) how many applications have been made for the screening for criminal records of care home workers since the requirement came into force; [53538]

(3) what the average time is that it has taken to process an application for the screening for criminal records of care home workers since the regulations came into force. [53540]

Jacqui Smith: The information about applications for disclosures for care home workers is not available in the form requested.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government plan to publish their Options for Change: NHS Dentistry proposals; if he will make a statement. [53536]

Ms Blears: The Options for Change group, led by the Chief Dental Officer, and including key stakeholders, have submitted their draft recommendations to Ministers to restore national health service dentistry, building on the Government's strategy document "Modernising NHS Dentistry: Implementing the NHS Plan", published in September 2000.

The ideas behind 'Options for Change' need practical testing and we announced on 25 April that we plan to set up demonstration sites across the country, with the

assistance of the NHS Modernisation Agency. The sites will explore a variety of new methods for providing NHS dentistry, such as allowing primary care trusts to commission all NHS dental services and allowing dentists to choose to work in different ways at different times.

We plan to publish a report on their work in due course.

Blood Donations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many blood donations there were in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2000. [53326]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The National Blood Service has reported that the number of blood donations from April 1999 to March 2000 were 2,928,443 units and from April 2000 to March 2001 2,910,104 units were donated.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) of 25 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 770W, on blood donations, what the Government are doing to encourage blood donations by those aged 17 to 20 years. [53325]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The National Blood Service (NBS) is undertaking a number of activities to encourage blood donation by 17 to 20-year-olds. Blood donor sessions are taking place at sixth form colleges and universities. The NBS is also sending text messages to students about up and coming blood donor sessions, promoting blood donation at student fresher fayres and writing articles on blood donation for inclusion in student magazines.

MMR Vaccinations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to contact parents of children who have not received *(a)* the MMR vaccination and *(b)* appropriate single injections to urge them to have their children inoculated. [53270]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* In February the Department held a meeting of immunisation co-ordinators at which they were all asked to ensure the accuracy of their databases on MMR immunisations, especially for those children appearing not to have received this vaccination. A special initiative had already been undertaken in London districts to identify children who were apparently unimmunised. The 20 districts with the lowest MMR coverage have been asked specifically to concentrate efforts on identifying unimmunised children or those who have had incomplete courses of single vaccines, clarify their immunisation status, and provide information to their parents, if so wished.

Smoking

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with central and eastern European Governments on sharing smoking cessation campaigns information. [53317]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* On 18 and 19 February 2002, I attended the World Health Organisation's (WHO) ministerial conference on a tobacco-free Europe in Warsaw. I met with representatives from a number of central and eastern European Governments and discussed smoking-related issues, including cessation. The Department also works closely with the European region of the WHO to share information about activities on smoking cessation.

Hepatitis C

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what national guidance his Department has issued to combat the hepatitis C virus. [53273]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The Department has issued the following publications relevant to hepatitis C[1]:

Protection against Blood-borne Infections in the Workplace: HIV and hepatitis (Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogen—1995)

Hepatitis C and Blood Transfusion Look back (1995)

Purchasing Effective Treatment and care for Drug Misusers (1997)

Guidelines for Clinical Health Care Workers: Protection against Blood-borne Viruses (1998)

Guidance on the Risk and Management of Occupational Exposure to hepatitis C (Public Health Laboratory Service 1999)

Drug Misuse and Dependence—Guidelines on Clinical Management (1999)

Guidelines on the Use of Ribavirin and Interferon alpha for hepatitis C (National Institute for Clinical Excellence, 2000)

Hepatitis C Factsheet (Health Promotion England, 2000)

Guidance on the Microbiological Safety of Human Organs, Tissues and Cells used in Transplantation (2000)

Hepatitis C—Guidance for Those Working with Drug Users (2001)

National Specialised Services Definitions Set (1 Edition): Specialised Services for Hepatology, Hepatobiliary and Pancreatic Surgery (Adult) (2001)

Health Advice for Travellers (2002)

Hepatitis C—Essential Information for Professionals (2002)

[1] Where appropriate, the most recent editions of publications are listed.

TREASURY

Income Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average income tax paid per household was in each of the last four years in *(a)* current and *(b)* 1997 prices. [26227]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the average income tax liability per household in the UK over the past four tax years are shown in the table.

Income tax paid by UK households

Tax year	Average income tax liabilities (£)	Average income tax at 1997 prices[1] (£)	Average income tax as a percentage of gross household income
1997–98	3,300	3,300	15.1
1998–99	3,600	3,500	15.1
1999–2000	3,750	3,550	15.0
2000–01	3,950	3,650	15.1

[1] Using the GDP deflator at market prices

These figures have been calculated using estimates of income tax liabilities based on the Survey of Personal Incomes, and estimates of the number of households based on the Labour Force Survey. Gross household income estimates are taken from Family Spending.

Mr. Salter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much more in income tax the average pensioner would pay if all the spending increases announced in the 2002 Budget were funded from income tax rather than national insurance contributions; [53609]

(2) by how much income tax would have to rise to fund the 2002 Budget increases for the NHS and other public services if income tax were used instead of the increases in national insurance. [53607]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to table A.1 in the Financial Statement and Budget Report, April 2002, for the yield from additional national insurance contributions. The direct effects of illustrative changes in income tax are given in table 4 of the "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs" published in November 2001, a copy of which is held in the Library of the House. This table will be updated in the statistics area of the Inland Revenue website on 31 May. The amount of income tax that any individual would pay depends upon how the additional income tax is levied.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 851W, what the value was of the 18 penalties imposed as a result of allegations of WFTC/DPTC fraud made via the anti-fraud hotline; what the value was of the 530 recoveries; if the two prosecutions resulted in convictions and what the sentence received in each case was; and what the cost is of *(a)* the benefits anti-fraud hotline and *(b)* the childminder's hotline in 2001–02. [37583]

Dawn Primarolo: The NAO report into the Inland Revenue's accounts for 2000–01 confirms that inquiries were thoroughly appropriately followed up. Of the cases referred to in my answer of 5 February, 2002, *Official Report*, column 851, penalties of around £10,000 were imposed in the 18 cases which resulted from allegations to the national benefit fraud hotline about working families tax credit (WFTC) and disabled persons tax credit (DPTC) applicants. In addition, approximately £743,000 of tax credits is recoverable in relation to the 530 cases. Both of the prosecutions referred to resulted in convictions. The individuals convicted were given a two-year conditional discharge and 50 hours community service respectively.

Based on figures to date for 2001–02, the Department for Work and Pensions estimates the total annual cost of running the national benefit fraud hotline at £816,000 and the estimated annual cost to running the childminder's hotline for WFTC and DPTC applications during 2001–02 at around £1,000.

Mr. Roy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of fraud have been exposed during the past 12 months in relation to the child care tax credit system. [46108]

Dawn Primarolo: The child care tax credit is only one component of both working families' and disabled person's tax credits (WFTC and DPTC). In the 12 months to 31 March 2002 almost 8,000 WFTC or DPTC awards were found to be non-compliant but it is not possible to say how many of these included non-compliance in relation to child care charges.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* investigations, *(b)* penalties and *(c)* prosecutions have been instituted since September 2001 in respect of working families tax credit fraud. [46898]

Dawn Primarolo: In the period from 1 October 2001 to 31 March 2002 there have been *(a)* in the region of 11,000 investigations opened, *(b)* 310 penalties applied, and *(c)* 26 prosecutions instigated.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason *(a)* a widow's pension is and *(b)* maintenance payments are not taken into account in assessing eligibility for working families tax credit. [53511]

Dawn Primarolo: The fact that widow's pension is taken into account in tax credits and maintenance payments are not, aligns the treatment with what happens in the rest of the tax system. The maintenance disregard also makes a significant contribution to tackling child poverty.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the running costs were of *(a)* his Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* his Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40980]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 808W.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42471]

Ruth Kelly: The following table details the full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in post figures for each of the last 10 years to April 2001.

Numbers of staff employed in each of the last 10 years

	FTE
2001	970
2000	870
1999	926
1998	893
1997	888
1996	958
1995	1,127
1994	1,400
1993	1,946
1992	2,846

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47141]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Between 1 April 2001 to date, special advisers in the Treasury have travelled overseas on three occasions at an average cost of £5,800. In each case a special adviser has accompanied the Chancellor to IMF and G20 meetings in the USA and Canada and associated events from 27 April 2001 to 1 May 2001, 16 to 19 November 2001 and from 19 to 22 April 2002. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2001 is already in the public domain. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Relocation

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of his Department to Scotland. [47933]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* There are not currently any plans to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to Scotland.

Tax Evasion

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures have been introduced since 1997 to reduce tax evasion by the use of offshore accounts. [49680]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue has a continuing commitment to detect and counter tax evasion. Resources are deployed with an emphasis on areas of high risk and the Inland Revenue's Special Compliance Office deals specifically with evasion involving offshore accounts.

The Finance Act 2000 introduced a package of measures to improve the UK's ability to exchange tax information with other countries. Effective exchange of information is a key tool in reducing tax evasion by the use of offshore accounts.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated cost of tax evasion was in each of the last 10 years. [49082]

Dawn Primarolo: No such figures are available. There is no generally accepted method of producing a measure sufficiently reliable to be of value.

The Inland Revenue has a continuing programme of counter-evasion work which covers all parts of the United Kingdom. Resources are deployed to detect evasion across the tax system with an emphasis on areas of high tax risk.

Taxation

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many forward contracts have been agreed by the Inland Revenue to allow taxpayers to negotiate a fixed regular payment of tax in place of the submission of an annual return in each year from 1997 to date; how many such agreements are in place; when such an agreement was first made; under what circumstances such agreements are made; and what the annual income is to the Inland Revenue from such agreements; [49292]

(2) how many UK taxpayers who make fixed regular payment in lieu of the submission of an annual return enjoy non-domicile status. [49293]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Inland Revenue has made a small number of such agreements, entered into at various dates since 1988, some involving taxpayers domiciled outside the United Kingdom. Typically, the arrangements agree a practical basis for taxing future income and gains where there would otherwise be particular difficulties in establishing an exact figure.

Three agreements involving fixed regular payments were made since the start of 1997, but none of these is now considered current. Two have expired. The Inland Revenue is contending in court proceedings that the third is invalid.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the services of his Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50311]

Ruth Kelly: The Better Quality Services (BQS) programme was launched in 1998 and adopted by the Cabinet Office in the "Modernising Government" White Paper of 1999 as a means of delivering continuous improvements in the quality and effectiveness of Government activities and services. It requires all Government Departments to review every activity and service over a five-year period starting in October 1999. The scheme covers all activities in Departments, agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies, and is similar in remit to the Best Value programme in local government.

HM Treasury does not provide services direct to the public however: under the umbrella of the Better Quality Services programme we have reviewed some 40 per cent. of our activities. By the end of 2004, efficiency reviews

will have been undertaken within all Treasury Directorates, using appropriate tools such as the European Foundation for Quality Management's Excellence Model.

Complaints

Mr. Breed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints were registered against his Department in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in those periods. [51222]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* Complaints handling is one of the areas covered by the Six Service Standards for central Government. Standard Five states that each central Government Department and agency "should have a complaints procedure or procedures for services it provides, publicise it, including on the internet, and send the customer information if they ask". Information about the Treasury's complaints procedures is on the Treasury's website at: www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/About/about_complaints.cfm

The Cabinet Office guidance "How to Deal with Complaints" advises Departments and agencies that they should develop a system to record all complaints about service delivery and policy. The Treasury has yet to do this so the information requested is not collected centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the numbers of complaints taken up and upheld by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration is contained in the parliamentary ombudsman's annual reports covering the periods specified. Copies of the annual reports are available in the Library of the House and for the reports from 1997–98 on the parliamentary ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/par01/index.htm

During 2001–02 the Treasury received two new statutory statements of complaint from the parliamentary ombudsman and have responded to both which have been resolved. Since 1 April 2002 the Treasury has received no new statutory statements of complaint.

The Treasury has one case that is current.

Budget Red Book

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to table 4.4 on page 79 of the 2002 Budget Red Book, if he will provide figures for each column in respect of marginal deduction rates *(a)* over 50 per cent. and *(b)* over 40 per cent. [51656]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The table shows estimates of the number of families facing marginal deduction rates (MDRs) in excess of 40 per cent.

Number of households facing MDRs of 40 per cent. and 50 per cent. (cumulative)

Marginal deduction rate	*Before Budget 1998*	*2002–03 system of tax and benefits*	*After introduction of NTCs*
Over 100 per cent.	5,000	0	0
Over 90 per cent.	130,000	45,000	45,000
Over 80 per cent.	300,000	210,000	200,000
Over 70 per cent.	740,000	255,000	260,000
Over 60 per cent.	760,000	940,000	1,450,000
Over 50 per cent.	760,000	1,140,000	1,600,000

Number of households facing MDRs of 40 per cent. and 50 per cent. (cumulative)

Marginal deduction rate	*Before Budget 1998*	*2002–03 system of tax and benefits*	*After introduction of NTCs*
Over 40 per cent.	800,000	1,180,000	1,775,000

This analysis does not take into account the way in which the new tax credits will respond to rises in income, described in detail in "The Child and Working Tax Credit". The new tax credits respond only to rises in income in the current year of more than £2,500, disregarding the first £2,500 of any rise. This means that recipients will not see their tax credits reduced as soon as their income rises, so reducing the effective marginal deduction in any one year.The figures in the table, which cover the number of households in receipt of either income related benefits or the working families tax credit (WFTC) or new tax credits from April 2003, where at least one person works 16 hours or more, include the effects of income tax and national insurance contributions, and the withdrawal of housing benefit and council tax benefit.

The effect of tax and benefit changes introduced since Budget 1998, including the WFTC, reduced the number of households facing MDRs in excess of 70 per cent. by around half a million. As WFTC is more generous than the family credit that it replaced, more households benefit from it, hence the larger numbers facing MDRs over 40 and 50 per cent. in 2002–03.

Building on the success of WFTC, the Government will be introducing a new system of tax credits from April 2003. As the new tax credits will be more generous and inclusive than the current system of support, more households will be eligible, and those currently eligible will gain more, hence a greater number will face MDRs over 40 and 50 per cent. from 2003–04.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of companies that will gain in 2002–03 from the exemption from corporation tax of companies with taxable profits of less than £10,000; and what the cost to public funds will be. [51776]

Dawn Primarolo: 150,000 companies with profits of £10,000 or less and with total corporation tax liabilities of £50 million in 2002–03 under a 10 per cent. starting rate of CT will have no liability as a result of the new zero rate band. Further information about changes to the corporation tax rates for small companies is contained in the Budget 2002 report.

Wanless Report Team

Mr. Maples: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of each member of the team listed in the Wanless report on the Future of the NHS, whether they are Treasury officials; and of those that are *(a)* what grade they hold and *(b)* what their individual functions in the Treasury are. [52234]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The following members of the Health Trends Review team are Treasury officials: Martin Beck (Range D); Jonathan Black (Range E), Ilona Blue

(Range E), Simon Brindle (Range E), Anita Charlesworth (Range F), Marian Fairweather (Range B), Duncan Innes (Range E) and Ian Walker (Range F). Most of these officials worked exclusively for the Health Trends Review team, supporting Derek Wanless in his review of the long-term trends affecting the UK health service. Two also worked part of the time for the Treasury's Productivity and Public Service Delivery Analysis teams.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many net additional staff his Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52438]

Ruth Kelly: The information for HM Treasury is shown in the table:

Month/ type of staff	*Executive officer level*		*Administrative level*	
	Headcount	*FTE*	*Headcount*	*FTE*
June 2001				
Permanent	0	0	4	4
Casual	1	1	5	5
FTA	0	0	0	0
Loan in	0	0	0	0
Total	1	1	9	9
July 2001				
Permanent	1	1	2	2
Casual	1	1	8	8
FTA	1	1	0	0
Loan in	1	1	0	0
Total	4	4	10	10
August 2001				
Permanent	3	3	2	2
Casual	−1	−1	−2	−2
FTA	0	0	0	0
Loan in	0	0	1	1
Total	2	2	1	1
September 2001				
Permanent	1	1	5	5
Casual	−1	−1	−8	−8
FTA	1	1	5	5
Loan in	0	0	1	1
Total	1	1	3	3
October 2001				
Permanent	1	1	0	0
Casual	1	1	0	0
FTA	0	0	0	0
Loan in	0	0	1	1
Total	2	2	1	1
November 2001				
Permanent	0	0	10	9.8
Casual	1	1	0	0
FTA	0	0	0	0
Loan in	0	0	0	0
Total	1	1	10	9.8
December 2001				
Permanent	0	0	7	7
Casual	−1	−1	0	0
FTA	0	0	0	0
Loan in	0	0	0	0
Total	−1	−1	7	7
January 2002				
Permanent	1	1	8	7.4
Casual	−1	−1	−1	−1
FTA	0	0	−1	−1
Loan in	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	6	5.4
February 2002				
Permanent	0	0	0	0
Casual	0	0	2	2
FTA	0	0	1	1
Loan in	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	3	3
March 2002				
Permanent	2	2	5	5
Casual	0	0	−1	−1
FTA	0	0	0	0
Loan in	1	1	2	2
Total	3	3	6	6

Source:
HM Treasury's Personnel Database

Terrorist Suspects

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to freeze the assets of a person whose name has been communicated to him consequent on the G7 summit; and if he will make a statement. [53082]

Ruth Kelly: The individuals named at the G7 summit have been listed by the United Nations Security Council under resolution 1390, which imposes sanctions against the Taliban, Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda and their associates. In line with our international obligations the Government instructed the Bank of England to issue an assets freeze on these individuals and organisations.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 23 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 127–28W, what percentage of revenue raised by the climate change levy in 2001–02 has been *(a)* recycled to business through a reduction in employers' national insurance contributions and *(b)* funds targeted programmes of support measures for business investing in energy-saving technologies and practices; and if he will make a statement. [53054]

Mr. Boateng: As set out in the answer of 23 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 127–28W, climate change levy receipts for the year 2001–02 were £551 million. The 0.3 percentage point reduction in employers' national insurance contributions was worth approximately £1 billion in 2001–02. The scheme of enhanced capital allowances was expected to cost £70 million in 2001–02 and an additional £50 million was allocated to support for energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library copies of each version of the internal guidance which have been drawn up by his Department since 1 January 1999 to assist staff in his Department to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. [53388]

Ruth Kelly: The internal guidance to the Data Protection Act 1998 that is used to assist staff in answering subject access requests is being placed in the Library.

Departmental Underspends

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much departmental underspend was carried over from financial years *(a)* 2000–01 to 2001–02 and *(b)* 2001–02 to 2002–03 (i) in total and (ii) in the health budget. [53591]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Table 6 of "Public Expenditure 2000–01—Provisional Outturn" (CM 5243) shows details of departmental entitlements to carry forward underspends from 2000–01 into 2001–02. The individual entitlements may also include an element of underspending from earlier years.

Details of the carry forward of 2001–02 underspends into 2002–03 are not available at present but will be announced before the summer recess.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to allow underspend to be carried forward to Departments other than the initial recipient Department. [53586]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The End Year Flexibility (EYF) scheme, introduced with effect from 1 April 1999, allows Departments to carry forward their departmental expenditure limits (DEL) underspends (normally less the value of DEL Reserve claims agreed during the year) from one year to the next. There are no plans to amend the scheme to allow the reallocation of one Department's underspending to another.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the underspends were in the financial year 2001–02; for the Departments of *(a)* Health, *(b)* Education and Skills, *(c)* Defence, *(d)* Home and *(e)* Transport, Local Government and the Regions. [53592]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Table C14 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" shows estimated outturn by Department. Details of Department's final plans and provisional outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published before the summer recess.

National Insurance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage share of expenditure from the national insurance fund was allocated to *(a)* the NHS, *(b)* each category of contributory benefit expenditure and *(c)* pension rebates in each year since 1996–97; and what the estimate is for 2001–02. [53475]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is provided in the national insurance fund accounts for 1996–97 (HC465), 1997–98 (HC130), 1998–99 (HC146), 1999–2000 (HC446) and for 2000–01 and 2001–02 in the report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Up-rating Order 2002 and the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Funds Payments) Order 2002 (CM5383).

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer following his account of classification of personal tax credits on page 216 of the Budget Red Book, how much of the expenditure on the WFTC in the latest year for which figures are available is less than equal to the tax liability of the household; how much expenditure on credits is exceeding liability; and what estimates he has made of his breakdown for the *(a)* child tax credit and *(b)* workers tax credit. [53648]

Dawn Primarolo: For 2001–02, around 12 per cent. of the working families tax credit scores as negative tax.

For the working tax credit (WTC) and child tax credit (CTC), the latest available estimates are that about 10–11 per cent. of the new tax credits will score as negative tax in 2004–05 and later years. The proportion will be slightly higher, at about 13.5 per cent., in 2003–04. As part of the transitional arrangements child allowance payments (at enhanced CTC rates) to income support and jobseeker's allowance recipients will still count as social security benefits in the first year of the new credits, and are not included in the tax credit total until 2004–05. As these recipients are likely to have much lower income tax liabilities than other WTC and CTC recipients, the proportion scoring as tax falls in 2004–05.

Separate figures for WTC and CTC are not available.

Stamp Duty

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many properties per annum he expects to benefit over the next three years from the exemptions from stamp duty for properties in disadvantaged areas listed in line 2 of Table A2.1 of the Financial Statement and Budget report. [53406]

Ruth Kelly: The number of properties per annum benefiting over the next three years from the current stamp duty exemption listed in Table A2.1 of the FSBR is estimated at around 40,000. At present the exemption applies to property transactions in designated wards where the consideration does not exceed £150,000. The Government intend to abolish stamp duty for all non-residential property transactions in these wards, subject to state aid approval.

Lung Cancer

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the lung cancer mortality rates were in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [53532]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Ian Gibson, dated 30 April 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning lung cancer mortality rates for each of the last five years for which figures are available. (53532) I am replying in his absence.

The figures requested are given in the table below:

Mortality rates[1] for malignant neoplasm of trachea, bronchus or lung[2], England and Wales, 1996–2000[3]

	Rate per 100,000	
Calendar year	*Males*	*Females*
1996	681	292
1997	649	285
1998	641	291
1999	609	289
2000	590	285

[1] Directly age-standardised to the European Standards Population.
[2] Selected using code 162 from the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision.
[3] Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year.

Source:
Office for National Statistics, 'Mortality Statistics: Cause, Review of the Registrar General on deaths by cause, sex and age, in England and Wales 2000.' Series DH2, Number 27, The Stationery Office (London: 2001).

Emigration

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many UK citizens emigrated in each of the last five years. [53136]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 30 April 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question on emigration of UK citizens. (53136)

The British Nationality Act 1981, which came into force on 1st January 1983, replaced citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies, with British citizenship, British Overseas citizenship, and British Dependent Territories citizenship. Therefore, the attached table shows outward international migration by British citizens during the last five years from 1996 to 2000.

Total international migration: British citizens emigrating 1996 to 2000, United Kingdom

thousands

	British citizens
1996	142.8
1997	134.5
1998	114.6
1999	126.5
2000	152.3

Note:
Figures in these tables represent total international migration combining data from the International Passenger Survey, Home Office data on asylum seekers, and people who entered the UK as short-term visitors but were subsequently granted an extension of stay for a year or longer for other reasons, and estimates of migration between the UK and the Irish Republic.

Pornographic Films

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether film tax relief has been extended to pornographic films made in the United Kingdom since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [53435]

Dawn Primarolo: Three of the four film tax reliefs are used for films, the master copy, tape or disc of which has been certified by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport as a British qualifying film. The changes announced in the Budget would restrict the reliefs to British qualifying films made for theatrical exhibition in the commercial cinema. The fourth relief is used for big budget international productions.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 2 May 2002

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Regional Governance

Joyce Quin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will publish the White Paper on English regional governance. [54682]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and I intend to publish the White Paper on Thursday 9 May.

United Nations Equator Initiative

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the UK supports the aims of the United Nations Equator Initiative. [48155]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

The UK has not been directly involved in the United Nations Equator Initiative, which has been designed to support the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the Convention on Biodiversity. However, we support its aim to reduce poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the equatorial belt by fostering, supporting and strengthening community partnerships. The initiative will highlight successful initiatives undertaken by communities in the equatorial belt who are using their biological resources in a sustainable way to improve livelihoods. The first Equator Initiative Awards for such initiatives will be presented at WSSD.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the written questions asked of him between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if he will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54077]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) today.

As at 30 April my Department had one question from February and one question from March that had not received a substantive reply. These have since been answered.

In addition 20 questions tabled in April had not received a substantive reply that were due for answer by that date.

PRIME MINISTER

Aga Khan

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met *(a)* the Aga Khan, *(b)* the Aga Khan development network and *(c)* the Aga Khan Foundation; what the subject matter of the meeting was; and what discussions he had in advance of the meeting. [53807]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings.

St. Thomas's

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what recent representations he has received on the sale of the St. Thomas's old medical school site; [53806]

(2) what recent discussions he has had on the St. Thomas's old medical school site. [53805]

The Prime Minister: I have received representations. I have made it clear that I am not in a position to intervene in the decision making on the St. Thomas's site. The site is owned by King's college London, and decisions on its future are a matter for them.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the written questions asked of him between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if he will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54076]

The Prime Minister: Two ordinary written parliamentary questions tabled for answer on 24 and 29 April 2002 respectively have not yet been answered, but will be shortly.

My office aims to answer all ordinary written parliamentary questions within five working days, and named day written parliamentary questions on the day named.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are part-time employees. [47414]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Leslie), on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 553W.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46836]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 348W.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 42–45W, on statutory instruments, what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of each of the statutory instruments listed. [50014]

Angela Eagle: Costs associated with regulatory proposals are considered at the policy development stage. A regulatory impact assessment (RIA) is completed for regulatory proposals unless there are no or negligible costs, and sets out the impact, in terms of costs, benefits and risks of the proposed regulation which could affect businesses, charities or the voluntary sector. RIAs are available from the Library.

Drug Cases

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug cases were dealt with in magistrates courts in the Greater London area in each of the last three years. [50876]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The available information, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, provided in the table, shows the number of defendants proceeded against in magistrates courts within the Metropolitan police area for drug offences by outcome in the years 1998 to 2000.

Information on court proceedings for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Number of defendants[1] proceeded against in magistrates courts in the Metropolitan police area by outcome, 1998–2000

	Type of drug offences	
	All types	*of which: Class A*
Defendants proceeded against		
1998	11,312	3,729
1999	11,280	4,200
2000	10,387	4,205
Percentage of:		
Proceedings terminated early		
1998	10.7	11.7
1999	10.5	11.3
2000	11.1	11.6

Number of defendants[1] proceeded against in magistrates courts in the Metropolitan police area by outcome, 1998–2000

	Type of drug offences	
	All types	*of which: Class A*
Defendants acquitted		
1998	0.3	0.3
1999	0.3	0.3
2000	0.3	0.3
Defendants convicted		
1998	17.2	31.4
1999	15.5	27.3
2000	16.3	28.9
Defendants committed for trial		
1998	71.8	56.6
1999	73.7	61.1
2000	72.2	59.1

[1] For which a drug offence was the principal offence

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 18 March from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Gul Hargus. [51794]

Angela Eagle: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office replied to my right hon. Friend on 16 April 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 18 February from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. A Khilei. [51793]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary wrote to my right hon. Friend on 22 April 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 22 February from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Debbie Esho. [51792]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 1 May 2002.

British Overseas Citizenship

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people he estimates hold British overseas citizenship; and what information he holds about their countries of residence. [52407]

Angela Eagle: There is no reliable way of estimating the number of British overseas citizens. However, returns from our consulates and diplomatic missions suggest that there may be about 1.5 million such citizens, with the largest concentrations residing in Malaysia, India and Kenya. Many of these also hold the citizenship of the country in which they are resident.

Suicide and Voluntary Euthanasia

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the research commissioned by him in the last five years on *(a)* suicide, *(b)* assisted suicide and *(c)* voluntary euthanasia. [52314]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Policy in this area is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department of Health (Ms Blears) on 12 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 670W.

Domestic Security

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much of the £50 million provided for domestic security responsibilities since 11 September 2001 has been spent. [52360]

Mr. Blunkett: All the additional money allocated to the Home Office that was announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his statement on the pre-Budget report on 27 November 2001 has been distributed to provide operational and technical support for the police and to enhance our preparedness to deal with the terrorist threat.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what religious beliefs have been declared by prisoners held in the special secure unit at HMP Belmarsh; what pastoral care is available for groups of prisoners of each religion; and what arrangements have been made by prison authorities to respect the *(a)* religious practices and *(b)* dietary requirements of each religion. [52462]

Beverley Hughes: The facility at Belmarsh is designated as a High Secure Unit (HSU). Currently the religious beliefs of prisoners within the unit who have declared a faith are (a) Church of England, (b) Roman Catholic, (c) Judaism, and (d) Islam.

All prisoners have access to ministers of their chosen faith, either as groups or individuals, at least once a week. Additional access can be requested by prisoners, which is then arranged. Religious services for each faith are held weekly within the HSU. In addition, the HSU can accommodate additional services required during times of religious festivals. Timings for religious services are built into the regime.

Individual religious dietary requirements are offered at each mealtime and prisoners are able to choose from the selection of food on offer. Religious festivals or celebrations, which require a change in the content of meals or the time of their provision, are also catered for. All food is prepared to the respective religious belief.

Prisoners are also supplied with religious items to enable them to practice their belief.

People Trafficking

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to offer victims of people-trafficking a reflection delay in order to make an informed decision regarding the pressing of charges against the traffickers. [52247]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* Arrangements already exist which enable the police to ask for someone subject to immigration control to be allowed to enter or remain in the United Kingdom where this would assist in the investigation of organised crime. These arrangements would permit a period of reflection, but it is not offered automatically. The Government have yet to decide whether or not to opt in to the proposed European directive on this subject.

Disability Discrimination Act

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what adjustments have been made to his Department's premises following the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and what the cost of these adjustments has been as a proportion of the Department's budget. [53026]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The Home Department has taken account of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 at its premises. Alteration works ranging from local works to suit the requirements of individuals to larger scale changes such as the construction of ramps, chair lifts and the refurbishment of toilets to accommodate wheelchair access have been undertaken where appropriate.

Disability Discrimination Act surveys have been undertaken at a number of sites and remedial work has been undertaken or is planned as appropriate. At other premises, we have ensured that the provisions of the Act are covered as part of larger refurbishment projects, or when acquiring new property.

The nature and cost of alterations to the Department's premises in order to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act are not recorded centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Racial Equality

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ask the CRE to extend the deadline for parish councils which received the consultative document on the draft code of practice on the duty to promote race equality late; and if he will list, by county, the parish councils which responded to the consultation. [53464]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* As I said in my reply of 13 March 2002, the consultation period ended on 28 February 2002 but the deadline was extended until 15 March 2002 for those Parish Councils who notified the Commission for Racial Equality that they had received the consultation pack late. No further extension is possible.

The draft Code of Practice was laid before Parliament on 17 April.

The 87 Parish Councils which responded to the consultation exercise are listed alphabetically below (but a breakdown by county is not available).

Name of Parish Council

Ardeley Parish Council
Arlesey Town Council
Ashington Parish Council
Balderton Parish Council
Barlaston Parish Council
Barton Mills Parish Council
Beccles Town Council
Birchanger Parish Council

Birstall Parish Council
Blithfield Parish Council
Bradwell Parish Council
Brockdish and Thorpe Parish Council
Buckingham Town Council
Cheddleton Parish Council
Chepping Wycombe Parish Council
Chipperfield Parish Council
Chipstable Parish Council
City of Ely Council
Clayworth Parish Council
Cottered Parish Council
Dean and Shelton Parish Council
Dilham Parish Council
Dover Town Council
East Hoathly with Halland Parish Council
Eastfield Parish Council
Emberton Parish Council
Etchingham Parish Council
Fakenham Town Council
Farnham Parish Council
Gnosall Parish Council
Godalming Town Council
Granborough Parish Council
Gurnard Parish Council
Haughton Parish Council
Haydon Wick Parish Council
Headley Parish Council
Hedge End Town Council
Hedon Parish Council
Hessle Town Council
Hexham Town Council
Holtby Parish Council
Holywell and Needingworth PC
Hopton and Coton Parish Council
Hoveton Parish Council
Hythe and Dibden Parish Council
Ingestre With Tixall Parish Council
Leominster Town Council
Llantwit Major Town Council
Maplethorpe and Sutton Town Council
Mavesyn Ridware Parish Council
Mossley Town Council
Newborough Parish Council
Newbrough Parish Council
Newholm—cum—Dunsley Parish Council
North Hykeham Town Coucil
Ormesby St. Michael Parish Council
Perton Parish Council
Peterlee Town Council
Porter Heigham Parish Council
Purleigh Parish Council
Quarnford Parish Council
Ringwood Town Council
Saltburn, Marske and New Marske Parish Council
Santon Downham Parish Council
Seaford Town Council
Sealescombe Parish Council
Shildon Town Council
Skegness Town Coucil
St Ives Town Council
Steeton with Eastburn Parish Council
Steppingley Parish Council
Stotfold Town Council
Tavistock Town Council
Terrington St Clement Parish Council
Tollesbury Parish Council
Trimingham Parish Council
Uckfield Parish Council
Uckfield Town Council
Warden Parish Council
Watford Rural Parish Council
Werrington Parish Council
West Buckland Parish Council
West Itchenor Parish Council
Wootton Parish Council
Worth Parish Council
Wyhondley Parish Council
Wythall Parish Council.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the UK and EU travel ban on Zimbabwean officials is enforced by *(a)* individual airlines and *(b)* immigration officials at ports of entry. [53134]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* The United Kingdom has adopted a travel ban on certain Zimbabwean officials consistent with a Common Position passed by the European Council. Whilst responsibility for deciding whether to carry a passenger ultimately rests with the airline, there is no requirement on the carrier to be fully satisfied in advance of travel that a passenger will be acceptable to the United Kingdom authorities. That judgment can be exercised only by the immigration officer on arrival. Airlines are, however, required to ensure that only properly documented passengers board their aircraft to the United Kingdom. Zimbabwean nationals do not require visas to enter the United Kingdom, but the airline is expected to ensure that the Zimbabwean passenger is the rightful holder of the passport being presented and that the document itself is acceptable for entry to the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom Immigration Service is responsible for enforcing the travel ban. Immigration officers at ports have been instructed not to grant entry to those Zimbabwean officials placed on the European Union travel ban list.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Zimbabwean nationals, subject to a travel ban by the United States, have recently passed through United Kingdom ports en-route to the US and any other destinations; and what liaison there is between UK and US immigration officials on this subject. [53133]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* We are not aware of any Zimbabwean nationals, subject to a travel ban, passing through the United Kingdom to other countries. But at major United Kingdom airports, only passengers who present themselves at the immigration control seeking entry whilst in transit would come to the

attention of the Immigration Service. Many others will remain airside and travel on in direct transit to their destinations and without seeking leave to enter the United Kingdom.

The Immigration and Nationality Directorate has strong links with Untied States officials. Anyone identified by the Immigration Service on arrival in the United Kingdom declared by the American authorities to be unacceptable for entry to the United States will be prevented from travelling on.

Asylum Seekers

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many pilot accommodation centres for asylum seekers he is seeking to secure; when they will be identified; when they will be announced; and when they will be operational. [52347]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* In respect of the number of pilot accommodation centres we are seeking to secure I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 160W.

In respect of the identification, announcement and operation of these sites, I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 781W, and to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 97W.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the development of all asylum seekers accommodation centres will require planning consent. [52350]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* Planning consent will be required in every case.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how it is proposed that planning applications for asylum seekers' accommodation centres will be handled. [52349]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* Planning notifications will be submitted under the terms of Circular 18–84, which covers developments by Government Departments on Crown property. In every case there will be full consultation with the local authorities and local communities.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he proposes to issue to private companies proposing asylum seeker accommodation centres as to the standards expected of them in their relations with local communities and representative bodies. [52356]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* We cannot set standards for organisations prior to their involvement formally in arrangements for the delivery of accommodation centres. However, those invited to bid would be expected to do so in accordance with normally expected standards.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what characteristics he seeks in the sites suitable for asylum seekers' accommodation centres. [52348]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1134W.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to provide information to local communities where proposals to develop asylum seeker accommodation centres are made. [52355]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 900W.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many expressions of interest he has received from *(a)* private landowners and *(b)* private sector prospective operators of asylum seeker accommodation centres. [52352]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 April 2002]:* The information requested is commercially confidential.

Yarl's Wood

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Ministers were informed that a decision had been made not to fit a sprinkler system to the premises at Yarl's Wood detention centre; and if he will make a statement. [39523]

Angela Eagle: The decision not to fit sprinklers was informed by a number of different expert sources. The Minister responsible at the time made the decision based upon this advice.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the latest estimated cost is of the Yarl's Wood fire; and how much is expected to be borne by the Exchequer. [49846]

Angela Eagle: For legal reasons I am unable to comment at this stage on the costs of the Yarl's Wood incident and who will bear responsibility for those costs.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railways

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many miles of new railway track have been commissioned in the last six months. [44236]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The maintenance of track, including repairs and replacement, is carried out daily. Some large scale infrastructure projects are currently in hand, such as the West Coast Main Line upgrade which includes track-relaying, and others are being planned, such as the East Coast Main Line upgrade. A host of other infrastructure projects are also in hand or planned nation-wide, as indicated in the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan.

Budget (Effects on Cheltenham)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what effect the Budget of 17 April will have on the transport system in Cheltenham. [52936]

Mr. Jamieson: The Chancellor's Budget statement included a number of fiscal and other measures relating to road vehicles and fuels. An assessment of the impact of these on the transport system in Cheltenham has not been carried out.

Young People

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what subjects and on which dates his Department has consulted organisations representing young people; and if he will list such organisations. [52491]

Ms Keeble: This information is not held centrally in the manner requested and could be secured only at disproportionate cost.

The Department is committed to the new core principles for the involvement of children and young people published by the Minister for Young People in November 2001. The Department will shortly be publishing an action plan setting out for the first time how it will implement these principles to extend the participation of children and young people in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much has been spent by his Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52743]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* My Department has not incurred any expenditure on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers or officials in the last five years.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much has been spent by his Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52703]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* My Department has not incurred any expenditure on training on voice coaching for Ministers or officials in the last five years.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much has been spent by his Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52727]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* There has been no expenditure for training in leadership skills for Ministers in the last five years. However, my Department actively encourages training in leadership skills for officials and as a result of the civil service reform programme a considerable commitment has been made in the last two years.

£000

Year	*Expenditure*
1997–98	n/a
1998–99	22.0
1999–2000	26.8
2000–01	207.0
2001–02	618.6

n/a = not available

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment his Department has made of EC Treaty Articles 81, 82, 87 and 88 with regard to the PPP of London Underground; [53114]

(2) what *(a)* discussions and *(b)* correspondence he and his Department have had with the European Commission with regard to the PPP of London Underground and EC Treaty Articles 81, 82, 87 and 88. [53113]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are aware of their obligations under European Community law. All appropriate regulatory clearances will be obtained before any PPP contracts take effect.

Construction Industry

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations have been made to his Department, and by whom, following the introduction of Building (Amendment) Regulations 2002. [53006]

Dr. Whitehead: Since the introduction of the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2002, my Department has had representations from the Federation of Master Builders and the Federation of Small Businesses. These representations have led to a number of letters and questions from MPs and Peers.

Up until 26 April we had also received around 30 items of correspondence, either directly or through Members of Parliament, from local authorities, industry bodies, individual installers of flues and glazing, window fabricators or potential scheme providers commenting on the schemes, asking for clarification on aspects of them, or wishing to be involved in self-certification. We have also held a number of meetings with further potential self-certification scheme providers in the fields of heating appliances, flue installation, energy ratings and assessments as well as with a trade body regarding the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme.

Council Housing

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much council tenant rent was written off in each of the last five years in each local authority. [53101]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities reported the total rent arrears written off their Housing Revenue Account during each of the years 1996–97 to 2000–01. This information has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Road Pricing

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what technology pilots into road pricing schemes his Department is involved with. [53221]

Mr. Jamieson: We are supporting research projects into technology suitable for urban congestion charging or lorry distance-based charging: a demonstration of interoperable charging and telematics systems (jointly with Leeds city council and the Highways Agency); and a project on dynamic freight analysis.

Tyneside Multi-modal Study

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the conclusions of the Tyneside multi-modal study will be published. [53480]

Mr. Jamieson: The Tyneside area multi-modal study report, including consultants' recommendations will be forwarded to the Regional Assembly in July 2002. The Assembly will consider the findings, together with all comments received, before forwarding their recommendations to Government. A ministerial decision on an investment strategy will be made after full consideration of the issues.

Rail Freight

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what protection is given to rail freight operators against increases in track access charges by the Rail Regulator. [53507]

Mr. Jamieson: The Rail Regulator published the final conclusions of his review of freight charging policy on 18 October 2001. This allowed a 50 per cent. reduction in the access charges that the freight operators pay Railtrack for the use of the network.

Chiltern Line

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on section 44.4 of the Chiltern franchise agreement, with particular reference to subsection (aa) and the reason that this clause was included in the agreement. [53503]

Mr. Jamieson: Clause 44.4(aa) was included in the Chiltern franchise agreement as a result of negotiations between the Strategic Rail Authority and M40 Trains.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if it is his policy to continue the provision for train operating companies to be reimbursed by the Government for additional costs resulting from an interim review and adjustment of track access charges by the Rail Regulator when all the remaining franchises are renewed; [53505]

(2) whether Chiltern will continue to be reimbursed by the Government for additional costs resulting from an interim review and adjustment of track access charges by the Rail Regulator as part of its new franchise agreement. [53504]

Mr. Jamieson: Yes. If such a provision was not included bidders for rail franchises would merely price the perceived risk of increased charges into their bids.

Seaports

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the security of seaports since 11 September. [R] [53647]

Mr. Jamieson: Under paragraph 1 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the practice to disclose details of security matters.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will reply to the letter to him dated 13 March 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Pat McGuinness. [53954]

Mr. Byers: I understand that Chris Shepley, Chief Inspector of the Planning Inspectorate, wrote to my right hon. Friend on 30 April.

Rural Housing

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 861W, on rural housing, how many households were identified as being in priority need for housing in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000, *(f)* 2001 and *(g)* 2002 in local authorities defined as rural. [53779]

Ms Keeble: Summary information on activity under the statutory homeless provisions of the 1996 Housing Act is reported to the Department by local authorities in England. This includes the number of households accepted as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. The numbers of these households in authorities categorised as either "mixed rural" or "deep rural" are as follows:

Households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need: rural authorities in England—financial year totals

	Number of households
1996–97	15,190
1997–98	14,460
1998–99	14,440
1999–2000	15,050
2000–2001	17,160

Source:
DTLR P1(E) housing activity return

Emergency Calls Service

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans he has to review back-up mechanisms in the event of a 999 telephone failure; and if he will make a statement; [54028]

(2) what measures are in place to ensure availability of 999 services in the event of failure in the local telephone network. [54029]

Dr. Whitehead: In addition to implementing contingency plans to restore the service, telephone companies liaise with the emergency services. The emergency services cover such circumstances with extra patrols, stationing vehicles at strategic points and advice through the media. Where possible calls will be transferred to another emergency service which should be in radio communication with the affected service.

Particular attention is paid to the resilience and robustness of the 999 service. DTLR manages a 999 liaison committee which brings together representatives of the emergency services and the telephone operating companies to consider issues affecting the service. This matter will be raised at the next meeting of the committee.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the level of service of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight 999 services on Thursday 25 April with particular reference to *(a)* emergency service 999 calls, *(b)* the telephone landlines in Southampton and parts of the Isle of Wight and *(c)* back-up arrangements. [53893]

Dr. Whitehead: At 18.30 on Thursday a fault occurred in the equipment at the Southampton Bargate BT telephone exchange. Customers in Southampton and some in surrounding areas in Hampshire and Wiltshire were affected and experienced loss of service. 80 per cent. of customers had been restored to service by midnight and almost all others by 3.55 am.

During the incident the BT call centres that answer 999 calls quickly liaised with the emergency services and implemented contingency plans. BT's 999 call centres are outside of the Southampton area. BT connected those who could make calls beyond their local area to neighbouring emergency services in Dorset or Hampshire who contacted the local emergency services using radio links or other means. For those who could only make local calls and therefore not access BT's 999 call centre, the emergency services covered these areas with extra patrols, stationing vehicles at strategic points and keeping the public informed through the media.

Isle of Wight Fire and Ambulance Control Rooms were not affected and callers on the Isle of Wight would have been able to make 999 calls as they are routed via equipment at a building in Portsmouth, not the affected Southampton unit. In the case of a request for police assistance, calls were routed via the temporary links to Dorset police on behalf of Hampshire police.

BT have informed me that a detailed investigation has established that a number of crucial components failed at the same time.

Railtrack Successor

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the categories and value of payments made to, by and on behalf of the proposed Company Limited by Guarantee as a successor to Railtrack which will be paid from public funds. [53802]

Mr. Spellar: The successor to Railtrack plc will continue to receive income to the time and profile as set out in the regulator's October 2000 periodic review and the April 2001 agreement between the Government and Railtrack.

If Network Rail's bid is successful, the support to be provided by Government is outlined in the replies to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 812W, and to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 284–85W.

National Insurance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the cost in a full year of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* agencies of his Department and *(c)* local government carrying out functions within the responsibility of his Department. [53889]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the written questions asked of him between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if he will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54083]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council.

Since this Department was formed on 8 June 2001, Ministers have answered over 6,600 written questions. At 30 April 2002, 72 written questions had not received a substantive answer. By convention ordinary written questions are answered within a week of tabling and 60 of the 72 questions were tabled after 24 April. Of the remaining 12 questions, one named day question was given a holding reply on 18 March and a substantive answer was given on 2 May; seven other named day questions were given a holding reply on various dates in April and they have now been given substantive answers; and four ordinary written questions which were due for answer in the period 12 to 24 April were answered on 1 May.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people have been employed by her Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44908]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information on the numbers employed on New Deal is not held in a format that identifies those employed on the over 50 or lone parent programmes.

Information on the subsidised numbers employed under New Deal for Young People is as follows:

New Deal for Young People

Year	
1998–1999	12
1999–2000	26
2000–2001	50
2001–2002	3

The figures for 2000–02 relate to DfES and its former Department DfEE. The figure for 2000–01 was prior to the Machinery of Government changes. The figure for 2001–02 takes account of the Machinery of Government changes.

Since 1 April 2000 there have been 51 unsubsidised New Deal job starts. It is not possible to allocate any of these to any particular age or client group.

New Deal recruits take up existing vacancies so any extra cost to public funds is limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and to any training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be identified.

School Transport

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of school children travelled by *(a)* foot, *(b)* bus, *(c)* car, *(d)* bicycle, *(e)* train and *(f)* other form of transport to rural (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in (A) 1999, (B) 2000 and (C) 2001. [46458]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Information is only available in respect of people living in rural areas, not for rural schools, and data are not sufficiently reliable for individual years.

From the National Travel Survey, the distribution of mode of travel to school for people living in rural areas of Great Britain over the period 1992–2000 was as follows:

Percentage travelling by:	*Primary*	*Secondary*
(a) Foot	41	19
(b) Bus	15	51
(c) Car	40	22
(d)-(e)-(f) Bicycle, train, other	4	8

Note:
Percentages are calculated across all children coded as being in education in the National Travel Survey. Primary pupils defined as children aged 5–10 in the National Travel Survey Secondary pupils defined as children aged 11–16 in the National Travel Survey.
Source:
DTLR

The sample size is too small to give accurate figures for bicycle and train which together account for less than half of the last category shown. Rural areas are those with a population of less than 3,000 as defined by the 1991 Census.

Business Development Unit

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the work of the Business Development Unit; and what her estimate is of the financial value of sponsorship and other support they have secured. [53741]

Mr. Timms: The Business Development Unit has, since its establishment in January 2001, managed and developed the Department's relationships with appropriate key business partners, promoting their understanding of and responses to our educational policies; and to date secured sponsorship of over £7.3 million in cash and in kind from businesses in support of national projects for the schools sector.

Examinations

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils are studying *(a)* mathematics, *(b)* physics, *(c)* chemistry, *(d)* biology, *(e)* history, *(f)* English literature, *(g)* French, *(h)* geography and *(i)* economics at (i) GCSE and (ii) A-level; and how many passed in each subject, broken down by grade achieved in all institutions in each year from 1997 to 2001. [48245]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the following tables.

GCSE entries and achievements of all candidates in all schools and further education sector colleges, 1996–97 to 2000–01

Academic year	*Number of entries*	*Grade A**	*Grade A*	*Grade B*	*Grade C*	*Grade D*	*Grade E*	*Grade F*	*Grade G*	*Total A*-C*	*Total A*-G*
1996–97											
Mathematics	660,910	13,121	46,520	90,104	152,279	106,312	97,925	76,689	77,960	302,024	622,567
Physics	38,527	5,429	8,700	11,063	7,627	2,866	1,491	579	772	32,819	37,811
Chemistry	39,406	5,597	8,441	11,386	8,397	2,835	1,344	539	867	33,821	38,617
Biology	52,043	4,592	10,564	13,296	10,016	5,817	3,609	1,193	2,956	38,468	49,338
History	212,215	9,266	27,047	42,351	41,631	30,852	24,206	17,456	19,406	120,295	203,545
English literature	468,037	12,721	50,611	100,800	121,708	83,831	49,928	27,929	20,509	285,840	455,987
French	313,013	12,193	44,354	44,317	52,757	57,300	41,737	33,666	26,689	153,621	302,679
Geography	265,895	10,560	32,290	48,136	51,560	44,060	35,023	24,067	20,199	142,546	257,229
Economics	8,530	244	1,027	1,719	2,179	1,546	627	454	734	5,169	8,021

GCSE entries and achievements of all candidates in all schools and further education sector colleges, 1996–97 to 2000–01

Academic year	Number of entries	Grade A*	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade D	Grade E	Grade F	Grade G	Total A*-C	Total A*-G
1997–98											
Mathematics	644,224	12,994	47,887	96,232	140,079	112,866	102,275	57,344	31,897	297,192	601,574
Physics	39,316	6,511	9,512	9,765	8,189	3,342	1,121	322	88	33,977	38,850
Chemistry	39,924	5,524	10,571	10,617	8,170	3,027	1,119	319	102	34,882	39,449
Biology	51,354	4,920	11,265	11,867	11,237	6,026	2,668	829	329	39,289	49,141
History	192,621	9,703	27,777	38,008	36,462	26,683	21,587	15,910	9,670	111,950	185,800
English literature	455,651	16,175	47,530	88,119	125,222	83,181	52,265	25,160	10,423	277,046	448,075
French	312,358	18,686	34,615	41,480	57,374	59,784	48,060	31,718	15,547	152,155	307,264
Geography	240,822	10,924	28,993	39,153	53,430	43,270	29,932	19,030	9,300	132,500	234,032
Economics	6,625	247	791	1,384	1,583	1,188	595	324	214	4,005	6,326
1998–99											
Mathematics	650,930	14,700	50,136	102,120	141,303	120,218	96,772	59,449	31,841	308,259	616,539
Physics	40,166	7,582	9,787	9,641	7,997	3,361	968	330	98	35,007	39,764
Chemistry	40,653	6,441	10,523	10,353	8,193	3,331	1,036	336	87	35,510	40,300
Biology	50,329	5,918	10,982	12,106	10,671	5,681	2,265	758	329	39,677	48,710
History	192,206	11,429	28,975	38,843	36,287	26,342	21,114	14,637	8,599	115,534	186,226
English literature	471,723	16,390	53,513	102,057	122,557	80,655	51,149	27,077	10,685	294,517	464,083
French	316,742	19,529	35,488	44,213	62,256	58,243	46,460	31,599	14,608	161,486	312,396
Geography	234,144	11,082	29,223	38,786	53,669	40,767	27,564	17,412	8,681	132,760	227,184
Economics	5,766	241	770	1,202	1,419	1,037	421	270	181	3,632	5,541
1999–2000											
Mathematics	651,804	17,951	50,100	105,652	147,105	118,257	98,578	57,102	27,198	320,808	621,943
Physics	40,230	7,088	10,447	9,868	7,851	3,347	920	264	88	35,254	39,873
Chemistry	40,524	6,564	10,667	10,237	8,249	3,285	896	241	64	35,717	40,203
Biology	50,068	5,853	11,528	11,798	10,880	5,490	2,050	672	273	40,059	48,544
History	193,447	13,205	30,720	39,016	35,627	26,040	20,194	14,779	8,474	118,568	188,055
English literature	476,486	17,024	56,469	107,386	120,040	80,333	50,561	25,732	10,758	300,919	468,303
French	318,889	19,811	35,340	42,832	64,276	57,625	46,288	32,128	15,677	162,259	313,977
Geography	221,005	11,315	28,836	37,148	50,137	38,099	25,333	16,135	8,009	127,436	215,012
Economics	5,352	221	709	1,137	1,324	989	404	233	134	3,391	5,151
2000–01											
Mathematics	670,858	18,250	55,248	111,725	150,697	121,798	95,976	58,194	28,243	335,920	640,131
Physics	40,602	7,212	10,678	9,742	8,208	3,188	889	252	97	35,840	40,266
Chemistry	40,911	6,761	11,103	10,117	8,241	3,211	903	228	59	36,222	40,623
Biology	48,961	6,858	11,185	11,740	10,286	4,778	1,862	709	269	40,069	47,687
History	197,789	15,164	31,241	38,705	36,000	26,915	20,598	14,668	8,739	121,110	192,030
English literature	499,205	18,515	59,512	112,480	124,886	86,740	50,825	25,403	11,707	315,393	490,068
French	326,065	22,022	32,971	41,496	71,810	59,683	45,143	31,293	16,374	168,299	320,792
Geography	223,525	17,282	29,126	35,964	50,501	36,105	24,721	15,697	7,792	132,873	217,188
Economics	4,694	246	650	1,038	1,170	773	362	172	113	3,104	4,524

Source:
Taken from data collected for the Secondary Performance Tables.

GCE A-level entries and achievements of all candidates in all schools and further education sector colleges, 1996–97 to 2000–01

Academic year	Number of entries	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade D	Grade E	Grades A-E
1996–97							
Mathematics	63,858	17,078	12,533	10,772	8,961	6,636	55,980
Physics	29,844	6,291	6,350	5,400	4,653	3,446	26,140
Chemistry	38,251	7,960	7,991	6,962	5,661	4,574	33,148
Biology	51,477	7,329	9,861	9,736	9,069	7,570	43,565
History	38,066	5,435	7,007	7,753	7,020	5,101	32,316
English literature	55,905	9,218	11,350	13,072	11,650	7,182	52,472
French	22,503	4,532	4,514	4,422	3,779	2,770	20,017
Geography	38,581	4,540	8,276	8,979	7,428	5,212	34,435
Economics	20,217	3,186	3,374	3,681	3,604	2,788	16,633
1997–98							
Mathematics	64,346	18,103	12,241	10,672	9,049	6,902	56,967
Physics	30,605	6,891	6,264	5,697	4,773	3,492	27,117
Chemistry	38,752	8,965	8,061	7,186	5,715	4,304	34,231
Biology	52,260	8,200	10,032	9,942	9,202	7,521	44,897
History	36,065	5,472	6,849	7,430	6,736	4,625	31,112
English literature	54,026	9,440	11,266	12,761	11,057	6,331	50,855
French	20,622	4,517	4,291	4,017	3,542	2,429	18,796
Geography	39,337	5,991	8,610	9,145	7,350	4,828	35,924
Economics	18,868	3,323	3,322	3,631	3,192	2,413	15,881

GCE A-level entries and achievements of all candidates in all schools and further education sector colleges, 1996–97 to 2000–01

Academic year	*Number of entries*	*Grade A*	*Grade B*	*Grade C*	*Grade D*	*Grade E*	*Grades A-E*
1998–99							
Mathematics	63,510	18,073	11,962	10,531	8,791	6,940	56,297
Physics	30,428	7,330	6,042	5,699	4,667	3,484	27,222
Chemistry	37,469	9,126	8,015	7,030	5,574	3,965	33,711
Biology	50,159	8,491	9,478	9,775	8,907	7,032	43,683
History	34,855	5,789	6,803	7,490	6,280	4,055	30,417
English literature	51,163	9,037	10,672	12,389	10,327	5,968	48,393
French	18,662	4,342	3,853	3,752	3,059	2,131	17,137
Geography	37,500	6,225	8,224	8,756	7,100	4,307	34,612
Economics	18,865	3,560	3,425	3,705	3,293	2,486	16,469
1999–2000							
Mathematics	60,734	17,600	11,543	10,156	8,679	6,222	54,200
Physics	28,945	7,179	5,720	5,312	4,390	3,300	25,901
Chemistry	36,696	9,237	8,061	6,823	5,389	3,713	33,223
Biology	48,987	8,436	9,546	9,630	8,609	6,819	43,040
History	34,488	5,887	6,809	7,575	6,125	3,984	30,380
English literature	48,417	9,066	10,100	11,943	9,720	5,290	46,119
French	16,049	3,807	3,430	3,194	2,609	1,710	14,750
Geography	33,405	6,029	7,438	7,578	5,980	3,813	30,838
Economics	17,742	3,736	3,261	3,282	3,141	2,250	15,670
2000–01							
Mathematics	61,202	17,732	11,362	9,894	8,625	6,607	54,220
Physics	28,725	7,121	5,698	5,260	4,241	3,343	25,663
Chemistry	35,138	9,170	7,622	6,512	4,980	3,671	31,955
Biology	46,868	8,519	9,237	9,232	7,945	6,412	41,345
History	35,032	6,356	7,223	7,636	6,104	3,641	30,960
English literature	47,486	9,403	9,915	11,648	9,351	4,928	45,245
French	16,102	4,010	3,308	3,150	2,571	1,731	14,770
Geography	33,461	6,387	7,477	7,526	5,948	3,669	31,007
Economics	17,369	3,829	3,263	3,498	3,029	1,964	15,583

Source:
Taken from data collected from the 16–18 School and College Performance Tables.

Ofsted

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what requirements were *(a)* placed on and *(b)* removed from the Office for Standards in Education in the last year for which information is available. [53892]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the reply about the requirements placed on, and removed from, HM Chief Inspector of Schools which I answered on 1 May.

Teachers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what reasons underlie the changes in the number of teacher training places since 1997. [54276]

Mr. Timms: The number of places on courses of initial teacher training that my right hon. Friend makes available each year is designed to ensure a supply of newly qualified teachers adequate for the forecast needs of maintained schools in England. The total is informed by a statistical model of the demand for new teachers, taking account of the availability of funding and of the capacity of training providers. The number of places available has risen each year since 1999–2000 and, from this September, will be the highest for over a decade.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the written questions asked of her between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if she will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54092]

Estelle Morris: The following table provides details of questions tabled to my Department and waiting reply as at 30 April.

Questioner	*Dates*	*PQs outstanding*
Mark Todd	2–28 February 2002	1
John Battle (1) John Bercow (4) Colin Breed (1) Damian Green (1) Lynne Jones (1) Eleanor Laing (3) Phil Willis (1) Tony Wright (1)	1–31 March 2002	13
John Bercow (8) Graham Brady (3) Alistair Burt (1) Brian Cotter (1) Ross Cranston (1) Claire Curtis-Thomas (1)	1–30 April 2002	68

Questioner	Dates	PQs outstanding
Louise Ellman (1)		
Chris Grayling (9)		
Jane Griffiths (1)		
Alan Hurst (2)		
Lynne Jones (1)		
Julian Lewis (4)		
David Lidington (1)		
Tim Loughton (1)		
John Mann (8)		
Gillian Merron (1)		
Mark Oaten (1)		
Chris Ruane (1)		
Barry Sheerman (3)		
Phyllis Starkey (1)		
Gerry Steinberg (1)		
Matthew Taylor (1)		
Jenny Tonge (1)		
Andrew Turner (8)		
Dave Watts (1)		
Phil Willis (1)		
Shaun Woodward (1)		
James Wray (4)		

These represent less than 8 per cent. of questions tabled to my Department between 1 February and 30 April. We are working towards providing all Members with substantive answers as soon as possible.

I also refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House of Commons.

Manufacturing (Skills)

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to raise the level of skills in UK manufacturing. [52017]

John Healey: Arrangements for training in the manufacturing industry are a matter for employers, as in any other industry. However, my Department has in place a wide range of policies designed to improve the nation's skills base. There are four key elements to our strategy for achieving a high skills, high value added economy, they are to:

strengthen the links between learning and employment;

create excellence in vocational learning;

work with employers to boost skills and productivity;

promote the adult basic skills strategy.

Within this context we are developing a network of Sector Skills councils that will engage employers more fully in the planning and delivery of learning and skills. We are pleased that important manufacturing interests such as textiles, oil and gas production, refining and distribution and chemicals manufacture are represented among the trailblazer Sector Skills councils. We are committed to building the conditions in which a successful manufacturing sector can thrive. The network of business-led councils will provide the framework in which to develop a highly skilled workforce that will support improved productivity and innovation in manufacturing companies in the UK.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Debt

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what the value is of the bilateral debt repayments held in trust by the UK; [53615]

(2) how many of the bilateral debt repayments held in trust by the UK have been repaid to developing countries. [53614]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

As of end of 2001, the UK has been holding in trust a total of £1,057,200 for six countries. Provision is being made to make payment to countries that have reached their Decision Point in this financial year.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the impact of natural disasters on levels of debt sustainability of heavily indebted poor countries. [53656]

Clare Short: The Government have been following closely the impact of falling commodity prices on developing countries even before the events of 11 September. At the annual meetings of the World bank and IMF in Ottawa last November, we raised this concern and asked bank and fund staff to revisit the debt sustainability analyses of all commodity dependent low-income countries, including HIPCs. The IMF and World bank analysis, published last month, shows that, although the situation varies from country to country, the external debt indicators for most HIPC countries have deteriorated, and several HIPC countries now face unsustainable debt burdens as a result. Following UK pressure, the World bank and IMF boards have agreed to provide additional relief to countries in this situation. This was reconfirmed at the spring meetings last month.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total is of public and publicly guaranteed external debt owed by all developing countries; and what proportion of this is owed by the heavily indebted poor countries. [53622]

Clare Short: The total public and publicly guaranteed external debt owed by all developing countries to the UK is £21.656 billion, of which £1.356 billion is owed by heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC), as at 31 March 2002. This includes £167 million of aid debts for middle and low-income countries; HIPCs account for £54 million of this. The UK has already written off its aid loans to all the poorest countries, not just HIPCs. However, the outstanding amounts are still included in DFID's accounts, as payments are written off as they become due.

The remaining amount consists of publicly guaranteed debt owed to ECGD (£21.349 billion, of which HIPCs account for £1.248 billion) and CDC (£140.12 million, of which HIPCs account for £54.21 million). The HIPC figures take account of debt relief to date and will continue to diminish over time as countries complete the HIPC process. The UK's definition of developing countries is based on the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list of aid recipients at 1 January 2000, which includes countries in transition and middle-income countries.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what human development indicators are taken into account when debt sustainability levels are calculated; and how; [53583]

(2) whether HIV/Aids levels are taken into account in debt sustainability measurements of the HIPC initiative; [53621]

Clare Short: When assessing developing countries' debt sustainability, principally in the context of the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative, the IMF and World bank work with Government in the countries themselves to produce detailed forecasts of export growth, GDP growth and new borrowing. These forecasts take account of various factors affecting the countries' economic situation, and the need for concessional borrowing to finance their poverty reduction strategies.

Childhood Immunisation

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the value of childhood immunisation in developing countries. [53895]

Clare Short: Immunisation against common childhood diseases are among the most cost effective interventions in health. Reducing the burden of communicable diseases directly benefits child survival and contributes to progress toward the child mortality millennium development goal. Vaccines against diphtheria, measles, pertussis, tetanus, polio, and tuberculosis currently save up to 3 million lives annually worldwide. Of the 30 million children who do not get vaccinated about 25 million live in low income countries.

Through its support of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) my Department is helping to achieve higher coverage with routine and new vaccines in poor countries that has the potential to save a further two million lives each year.

National Insurance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the cost in a full year of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* agencies of her Department and *(c)* charities in the overseas development sector. [53888]

Clare Short: I estimate that the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions will add approximately £400,000 per year to DFID staff costs from April 2003. DFID does not have any agencies as such, and we are not able to estimate the cost to charities in the overseas development sector.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the written questions asked of her between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if she will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54094]

Clare Short: In the period indicated 1,482 questions were tabled to my Department, of which 99.12 per cent. were substantively answered by 30 April 2002. Twelve questions remain unanswered at present. These are due to the usual inter-Departmental consultations conducted in order to ensure as full an answer as possible is provided to MPs.

Sudan

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding her Department has allocated in 2002–03 for projects in the Sudan; and if she will list them. [53687]

Clare Short: We have an allocation at the start of this year of approximately £8 million for Sudan. Much of this will be spent on meeting humanitarian needs, the rest on activities in support of the peace process. Activities will largely be determined in-year according to need.

Overseas Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the National Agency for the Development and Implementation of Reconstruction Programmes in Romania. [49194]

Clare Short: The National Agency for the Development and Implementation of the Reconstruction Programmes for the Mining Regions (NAD) was set up as an autonomous agency by the Government of Romania in February 1998. Its remit is to achieve the social and economic regeneration of communities in mining regions. It is still in the process of fully developing its capacity and skills, support for which is being given by my Department and the World bank. It is too early to assess the value for money being achieved by NAD.

African Farmers

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to ensure that the interests of African farmers are being secured with regard to intellectual property rights. [53370]

Clare Short: A number of international agencies, supported by DFID, have assisted developing countries to introduce intellectual property rights regimes for improved crop varieties, which take account of their particular socio-economic circumstances, for example protecting farmers' rights to save seed from one crop to the next. We will continue to support such initiatives and to help ensure that any future developments in international agreements on intellectual property rights regimes, including in the WTO, continue to take account of the needs of developing countries.

Furthermore, the UK Government has established the UK Commission on Intellectual Property Rights (CIPR), to look at how international intellectual property agreements can best take account of the needs of poor people in developing countries (for further information see http://www.iprcommission.org or telephone +44(0) 2077637162). The Commission will look at many of the

issues relating to the developmental impact of intellectual property rights, including the effect of intellectual property rights on poor farmers in developing countries. We expect the Commission to report its recommendations by summer 2002.

Cambodia

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of children's *(a)* participation in primary education and *(b)* access to health services in Cambodia. [53438]

Clare Short: Large numbers of Cambodian children are poor and do not have access to good primary education and health services. The quality of state education provision is low. Net enrolment rates are 78 per cent. at primary level (74 per cent. for girls) reducing to 6 per cent. at upper secondary level (5 per cent. for girls). The primary education sector is currently receiving substantial support from a consortium of donors led by the Asian Development bank, which includes some assistance from my Department.

State health provision is poor, though improving from a very low base and with notable successes in certain areas, including in combating malaria and HIV/AIDS. Infant and under-five mortality rates are 86 and 122 per 1,000 live births. Since 1992, my Department has committed £20 million to improve access by the poor to health services and for HIV/AIDS programmes. We plan to provide further substantial support in these areas.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid is being directed to Cambodia by *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the EU. [53393]

Clare Short: In 2001–02 my Department provided £5.8 million and in 2002–03 we expect to spend about £7.5 million, mainly focused on rural development and health, including HIV/AIDS. We contributed £0.58 million to help organise and run the Cambodian commune elections in 2001. The latest figures available for European Union member state and European Commission development assistance for Cambodia relate to calendar year 2000, when member states (including the United Kingdom) provided £62.4 million and the European Community £18.5 million, of which the UK share was £3.5 million.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how her Department defines the principle of additionality with regard the distribution of lottery funds; and if she will make a statement. [51760]

Mr. Caborn: Lottery money must not substitute for services already provided by Government and funded by the Exchequer, but it can add to them. There are many desirable projects within the fields of health, the environment and education as well as the arts, sport and heritage, which would not be funded within existing priorities. Lottery money is used both to fund projects which would not receive funding from the Exchequer and in some cases to support innovations which, if successful, may eventually become absorbed into mainstream funding.

National Insurance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will estimate the cost in the next 12 months of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to *(a)* her Departments, *(b)* agencies of her Department and *(c)* local government carrying out functions within the responsibility of her Department. [52069]

Dr. Howells: It is estimated that the changes to employers' national insurance contributions announced in the Budget will increase pay costs on average by 0.7 per cent. next year.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the cost to museums, galleries and arts organisations of the proposed increase in national insurance contributions. [52758]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* It is estimated that the changes to employers' national insurance contributions announced in the Budget will increase pay costs on average by 0.7 per cent. next year.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many net additional staff her Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52420]

Dr. Howells: The number of net additional staff recruited by the Department are shown in the following table:

Month/ type of staff	*Executive officer level*		*Administrative level*	
	Headcount	*FTE*[1]	*Headcount*	*FTE*[1]
June 2001				
Permanent	−1	−1	7	7
Casual	−1	−1	0	0
Total	−2	−2	7	7
July 2001				
Permanent	1	1	−1	−1
Casual	1	1	0	0
Total	2	2	−1	−1
August 2001				
Permanent	0	0	−1	−1
Casual	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	−1	−1
September 2001				
Permanent	−2	−2	4	4
Casual	−5	−5	0	0
Total	−7	−7	4	4
October 2001				
Permanent	0	0	−1	−1
Casual	1	1	0	0
Total	1	1	−1	−1

Month/ type of staff	Executive officer level Headcount	Executive officer level FTE[1]	Administrative level Headcount	Administrative level FTE[1]
November 2001				
Permanent	0	0	−2	−2
Casual	0	0	0	0
Total	1	1	−2	−2
December 2001				
Permanent	−1	−1	0	0
Casual	0	0	1	1
Total	−1	−1	1	1
January 2002				
Permanent	1	1	3	3
Casual	0	0	0	0
Total	1	1	3	3
February 2002				
Permanent	0	0	1	1
Casual	0	0	1	1
Total	0	0	2	2
March 2002				
Permanent	1	1	−3	−3
Casual	0	0	1	1
Total	1	1	−2	−2
Grand total	−4	−4	10	10

[1] Full time equivalent

National Heritage Memorial Fund

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will ensure that the National Heritage Memorial Fund publishes a breakdown of the funds that have been allocated, indicating *(a)* to whom the funds have been allocated, *(b)* how long the allocation has been in place and *(c)* reasons for significant delays in the release of funds to the beneficiaries. [52996]

Dr. Howells: The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) publishes information on grants in its annual report. Funds remain allocated until the grantee draws them down or NHMF is informed that the funds will not be needed. There are no delays in the release of funds by NHMF, with payment taking on average just 13 working days from the date on which grantees apply to draw on moneys awarded to them. However, delays could occur as a result of changes in the grant recipients' own project timetable which may mean they delay drawing down funds.

World Tourism Organisation

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her policy on the United Kingdom joining the World Tourism Organisation. [54069]

Dr. Howells: The Government do not believe that there would be value for money in joining the World Tourism Organisation, membership of which would cost an estimated £200,000 a year. However, DCMS does takes an interest in the work of the WTO and offers co-operation in areas such as statistics and best practice in environmentally sustainable development.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the written questions asked of her between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if she will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54093]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council today.

Ministers make every attempt to answer questions within the agreed time scales but delays may occur when we are required to obtain information from external sources such as our sponsored bodies. The number of questions still awaiting a reply from the Department at the end of April is shown in the table.

Period	Total tabled	Number outstanding	UIN	Date tabled	Hon. Member for . . .
1 to 30 June 2001	139	0	—	—	—
1 to 31 July 2001	160	0	—	—	—
1 to 30 September 2001	7	0	—	—	—
1 to 31 October 2001	162	0	—	—	—
1 to 30 November 2001	256	0	—	—	—
1 to 31 December 2001	184	0	—	—	—
1 to 31 January 2002	210	0	—	—	—
1 to 28 February 2002	246	0	—	—	—
1 to 31 March 2002	281	3	47255	25 March 2002	Buckingham
1 to 31 March 2002			485335	26 March 2002	South Suffolk
1 to 31 March 2002			48377	26 March 2002	South Suffolk
1 to 30 April 2002	142	11	52069	18 April 2002	Isle of Wight
1 to 30 April 2002			51760	17 April 2002	North Devon
1 to 30 April 2002			52420	22 April 2002	New Forest, East
1 to 30 April 2002			52471	23 April 2002	Crosby
1 to 30 April 2002			52506	23 April 2002	Milton Keynes, South-West
1 to 30 April 2002			52815	23 April 2002	South Suffolk
1 to 30 April 2002			52851	23 April 2002	South Suffolk
1 to 30 April 2002			52816	23 April 2002	South Suffolk
1 to 30 April 2002			52757	23 April 2002	Ryedale
1 to 30 April 2002			52758	23 April 2002	Ryedale
1 to 30 April 2002			52759	23 April 2002	Ryedale

In addition, there are a further 30 questions which were tabled to us at the end of April with answers due in May.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Small Business Sector

[redacted] **Jranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and [redacted]try what assessment she has made of the effect the measures announced in the Budget will have on enterprise in the small business sector. [52010]

Nigel Griffiths: The Budget will benefit the small business sector through a new zero starting rate and a reduced small company rate for corporation tax; VAT and payroll simplification measures; a new Community Investment Tax Credit, and a range of other measures which are making Britain the best place to start and grow a business.

Lisbon Agenda

14. **Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on how the Lisbon agenda is being pursued following the Barcelona summit. [52011]

Ms Hewitt: The conclusions agreed at Barcelona registered solid progress on the economic reform agenda.

I will be ensuring that the Department delivers on the Government's Lisbon commitments.

Broadband

15. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to assist the roll-out of broadband infrastructure in Monmouthshire. [52012]

Mr. Alexander: The UK online annual report in November 2001 set out the Government's strategy for making the broadband market more extensive and competitive.

Last month BT announced its intention to enable a further 100 telephone exchanges, including in Monmouth, to deliver ADSL services.

27. **Mr. Bacon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress towards the Government's target for broadband access. [52029]

Mr. Alexander: The UK online annual report (November 2001) assessed the UK's progress in developing an extensive and competitive broadband market.

Since then, take-up has risen to above 500,000 customers, while coverage has increased with 100 further telephone exchanges now due to be enabled to provide broadband services.

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many homes and businesses have a broadband connection. [52014]

Mr. Alexander: The UK now has over half a million broadband connections. This represents a 54 per cent. increase since the beginning of 2002.

BT's commitment to broadband and their recent price reductions, together with the successful broadband programmes of the cable companies, pave the way for further advances on broadband during 2002.

Workplace Management

18. **Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what she is doing to promote among all companies the common characteristics shared by what she considers the best managed workplaces in the UK. [52015]

Alan Johnson: We recognise the importance of good people strategies as key drivers of productivity improvement.

That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced a £20 million package of support to champion best practice in work organisation, which will:

expand the Partnership Fund

extend the reach of the Industry Forum activity

enhance the Fit for the Future Best Practice Campaign

support the "100 best companies to work for" list.

Rural Communities (Utilities)

20. **Peter Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance her Department provides to rural communities wishing to secure connections to the principal utilities. [52019]

Mr. Alexander: Gas, electricity and telephone connections are a contractual matter between consumers and companies within the individual industries, and are not subsidised by the DTI. Companies providing connections are subject to the relevant provisions of primary and secondary legislation, which are designed to encourage connections.

Universal telecoms providers are required to provide a connection to anyone who reasonably requests it. Electricity distribution networks are required to provide and maintain a connection to any customer requiring electricity within their area. Gas transporters are required to connect all properties within 23 metres of an existing main.

Steel

21. **Dr. Francis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the operation of European safeguards introduced to protect the British steel industry. [52020]

Ms Hewitt: The Government will stand by our steel industry and communities in combating the unjustified and deeply regrettable action by the United States. We pressed for and welcome the introduction from 29 March of provisional safeguard measures to protect the UK and EU industry against diversion of trade from the US. We also fully support the action taken by the European Commission in initiating World Trade Organisation action against the US.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent consultations she has had with the steel industry. [52013]

Ms Hewitt: I have had a number of consultations with steel companies and key organisations representing the steel industry recently. These discussions have focused on US actions to restrict steel imports.

Advantage West Midlands

22. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with Advantage West Midlands about promoting Telford as a business location. [52022]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has met recently the board of Advantage West Midlands, to discuss region-wide issues such as manufacturing and the region's proposal to become a manufacturing beacon; clearly this will have an impact on Telford.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other DTI Ministers also attend frequent meetings of the RDA chairs, including Advantage West Midlands, where a wide range of issues is discussed, including its broadband and technology cluster proposals.

Energywatch

23. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has put in place to monitor the effectiveness of Energywatch. [52023]

Ms Hewitt: Energywatch is subject to formal and informal in-year monitoring by DTI. The impact that Energywatch has had and the benefits it has delivered against its main aims are measured against its performance indicators. The indicators for 2001–02 were published in 2001 in the document "Measuring Up", and Energywatch's performance against them will be set out in its annual report for 2001–02. Those for 2002–03 are included in the document "What We Plan To Do, Year 2", Energywatch's forward work programme for 2002–03.

Energy

24. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department will respond to the performance and innovation unit report on future energy provisions. [52024]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given earlier today to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh).

Corporate Social Responsibility

25. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of companies have adopted corporate social responsibility policies; and if she will make a statement. [52026]

Mr. Alexander: There is no single measure for the proportion of companies that have adopted corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies. However, 76 per cent. of FTSE 100 companies currently publish information on their social, human rights and environmental performance. In addition, 83 per cent. of companies that feature in the FTSE all-share index are now represented in the FTSE 4Good indices, which reflect the performance on equities regarded as socially responsible.

It is currently estimated that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) make a social contribution of up to £3 billion per annum.

The Government will publish their second report on CSR on 14 May, which is designed to drive forward the CSR agenda and encourage more businesses to initiate their own CSR policies.

Digital Broadcasting

26. **Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to guarantee the future of all three platforms for delivery of digital broadcasting. [52028]

Mr. Alexander: The Digital Television Action Plan sets out a wide range of tasks to be undertaken by Government and stakeholders in order to achieve our aim for the UK to have the most dynamic and competitive market for digital TV in the G7, and to enable us to meet the criteria set for the switchover from analogue to digital terrestrial transmissions. The action plan is based on our commitment to enabling consumers to have a choice, wherever possible, of the means by which they access their digital services. Where Government have a principal role to play, as in ensuring that the digital terrestrial platform has sufficient spectrum available to it to enable it to compete effectively, we will do so. However, it is up to the broadcasters and others involved in the provision of digital television services to make the most of what each platform can offer.

Coal Aid Scheme

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has held with EU partners about a replacement coal aid scheme. [52008]

Ms Hewitt: This issue was discussed at the last Energy Council on 5 December last year, attended by my hon Friend the Minister of State for Industry and Construction. There have since been a number of discussions, at official level, in the Council Energy Working Group.

BCCI

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the meeting between the hon. Member for Leicester, East and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at her Department on 17 April concerning BCCI. [51564]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I met my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East together with Mr. Clarke, Mr. Malik and Mr. Qayyum on 17 April to discuss the progress of the liquidation of Bank of Credit and Commerce International SA. I am grateful to my hon. Friend and his colleagues for bringing me up to date with their concerns.

National Insurance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate the cost in the next 12 months of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* agencies of her Department and *(c)* local government carrying out functions within the responsibility of her Department, *(d)* industry, *(e)* manufacturing industry, *(f)* aerospace industries, *(g)* small businesses and *(h)* self-employed people. [52081]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary on 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W.

Scientific Research

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her action to promote scientific research in the UK, with special reference to research and development spending, training, investment and independent advice. [52547]

Ms Hewitt: Scientific research lies at the heart of this Government's policies to stimulate innovation and economic development, and to improve the quality of life. The Science and Innovation White Paper—"Excellence and Opportunity: A science and innovation policy for the 21st century"—was published in July 2000. It set out our strategy for building on the UK's record of scientific excellence, and for ensuring that outputs from scientific research are harnessed in innovative products and services that will yield economic and social benefits for the people of the UK.

The following are among the actions we are taking to promote scientific research in the UK:

An increase in total Government investment in Science, Engineering and Technology in real terms of almost 11 per cent. from 2000–01 to £7.6 billion in 2003–04.

The creation of two tax credits specifically to encourage greater levels of R&D in the UK. The first is aimed at SMEs and offers a 50 per cent. super-deduction on all qualifying R&D, while the Chancellor announced in his recent Budget that to complement the SME Credit, a new straight volume Tax Credit will now be offered to large companies which will benefit from a 25 per cent. super-deduction on all qualifying R&D expenditure.

We have increased the funding available for postgraduate researchers and are actively encouraging better practice in managing and developing research staff. The Government are considering how to take forward the recently published review by Sir Gareth Roberts on the training of scientists and engineers.

Our work on the development of strategic priorities for the Research Councils, acting together as Research Councils UK, will serve to increase the relevance of scientific research in the UK and encourage further investment in it.

The Government are committed to improving the ways it obtains scientific advice and communicates developments in science and science policy. It has published a Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees, and Guidelines 2000 which set out best practice for the use of scientific advice in policy making.

Business Contacts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what occasions in the last 12 months she has lobbied in other countries in support of specific contracts; and with what results. [53957]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 26 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 490W.

BP

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in what work Mr. Bob Saunders will be involved at her Department while on secondment from BP. [52159]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Mr. Saunders will work in Oil and Gas Directorate and will deal with downstream oil industry issues. The specific duties include contributing to policy development and briefing on the downstream oil sector including questions of security of supply, fuel quality, air and water quality and fuelling of vehicles in the longer term.

The secondment will be subject to contractual terms and conditions, including provisions on avoidance of conflict of interest.

Disabled Access

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what adjustments have been made to her Department's premises following the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and what the cost of these adjustments was as a proportion of the Department's budget. [53030]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* My Department is committed to ensuring compliance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. My Department has used the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation to provide specialist advice on how its premises and facilities can be enhanced for people with disabilities. Whenever new works or refurbishment projects are undertaken in premises controlled by the Department the requirements of people with disabilities using the premises are taken into account. Where the Department is a minor occupier of premises we work with the premises landlord to ensure compliance where practicable. Examples include induction loop systems in reception areas; tactile marking, handrails and ramps; low level embossed call buttons and voice announcements in lifts; counters designed to aid wheelchair users; automatically opening doors.

My Department also has an accommodation focus group for staff with disabilities to discuss their concerns and requirements. For example staff have been supplied with specialist furniture, specialist display screen equipment for those with visual impairments; voice activated personal computers; and teledata fire alarm paging systems.

My Department does not keep a separate record of all such adjustments or their cost. To produce such information could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Telephone Systems (Hampshire and Isle of Wight)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will instigate an inquiry into the service level of the telephone system in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight on 25 April and its impact on emergency services; [54026]

(2) what investigation has taken place into the level of service of the telephone system in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight on 25 April and its impact on emergency services. [54027]

Mr. Alexander: I understand that at 18.30 on Thursday 25 April a fault occurred in the equipment at the Southampton Bargate BT telephone exchange. As a result a large number of customers across a wide area in Hampshire, Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight were affected involving the loss of their telephone service including access to the 999 emergency services. BT worked to restore service as quickly as possible and to mitigate the impact on the emergency services including the police. Services were restored to some 80 per cent. of customers by midnight and all others by 03:55 am the following morning.

Oftel is urgently investigating the causes of this failure and considering what measures should be put in place to avoid it happening again. I have asked the Director General to write to the hon. Member as soon as possible, and to keep me informed.

Aerospace Industry

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has made to the Treasury on the review of the Export Credits Guarantee Department on the impact of changes to the ECGD on the competitiveness of the UK aerospace industry. [53242]

Ms Hewitt: DTI and Treasury Ministers meet regularly to consider progress on the programme of work being carried out to strengthen ECGD's risk management systems and evaluate its contribution to the competitiveness of the UK economy. ECGD plays an important role in supporting the UK's aerospace industry and is currently seeking views from customers, including those in the aerospace sector, on the economic benefits it generates.

Older Women

32. **Mrs. Humble:** To ask the Minister what assessment she has made of the contribution that women aged over 50 years make to UK prosperity. [52036]

Ms Hewitt: Almost 2.4 million women in their 50s are in work. They make up 20 per cent. of the female working population and 9 per cent. of total working population. The New Deal 50 plus has helped over 19,000 women off benefits and back into work since its launch in April 2000.

Returning to Work

34. **Mr. Bacon:** To ask the Minister if she will make a statement on the steps she is taking to help mothers return to work. [52039]

Ms Hewitt: We are taking a number of steps. These include introducing, as part of the Employment Bill which is currently before Parliament, a new duty for employers to seriously consider requests for flexible working from parents of young children and improvements to maternity leave and pay. We are also taking forward a range of other measures such as investment in child care, working families tax credit, the New Deal for Lone Parents, the New Deal for Partners, and increased access to adult education.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Solicitor-General what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46800]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 9 April 2002]* The single press officer who acts for both my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, and the Treasury Solicitor's Department also acts as Private Secretary to the Attorney-General. Costs incurred in relation to the press office aspect of the post cannot be separately calculated.

No figures are available for the total cost of running the Crown Prosecution Service's press office in 1996–97. The total cost in 2000–01 (the latest year for which figures are available) was £205,269.

The cost of running the press office of the Serious Fraud Office in 1996–97 was £170,439. The figure for 2001–02, which is provisional, is £201,003.

User Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what new steps her Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if he will publish the findings. [47312]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Treasury Solicitor's Department has carried out an extensive consultation exercise with clients in the course of the Quinquennial Review of the Department. The findings were reported and published by the Attorney-General on 3 May 2001. In addition, the Treasury Solicitor's Department carried out annual client satisfaction surveys which seek client Departments' views on the legal service it provides and whether those services meet their expectations. These surveys figure among the SDA targets for the Treasury Solicitor's Department, progress on which will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has also recently adopted a client care policy at the core of which is regular contact and discussion with recipients of the legal services they provide.

The concept of user service satisfaction is not easily applicable to the duties of my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, the primary function of which is to give legal advice to Government, or to the prosecuting authorities, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office. However, in relation to the

CPS, following the recommendation made at the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry that the CPS should communicate information about its casework decisions direct to victims rather than the police, the CPS launched its Direct Communication with Victims (DCV) scheme in October 2000. Under this scheme the CPS provides reasons to victims whenever it either drops or alters a charge substantially and, in certain cases, it offers to meet face to face to give a fuller explanation if required. In this way the CPS is able to take into account the wishes and expectations of its users.

UK Crown Prosecutions

Harry Cohen: To ask the Solicitor-General what criteria the CPS uses in determining whether to seek to prosecute in the UK courts, UK nationals accused of committing serious offences abroad; and if she will make a statement. [51796]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* In most cases foreign states would normally prosecute offences committed within their own jurisdiction.

The general rule is that the English courts do not accept jurisdiction where UK nationals commit offences outside England and Wales in the absence of express provisions to the contrary. Some of these statutory exceptions are:

Homicide as set out in sections 9 and 10 of the Offences against the Person Act 1861. A British subject therefore, who, in a foreign country, within the dominion of a foreign power, murders either a British subject or a foreigner is triable in England under the express provisions of this section.

Offences of dishonesty and blackmail contrary to sections 1–6 of the Criminal Justice Act 1993.

Conspiracy, incitement and attempt to commit the offences listed in the Criminal Justice Act 1993.

Sex Offenders Act 1997.

Part 12 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, which applies to offences committed on or after 14 February 2002, extends the ambit of the present offences under common law and statute by making it explicit that they cover both the bribery and corruption of foreign public officials and of those in the private sector when committed wholly abroad. It also extends the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom to include acts committed by UK nationals and companies abroad.

All such cases are reviewed in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors. The Crown Prosecutor must first be satisfied that there is enough evidence to provide

"a realistic prospect of conviction".

If the case passes the evidential test the Crown Prosecutor then has to consider whether a prosecution is required in the public interest. The code gives examples of public interest factors both for and against prosecution but this is not an exhaustive list. A prosecution will usually take place unless there are public interest factors tending against prosecution, which clearly outweigh those tending in favour.

However, there is often the need to recognise the fact that the foreign state in which the offence was committed may either want or intend to prosecute the UK national for the same offence. This can necessitate discussion between the judicial authorities in the UK and abroad. Such factors as where the victims and witnesses reside and the views of the victim are also taken into account.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how much has been spent by her Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52701]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Nothing.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how much has been spent by her Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52740]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Nothing.

Young People

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Solicitor-General on what subjects and on which dates her Department has recently consulted organisations representing young people; and if she will list such organisations. [52493]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* The Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible have not formally consulted any organisations representing young people. However, the Crown Prosecution Service has worked with the following groups on youth justice issues: Nacro Youth Crime section, SOVA, the Michael Sieff Foundation, Schools Out!, the Children's Society, youth offender teams and Connexions.

Ronald Maddison

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will place in the Library a copy of the request from Her Majesty's Coroner for Wiltshire and Swindon for a fresh inquest into the death of Ronald Maddison. [53394]

The Solicitor-General: Following requests for and availability of further information, HM Coroner for Wiltshire and Swindon recently completed an application to the Attorney-General for authority to apply for a fresh inquest into the death of Ronald Maddison. That application was granted on 16 April 2002. The next stage is for the coroner to apply to the High Court for a fresh inquest. If the High Court grants the application, the coroner will hold the fresh inquest with a jury. If that is the case, the jury should reach a verdict on the evidence received at the inquest, free from prejudice. I am not satisfied that publication of the request made by the coroner would not prejudice a jury if there were to be a fresh inquest and therefore I do not consider it to be appropriate to place a copy of the coroner's request in the Library. The coroner shares my view. The facts will be fully canvassed at the inquest if the application is granted.

CPS

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Solicitor-General when the annual report by HM chief inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service for 2000–01 will be published. [54679]

The Solicitor-General: The report was laid before Parliament today and will be published tomorrow. It reports on the performance of the Crown Prosecution Service in the period from 1 October 2000 to 30 September 2001.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Victor Bout

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent developments there have been concerning Victor Bout. [54788]

Mr. MacShane: There have been two recent important developments. On 15 April 2002 the UK publication *Air Cargo News* published an article which alleges that Victor Bout had been involved in the supply of an aircraft for Osama bin Laden in 1995. Prior to 11 September this aircraft had reportedly been frequently overflying Iran from Saudi Arabia to Kabul and Kandahar in Afghanistan. It is now reportedly parked at Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. I shall be asking that the United Nations investigate this very serious allegation as a matter of great importance.

Following our past approaches to the UAE on the subject of Victor Bout, and the issuing of an international arrest warrant by the Belgian authorities, I am pleased to welcome a recent announcement by the Government of the United Arab Emirates. They have informed the United Nations Angola Monitoring Mechanism that Bout's companies, ie Air Cess and Trans Avia, have been prohibited from operating in the United Arab Emirates. He has also been banned from entering the United Arab Emirates personally.

I hope that this increased international pressure on Bout will finally result in the end of his sanctions-busting activities and that he will be brought to justice. The UK has played a leading role in drawing international attention to Bout's illegal activities, initially in Angola and Liberia and more recently relating to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

Iraq

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of unaccounted for stocks of Iraqi precursor chemicals, chemical agent and special munitions, based on the findings of the UN Special Commission. [54789]

Mr. Straw: In answer to questions on 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 743–45, I said that weapons inspectors were unable to account for 4,000 tonnes of so-called precursor chemicals used in the production of weapons; 610 tonnes of precursor chemicals used in the production of nerve gas; and 31,000 chemical weapons munitions.

This information was the best available at the time, and was based on Iraqi declarations to UNSCOM inspectors between 1991–98 and data contained in an UNSCOM report published in 1999.

Since I gave this answer, Her Majesty's Government have carried out a more detailed study. This latest assessment of the quantities of material unaccounted for by UNSCOM inspectors which has potential applications in Iraq's chemical and biological weapons programmes is as follows:

Up to 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals, approximately 300 tonnes of which, in the Iraqi CW programme, were unique to the production of VX nerve agent;

Up to 360 tonnes of bulk CW agent including 1.5 tonnes of VX; and

Over 30,000 special munitions for delivery of chemical and biological agents;

Large quantities of growth media acquired for use in the production of biological weapons—enough to produce over three times the amount of anthrax Iraq admits to having manufactured.

These figures represent our latest assessment. This assessment is subject to continual review in the light of any updates from UNMOVIC or incoming intelligence reports. Some of the estimates are unchanged. The changes we have made do not alter our view on the scale of the Iraqi WMD threat. Indeed, they reinforce our judgment that Iraq's chemical and biological capabilities are substantial and a very real danger to the region and the wider world. We shall be releasing further material about this threat in due course.

Uganda

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Uganda about human rights with specific reference to the conduct of the police towards opposition supporters at a rally in Kampala on 12 January; and if he will make a statement. [52112]

Mr. Straw: We follow closely the human rights situation in Uganda and regularly raise our concerns with the Ugandan authorities. We also have regular contact with the Ugandan Human Rights Commission and other HR interest groups such as the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative.

We take seriously reports of human rights abuses, such as harassment of the opposition. Unfortunately, the 12 January rally resulted in the death of a student. Three policemen were arrested in connection with the incident, but were subsequently released pending further investigation. The high commission continues regularly to stress to the Ugandan authorities the need for effective action to bring those responsible for this death to justice.

Gibraltar

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on referring the issue of self-determination of the Gibraltar people to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion. [53959]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 121W.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Derby, North on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 525W, on Gibraltar, whether the sums mentioned that Gibraltar is to receive under European Union structural funding are in pounds or euros. [52487]

Peter Hain: The sums referred to are Gibraltar's Structural Fund allocations in euros.

Racism

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1638W,

on racism, what further progress has been made in consultation with NGOs in drawing up a national action plan to ensure UK-wide follow-through in line with the action plan drawn up by the UN World Conference on Racism in Durban in September 2001; when he plans to publish a draft action plan for consultation; what events he is considering to discuss this plan; and what measures he will take to ensure the engagement of the devolved regions in this process. [52546]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for taking this work forward falls to the Home Office. A working group of representatives from all interested Departments, including the devolved Administrations, is being established with a view to drawing up a national action plan by early summer. This will be done in close consultation with an non-governmental organisation (NGO) steering group which has been specifically set up for that purpose.

Much of the work recommended in the World Conference Programme of Action is already being undertaken or planned in United Kingdom. We are in the process of mapping out the extent of this work to identify any gaps. We are also considering with the NGO steering group plans for a national consultation exercise to discuss the draft action plan, culminating in a national conference in the autumn.

TREASURY

Civil Servants

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil servants were employed in each of the past 10 years; and what changes have taken place in real terms in their total remuneration. [34083]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The Office for National Statistics Annual Abstract of Statistics 2002 (ISSN 0072 5730) gives consistent historical data on civil service staff numbers. Numbers for paybill costs within departmental administration costs limits are given in table 5.1 of PESA 2001–02 (Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses, Cm 5101). These are not precisely comparable with civil service staff numbers statistics, as civil servants in the devolved Administrations are excluded, and casual and other non-civil service staff on departmental payrolls are included.

Aerospace Industry

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the competitiveness of the UK aerospace industry of recent changes to the Export Credits Guarantee Department. [53243]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The recent changes to the Large Aircraft Sector Understanding (LASU) scheme, under which ECGD provides support for the UK aerospace industry, were made as a result of a 1999 economic study undertaken by ECGD. These changes were delayed to allow time for ECGD to move in concert with its French and German counterparts. The Government are fully committed to supporting in the most effective way possible the competitiveness of all UK companies, including those in the aerospace sector, who will constitute some of the major beneficiaries of the new R&D tax credit announced in the Budget.

Pension Contribution Holidays

Mr. Watts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will amend the pension rules to remove the ability of companies to take contribution holidays from their employees' pension scheme. [52027]

Ruth Kelly: In general, contributions to occupational schemes are determined by the trustees' view of the funding position of the scheme and its likely needs. The Government have no plans to amend the tax rules governing the taking of employer contribution holidays from occupational pension schemes.

Pornographic Films

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether film tax relief is available for pornographic films made in the UK *(a)* before and *(b)* after the restrictions on film tax relief introduced in the April 2002 Budget; and if he will make a statement. [53335]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 1 May.

Revenue

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in cash terms *(a)* at 2002–03 prices and *(b)* and as a percentage of gross domestic product, the net taxes and social security contributions for each year since 1996–97, incorporating the accounting changes referred to in Box C2 of the Budget Red Book 2002. [53774]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Historical figures for net taxes and social security contributions as a percentage of GDP, consistent with the new OECD classification of personal tax credits, are set out in Table C23 of Budget 2002. An estimate of this ratio for 2001–02 and projections for 2002–03 onwards are shown in Table C10.

Vehicle Seizures

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if HM Customs and Excise will change its vehicle seizure policy in relation to alcohol and tobacco smuggling as a result of the Court of Appeal decision in the Lindsay case. [54790]

Mr. Boateng: The Court of Appeal confirmed in the Lindsay case that Customs vehicle seizure and non-restoration policy in relation to those who smuggle alcohol and tobacco for profit was justified and proportionate. It also confirmed that vehicles used to smuggle on a non-profit basis were similarly liable to seizure. However, the Court considered that in not-for-profit cases a proportionate response, depending on the individual circumstances, would be to offer to restore such seized vehicles.

Accordingly when Customs detect commercial for profit smugglers, any vehicles used in such smuggling will remain subject to the existing tough seizure and non-restoration policy. However, Customs have now further developed their vehicle seizure policy, taking into account the clarification provided by the Court of Appeal.

When Customs detect not-for-profit smugglers their goods and vehicles will be seized but vehicle restoration will ordinarily be offered in the first instance for a sum equivalent to the revenue evaded. There will be a rising scale for any subsequent offences up to non-restoration. Customs will reserve the right to vary their restoration terms according to the aggravating or mitigating circumstances of any individual case.

This policy will allow Customs to continue their successful approach of hitting those who smuggle for profit with tough sanctions that strike at their illicit trade and also provides a real and proportionate penalty for those who break the law, albeit without such profit-making motivation. It represents a fair and balanced policy.

Scotland Office

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the implication of his Budget statement for the Scotland Office DEL. [53332]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Scotland Office provision (non-devolved) will be determined in the spending review within the overall Scotland DEL provision to be determined in the spending review. The increases in the Scottish Executive's (devolved) budget in 2003–04 to 2007–08 as a consequence of the increases in health spending announced for England are £224 million, £858 million, £1,576 million, £2,341 million and £3,201 million.

Property Prices

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what projected change in property prices underlies the revenue assumptions in Table C8 of the Financial Statement and Budget report 2002; and if he will make a statement. [53404]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The revenue forecasts in Table C8 of the FSBR are based on house price data calculated by taking the arithmetic average of the DTLR, Nationwide and Halifax indices available at the time of the Budget. Following this, house prices inflation is projected to moderate towards its long run relationship with earnings, as explained in paragraph B54 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2002. Forecasts for house prices are not published.

Projected Revenues

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the reasons are for the change in projected revenues from *(a)* air passenger duty and *(b)* capital taxes since the Budget of 2001 shown in Table C8 of the Financial Statement and Budget report 2002; and if he will make a statement. [53405]

Mr. Boateng: The change in projected revenues for APD was announced in the pre-Budget report 2001. There are a number of reasons for this change. Last year's global economic slowdown had significant effect on passenger numbers and this was exacerbated by the tragedies on 11 September. There has also been a trend towards economy class travel to European destinations, which are generally charged at the lowest rate of APD. This is attributed in part to the success of the low cost airlines.

Explanations of the changes in forecast receipts for capital taxes since the Budget of 2001 are given in paragraphs B48 of the pre-Budget report, November 2001 and C45 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report, April 2002.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Heald: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the *(a)* costs and *(b)* savings to HM Treasury in developing a modern mental health service. [45929]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Wanless Final Report estimated the costs of developing a world class service at some £3.1 billion per annum, and the net savings across government at £3.1 billion per annum. The Department is studying the Wanless Report with great interest and it will be an important source of analysis and information in the allocation of resources to the service.

Computer Terminals

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many on-line computer terminals were available in each division of Customs and Excise in each of the last three years; what assessment was made of system reliability; and who the providers of the IT system were. [53481]

Mr. Boateng: The following number of on-line computer terminals were available to Customs and Excise in the last three financial year:

31 March 2000—18,502

31 March 2001—19,669

31 March 2002—23,130.

On 31 March 2000 responsibility (and ownership) for desktop and laptop computers passed to ICL (now Fujitsu Services) under a PFI contract. Responsibility for the IT system mainframes remains with Customs and Excise. Mainframe services are provided by in-house staff using mainframes, which have been purchased from Fujitsu.

Since the transfer of ownership to Fujitsu Services the level of service has been jointly monitored on a monthly basis. Although there were inevitable teething problems during national roll out/hand over, service standards have improved significantly in recent months and the monthly service report for March 2002 records a high level of service in nearly all areas.

Given major organisational changes within HMCE over the last three years a detailed breakdown of computer availability by division is not available in this format.

Climate Change Levy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost to the Treasury will be *(a)* at the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of (i) an exemption from the Climate Change Levy of fuel used in dual-use purposes and (ii) extending relief to certain processes to certain processes which compete with those benefiting from the dual-use or non-fuel use

exemptions; what steps (A) have and (B) will be taken to introduce such exemptions; and if he will make a statement. [53738]

Mr. Boateng: The dual-use exemption is an integral part of the levy's design and is taken account of in published climate change levy forecasts. Customs have been considering which processes the new exemption will apply to and will be consulting industry and other Government Departments shortly for their views on which processes should benefit, with a view to introducing the exemption at the earliest opportunity. The cost of extending the exemption is expected to be negligible, but will be subject to the definition being finalised.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the written questions asked of him between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if he will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54078]

Mr. Boateng: 3,255 of the 4,205 (77.4 per cent.) written questions tabled to Treasury Ministers in the present parliamentary Session up to 30 April received substantive replies on or before the dates on which answers were due. Answers have not yet been given to 36 questions, but in 14 of these cases the answers are not overdue.

Energy Efficiency

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost to the Treasury will be *(a)* at the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of the extension of the 5 per cent. rate of VAT to apply to the grant-funded installation of (i) factory-insulated hot water tanks, (ii) micro-combined heat and power and (iii) renewable energy heating systems in the homes of the less well-off. [53716]

Mr. Boateng: The cost of the reduced rate of VAT for these grant-funded installations at the outset of its introduction and over the next three years will be negligible.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

"Agriculture in the United Kingdom"

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the latest volume of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom" will be published. [54680]

Margaret Beckett: Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2001 will be published on Friday 3 May. Copies of this report will be available from the Libraries of the House on that day. It will also be available in electronic form from DEFRA's website at www.defra.gov.uk/esg.m_publications.htm.

EU Funding

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if it is the policy of her Department to claim the outstanding agrimony compensation from the European Commission; and if she will make a statement. [54528]

Margaret Beckett: We have considered the case for payment of optional agrimonetary compensation to the livestock sector. While we acknowledge the difficulties that the sector is facing and are working with them on the recommendations of the Policy Commission on Food and Farming, we have decided not to make a claim on these funds given the many competing demands on the Exchequer at present.

Water Bill

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will publish its response to the draft Water Bill consultation; and if she will make a statement. [54681]

Mr. Meacher: The Government response to the draft Water Bill consultation is being published today. It considers issues raised by over 150 respondents. Copies of the response are being placed in the Library.

There was general support for the aims of the Bill, although there were inevitably differences regarding a number of the proposals. The main changes that will be in the Bill as a result of the consultation are:

Ofwat will be governed by a Regulatory Board rather than an individual Director General, along similar lines to other economic regulators. This is instead of the Advisory Panel proposed in the draft Bill.

Ofwat's duty to ensure that water companies are able to secure reasonable returns on their capital will now be retained.

The draft Water Bill contains provisions in the broad areas of water resource management and better regulations as well as other specific provisions. In particular the draft Bill contains:

reform of water abstraction licensing to provide new powers to protect the environment and manage water resources more effectively and a requirement on water companies to prepare drought plans and conserve water;

amendment of the regulatory framework to improve the position of consumers and improve regulatory certainty, and in particular to set up a new, independent Consumer Council for Water;

reform of the drinking water regulatory regime to cope with industry restructuring and the possible effects of the Competition Act 1998 giving the Drinking Water Inspectorate greater status, and increasing the level of fines that magistrates can impose; and

improvement of the regime for controlling polluting discharges, and rationalisation of arrangements for reservoir safety and the regulation of water, sewerage and contaminated land.

The Government response to the draft Water Bill consultation reflects the Government's continued commitment to placing consumers at the heart of regulation and ensuring environmental sustainability in the water industry.

We aim to introduce the Bill as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Meat Imports

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make

a statement on recent changes to the regulations on meat imports; and what action her Department has taken since February 2001 to prevent the import of illegal meat into the UK. [52475]

Mr. Morley: We amended legislation on 1 May 2001 to make it easier for local authorities to take action where meat, which could have been imported illegally, is found. Legislation has been laid before Parliament which includes new powers for enforcement officers (already available to customs officers) to search baggage, etc. for illegal imports of animal products.

Since February 2001 we have taken a range of initiatives aimed at improving our ability to prevent and detect illegal imports of animal products. These initiatives have been co-ordinated by officials in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but involve other Departments such as HM Customs and Excise and the Food Standards Agency, and the local authorities who are responsible for controls at ports and airports. We have concentrated on raising public awareness of our import rules through our embassies, and strengthening intelligence gathering and sharing to improve targeting of anti-smuggling measures. We also introduced new posters which are displayed at airports and ports to ensure that travellers are aware of the restrictions on what may be imported. On 28 March we published an action plan. This plan commits Government to a range of measures including completing a risk assessment of disease risks posed by illegal imports of meat. The action plan is available in the Library of the House.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what buildings owned by her Department have solar panels installed. [53488]

Mr. Morley: The Department's animal health office at Bury St. Edmunds has solar panels installed to heat the hot water used on the site.

Rural Proofing Report

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the cost of *(a)* drafting, *(b)* printing and *(c)* distributing the rural proofing report drafted by the countryside agency. [51911]

Alun Michael: "Rural Proofing in 2001/02—A report to Government by the Countryside Agency", was published by the countryside agency on 11 April. Printing costs were £3,417; distribution costs were about £488 in postage and £563 to load the report onto the agency's website. The costs of drafting the report cannot be separated out from the rest of the agency's work.

Foot and Mouth

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average amount of compensation paid by her Department to individual farmers as the result of the recent foot and mouth disease outbreak was; and if she will make a statement. [53698]

Mr. Morley: The average amount of compensation paid by the Department to individual farmers is £124,755. A total of £1,050 million has been paid to farmers in compensation for animals slaughtered due to foot and mouth disease.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what different types of compensation have been paid to farmers by her Department as the result of the recent foot and mouth disease outbreak ; and if she will make a statement. [53697]

Mr. Morley: There are two types of compensation paid to farmers as a result of the recent outbreak of foot and mouth disease, they are (a) animal compensation for animals slaughtered and (b) non-animal compensation. Non-animal compensation covers cleansing and disinfecting, items seized and destroyed and claims for reinstatement of damaged property.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much compensation has been paid by her Department to farmers in *(a)* the Montgomeryshire constituency and *(b)* Powys as the result of the foot and mouth disease outbreak; and if she will make a statement. [53696]

Mr. Morley: The statutory amount paid in compensation to farmers in Powys county is £35,601,839.00 this includes payment to farmers in Montgomeryshire. It is difficult to establish the exact amount of compensation paid to particular parts of a county or region.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total value was of road haulage contracts for the removal of foot and mouth carcases in Northumberland; what the value was of contracts awarded to Snowie Ltd; and what tendering procedure was used for the awarding of carcase haulage contracts. [45456]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The total value of road haulage contracts for the removal of foot and mouth carcases in Northumberland was £2,857,867 excluding VAT. The value of foot and mouth contracts awarded to Snowie up to mid-March 2002 was £37,751,894 excluding VAT. Carcase haulage contracts were awarded through the negotiated procurement procedure without the prior publication of a notice, and by competitive tendering.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what claims against her Department remain unsettled in respect of damage to roads and infrastructure in Dumfries and Galloway region inflicted during the foot and mouth outbreak. [52908]

Mr. Morley: The claim submitted by Dumfries and Galloway council to the Department in respect of damage allegedly caused to roads and infrastructure in the region during operations to control and eradicate foot and mouth disease referred to in the reply to the hon. Member on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 85–86W, has not been pursued. However, I understand that Writs in respect of such damage have been served on Scottish Ministers in relation to certain operational aspects of disease control and eradication in Scotland.

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from *(a)* the Scottish Executive and *(b)* Dumfries and Galloway council for the recovery of moneys used by Dumfries and Galloway council for repairs to roads damaged by work associated with the eradication of foot and mouth disease. [53236]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* Officials of Dumfries and Galloway council, the Scottish Executive and the Department met in January. The matter of the council's wish to recover costs relating to repair of road damage allegedly caused during operations to control and eradicate foot and mouth disease was raised. Subsequently, the council wrote to the Department indicating that it was seeking legal advice. I understand that Writs in respect of such damage have been served on Scottish Ministers. Officials of the Scottish Executive and of the Department are in touch about this.

Pigs

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the size of the national pig breeding herd in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 1999. [53700]

Mr. Morley: The June agricultural and horticultural census estimates the size of the pig breeding herd in England was:

	Thousand
(a) 2001	489
(b) 2000	503
(c) 1999	573

Notes:

1. These data relate to main and minor holdings.
2. The pig breeding herd comprises sows in pig, gilts in pig and suckled or dry sows being kept for further breeding.

Mr. Robert Watson and Hans Blix

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the United Kingdom will support *(a)* Mr. Robert Watson continuing as Chairman of the InterGovernmental Panel on Climate Change and *(b)* Hans Blix continuing in his post as Head of the UN Monitoring, Inspection and Verification Commission. [52155]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 24 April 2002]:* In view of Robert Watson's outstanding track record the UK was in favour of his continuation as chair of IPCC. In the event, the IPCC elected Dr. Rajendra Pachauri to the position of chairman.

The UK supported Hans Blix's appointment as the head of UNMOVIC in 2000. We have every confidence in his continuing chairmanship.

BSE

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent studies on the transmissibility of BSE she has commissioned; and if she will make a statement. [53129]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Within the past 12 months, DEFRA has commissioned two studies investigating BSE transmission. One is using transgenic mice to assess the relative transmissibility of sheep BSE (and sheep scrapie) and cattle BSE to humans. The second study is following the natural spread of BSE from experimentally infected sheep within a breeding flock to establish whether BSE can transmit to TSE free animals and establish itself within the flock.

In addition to these projects, one study, which is about to begin, will investigate what effect the age at which sheep are experimentally infected with BSE has on the disease. The Department is also funding a study, under way for the past six years, to assess the possibility of maternal transmission of BSE in sheep.

Within the past year, no further studies have been commissioned to investigate BSE transmission in cattle.

Regional Advisory Councils

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the conditions for the setting up of regional advisory councils in connection with the Post 2002 Common Fisheries Policy. [51444]

Mr. Morley: The Commission's proposals for the future of the Common Fisheries Policy are now expected imminently: we may expect them, if the Commission follows through with the ideas it envisaged in its Green Paper last year, to propose the establishment of regional committees which would comprise a range of stakeholder representatives. The idea of involving stakeholders more closely in management decisions relating to the fisheries in which they are interested is broadly welcome to us: the precise details of what may be adopted will need to be the subject of consultation with interested UK bodies and then negotiations in the Council of Ministers.

Farmers

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of the farm workforce is aged under 35 years in each European Union member nation; and how much financial aid was claimed by each European Union member nation under the EU system of grants and interest rate subsidies to assist young farmers to enter the agriculture industry in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [53202]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the latest available information from Eurostat (the Statistics Office for the European Community) on the proportion of the agricultural work force aged under 35 years in each member state. It was not obligatory for member states to collect information on ages of all workers in 1993 and 1997.

Proportion of workforce aged under 35 years[1]

Percentage

EU member state	*1989–90*	*1993*	*1995*	*1997*
Belgium	20	19	23	21
Denmark	20	—	31	32
Germany	30	28	27	25
Greece	19	23	18	17
Spain	20	—	22	22

Proportion of workforce aged under 35 years[1]

Percentage

EU member state	*1989–90*	*1993*	*1995*	*1997*
France	21	21	20	20
Ireland	26	31	30	30
Italy	17	16	15	16
Luxembourg	26	26	25	23
Netherlands	32	—	32	—
Austria	—	—	31	29
Portugal	30	—	26	25
Finland	—	—	29	29
Sweden	—	—	17	—
United Kingdom	28	—	24	—
Total EU12	22	—	20	—
Total EU15	—	—	21	—

[1] Excludes non-regular workers (eg seasonal, casual and gang labour)

Source:

EC Farm Structure Surveys—Eurostat

The EU regulation on rural development, which was implemented in 2000, permits member states to provide funds for the setting-up of young farmers as part of their rural development programmes. Expenditure from the EU budget for these schemes, by member state, is shown in the following table. Prior to 2000 other EU member states may have provided aid to young farmers via structural fund programmes or national schemes. We do not have information on any such schemes or the levels of expenditure.

Rural development programmes EU expenditure on setting up young farmers

euro million

	2000	*2001*
Belgium	0.7	0
Denmark	0	0
Germany	1.0	2.4
Greece	0	0
Spain	1.2	4.7
France	22.8	29.8
Ireland	0	0
Italy	19.5	42.0
Luxembourg	0.1	0.3
Netherlands	0	0
Austria	8.0	8.3
Portugal	0	0
Finland	0	0
Sweden	0.3	0.8
UK	0	0
Total EU15	53.6	88.2

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 829W, on newspaper advertising, how many advertisements have been placed in each of the publications listed since 8 June 2001; and what the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* result of each advertisement was. [49927]

Mr. Morley: Our records show that we booked the following number of advertisements since June 2001.

	Number of advertisements
Regional Papers	78
National Press	8
Magazines	55
Total	141

The purpose of newspaper advertisements is to inform and increase general awareness of the Department's policies, aims, activities and procedures. The advertisements may be aimed at any or all of the general public, stakeholders, industry and special interest groups as well as being directed at potential employees and can be targeted locally, by region, or nationally. Measurement of results can be either subjective or quantifiable, many of the advertisements aim for respondent involvement, some advertisements generate other media coverage thereby achieving a wider dissemination of the message.

To provide the detail for each advertisement as asked for in the question would incur disproportionate cost.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible in each of the last five years. [50304]

Mr. Morley: The information is contained in the annual reports and accounts of the Department's NDPBs, which are laid before Parliament each year. Copies are deposited in the Library of the House.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 355W, on the Rural White Paper, what proportion of announced funds and schemes was spent, broken down by category, during 2001–02. [53780]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 991W, which set out details of the latest available information on expenditure broken down by category.

Since then I can report the following:

220 application forms have been issued in respect of the £2 million Government fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas. 44 applications worth £375,000 have been approved and the actual amount paid out from September 2001, when the scheme came into operation, to 31 March 2002 is £79,000.

From April 2001 up to the end of the third quarter, December 2001 Cornwall, Devon, Durham and Lincolnshire partnerships have reported the creation of 8,588 child care places broken down as follows: Durham—2,187, Devon—2,484, Cornwall—2,310, Lincolnshire—1,607. Figures up to April 2002 are not yet available.

The final figures for expenditure in 2001–02 on Rural Bus Subsidy Grant and Rural Bus Challenge are £41.4 million and £11.2 million respectively, a total of £52.6 million.

The total outturn for expenditure on the new countryside agency's Vital Villages Grant schemes until 31 March 2002 is: Community Services Grant—£1.7 million, Parish Plans Fund—£399,000, Parish Transport Fund—£354,000. In addition grants worth £5.9 million have been approved under the Rural Transport Partnership fund.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place the study *(a)* to identify the key drivers of economic development and social exclusion in rural areas and *(b)* into rural statistics relating to the Rural White Paper in the Library. [53887]

Alun Michael: Both studies have attracted a wide level of interest. Consultation on the economic study of rural areas report is now expected to be complete by early next month. We plan to publish both reports and to place copies in the Library as soon as possible.

Bovine TB

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers were waiting for bovine TB tests, broken down by constituency, in each month since January 2001. [53759]

Mr. Morley: The information is not available in the format requested. Raw data show that at the end of March 2002 there were some 2,200 TB tests overdue in the Cornwall Animal Health Office area.

In context, at the end of March 2002 some 10,500 TB tests were overdue in the west animal health region and some 25,000 overdue in GB.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of changes to the geographical incidence of reported cases of bovine TB in herds in the last five years; and what impact this has had on the deployment of her Department's bovine TB testing and control resources. [53205]

Mr. Morley: In the last five years the known higher incidence areas, such as Cornwall, Devon and Gloucestershire in the south and west of England and south and mid-Wales, have seen increases in the number of incidents of bovine TB. In addition to these, new areas of infection have been identified in Derbyshire and Staffordshire. The restart of TB testing after the foot and mouth disease outbreak has disclosed an increase in incidents in the areas with higher incidence of bovine TB. Outside of these areas it is not yet clear whether the scattered incidents come from movement of infected cattle or new foci of disease.

As herds with bovine TB are identified greater veterinary resource is targeted to testing herds in the surrounding area, usually on a parish basis. Currently the greatest deployment of state veterinary resource on bovine TB testing is to be found in the parishes of the south and west of England and the south and west Wales. Most routine TB testing is carried out on behalf of the State Veterinary Service by local veterinary practitioners employed as local veterinary inspectors (LVIs).

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals the Department has made at EU level to reform the common fisheries policy. [51236]

Mr. Morley: The Government set out their views on the future of the common fisheries policy in September 2001, in response to the Commission's Green Paper on the subject.

Our primary aim must be a policy which is both economically and environmentally sustainable and which offers stakeholders greater involvement in management decisions affecting them. Only in that way will the CFP attract support and credibility from fishermen and so ensure responsible stock management and offer the prospect of a viable future. I strongly agree with the Commission's conclusions in their Green Paper on the operation of the CFP that it is not meeting its objectives. The Commission's actual proposals for the future of the CFP, which we need in order that these vital negotiations can start, are now expected imminently.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the magazines and periodicals subscribed to by her Department, stating for each subscription the *(a)* number of copies taken and *(b)* annual cost. [52822]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* DEFRA has 1,376 subscriptions which are centrally managed, the annual cost of the centralised subscriptions is £75,816.89.

There may be local magazine and periodical subscription arrangements for agencies and decentralised budget holders.

To list the magazines and periodicals and obtain details of the decentralised expenditure for these subscriptions could only be done at a disproportionate cost.

Incinerators (Animal Disposal)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the names, locations and percentage out of the total number of those commercial incinerators deemed adequate for the disposal of animals following a future animal disease outbreak. [53798]

Mr. Morley: Six commercial large-animal incinerators in England and Wales have indicated they are willing to dispose of animals culled under foot and mouth disease control measures. Negotiations and contractual arrangements have yet to be finalised and as a result, the names and locations cannot be disclosed. The total weekly disposal capacity of these six sites is approximately 17,000 sheep or 1,900 cattle.

At present, as set out in the Interim Contingency Plan, incineration will be the initial preferred disposal route in a disease outbreak, but in the event of escalation, additional disposal routes, including rendering and licensed commercial landfill, will be employed.

Environment Agency

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether it is the policy of her Department to allow the Environment Agency to *(a)* reduce the resources devoted to freshwater fisheries and *(b)* increase expenditure on other aspects of the agency's work; and if she will make a statement. [52482]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The controls on financial, staffing and related matters are defined in the Environment Agency Financial Memorandum, prepared by DEFRA and the National Assembly for Wales and agreed with the agency. Revenue from rod and net licence duties, together with this Department's fisheries grant-in-aid are used for salmon and freshwater fisheries purposes only, unless otherwise agreed.

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to ensure that the Environment Agency BRITE proposals do not result in a transfer of funding and manpower from freshwater fisheries activities to other areas of the agency's responsibilities; and if she will make a statement. [52483]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 129W.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average time that agrimonetary compensation payments were overdue in *(a)* England, *(b)* the south-west and *(c)* Somerset was in 2001–02. [53308]

Mr. Morley: Payments of agrimonetary compensation in England due to be made in the financial year 2001–02 were nearly all made in that period. We have not interrogated the databases necessary to provide details of late payments as this could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Curry Moor, Somerset

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when Curry Moor in Somerset was registered as a reservoir; what consultation, and with whom, there was ahead of the registration; what measures were taken to assess the social and environmental impact of the reservoir on Curry Moor; who has responsibility for the reservoir; and whether the reservoir has its completion certificate. [53309]

Mr. Meacher: I understand that the Curry Moor embankment was built in the 12th century for flood protection. The Environment Agency was granted planning permission in July 1999 to carry out strengthening works to ensure its continuing safety as one of the agency's flood prevention works. These works started in May 2001 and have not yet been completed so no final certificate has been issued by the construction engineer. In recognition of its potential to retain a significant volume of water artificially, Somerset county council, as the enforcement authority for the purposes of the Reservoirs Act 1975, registered the embankment as forming part of a large raised reservoir in March 2002. Registration under the 1975 Act is necessary for all reservoirs which are designed to hold, or are capable of holding, more than 25,000 cubic metres of water above natural ground level. No consultation is required for registration purposes.

Organic Waste

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent steps have been taken to encourage composting of organic *(a)* kitchen and *(b)* garden waste from (i) domestic and (ii) commercial properties by local authorities; [52382]

(2) what her Department's *(a)* national and *(b)* local targets for (i) domestic and (ii) commercial composting of organic waste are; [52384]

(3) what funding is available to local authorities to increase levels of composting; and by how much funding has changed for each year since 1997. [52383]

Mr. Meacher: The Government strongly supports composting as a way of disposing of biodegradable waste, improving soil quality and replacing non-renewable products such as peat. Although the land spreading of composted kitchen/catering waste is currently prohibited under animal health legislation, we are actively encouraging the composting of green waste—at home, at municipal civic amenity sites and when separately collected by local authorities.

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) are currently working with the Composting Association to develop the existing industry standard for compost, to achieve British Standards Institute (BSI) accreditation. The delivery of these industry standards for compost will help to create markets for organic waste derived products.

Targets have been set for England and Wales to recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005. This national target is backed up by statutory targets for each local authority in England for 2003–04 and 2005–06.

The 2000 spending review allocated £220 million private finance initiative funding for waste management that can be used to deliver increased recycling/composting rates. It also established a new £140 million household waste and recycling fund to help local authorities meet their statutory performance standards for recycling and composting.

The principal funding for local authority waste management functions, including composting, is the Environmental Protection and Cultural Services (EPCS) standard spending assessment. The spending review 2000 set the Government's support for local authorities for the three years up to 2003–04. This included an annual increase in the revenue support to local authorities for environmental protection and cultural services (EPCS). By 2003–04 this support will have risen by £1.1 billion over the 2000–01 provision. Consistent with the general local authority financial framework, it is for individual local authorities to decide the proportion of their budget that should be directed to waste management work.

The average annual increase in the EPCS standard spending assessment block since 1997–98 has been 3.3 per cent.

Future funding for local authority waste management will be determined in the 2002 spending review.

Flood Defence

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what future plans there are to increase funding to the Environment Agency for flood defence. [53450]

Mr. Morley: This Department provides grant (and supplementary credit approvals to local authorities) to the Environment Agency, local authorities and internal drainage boards for flood and coastal defence capital works in England. The total provision available, and the Environment Agency's share of it, is increasing as shown in the table:

£ million

	2001–02 Provisional outturn	*2002–03 Allocation*	*2003–04 Provision*
Total	91.0	106.0	114.0
Of which:			
Environment Agency	61.5	65.0	[1]—

[1] Not yet allocated

The provision available for 2003–04 will be allocated to authorities later this year.

The other main source of funding for the Environment Agency are levies paid by local authorities. The figures are as follows:

£ million

2001–02	233.7
2002–03	247.8
2003–04	[1]—

[1] To be decided in early 2003

Funding levels for future years will be considered in this year's spending review.

Rural Areas (Budget)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of the Budget on rural areas. [51983]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* Many of the measures in the Budget will benefit rural areas. In particular rural businesses are overwhelmingly small businesses and the Budget measures aimed at helping small businesses will benefit rural areas. The commitments given on increased benefits for health care and education will also help rural areas, as will the decision to exempt the provision of employer-subsidised bus services from tax. Measures to support neighbourhood renewal and to help disadvantaged areas, for example the abolition of stamp duty on non-residential property transfers in those areas, will also help the relatively few rural districts suffering severe social deprivation.

Battery Farming

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she intends to ban the beak trimming of birds kept in battery cages; and if she will make a statement. [49281]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Council Directive 99/74/EC prohibits all mutilation but permits member states to authorise beak trimming provided it is carried out by qualified staff on chickens that are less than 10 days old and intended for laying. It is intended that the directive will be implemented in England without being added to in any way. We do expect beak trimming to be ended as soon as practicable and we will be discussing with the egg industry and breeders the best way to achieve this.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52738]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Ministers in this Department are able to take advantage of the "Programmes for Ministers" organised by the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) in the Cabinet Office.

Since the formation of this Department in June 2001 no departmental training has been provided to Ministers and officials by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52712]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Ministers in this Department are able to take advantage of the "Programmes for Ministers" organised by the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) in the Cabinet Office.

Since the formation of this Department in June 2001, £492,878 has been spent on a departmental centrally funded leadership programme for the senior civil service in DEFRA and for other senior managers in key leadership roles.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52699]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Ministers in this Department are able to take advantage of the "Programmes for Ministers" organised by the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) in the Cabinet Office.

Since the formation of this Department in June 2001 no departmental costs have been incurred on voice coaching for Ministers and officials.

Energy Conservation

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the (1) *(a)* past and *(b)* future impact on carbon dioxide emissions of the enhanced capital allowances for investments in energy saving technologies introduced in April 2001; [53728]

(2) impact on carbon dioxide emissions of the enhanced capital allowances for investments in *(a)* heat pumps, *(b)* radiant and warm air heaters, *(c)* solar heaters, *(d)* energy efficient refrigerator equipment, *(e)* compressor equipment and *(f)* energy-saving technology investments in assets for leasing. [52721]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The energy-saving technologies introduced in 2001 are forecast to save at least 0.5 million tonnes of carbon a year by 2010. The technologies to be added in 2002 are expected to save a further one million tonnes of carbon to 2010, with the greatest contributions from radiant and warm air heaters, and refrigeration compressors. Savings will depend on the uptake and evolution of the scheme.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his Department. [49130]

Mr. Robin Cook: My policy is that, where staff work extra hours, they should be properly recompensed for it. Accordingly, all staff in my Department, except for members of the senior civil service, are entitled to claim overtime for work done in excess of their conditioned hours.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the written questions asked of him between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if he will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54079]

Mr. Robin Cook: Ministers have an obligation to Parliament to ensure that Members receive a substantive response to their named day question on the named day and to endeavour to answer an ordinary written question within a working week of it being tabled.

Ministers and their Departments should make every effort to ensure that the live load of questions still awaiting a substantive reply should be kept to a minimum at all times.

For my Department, only one question tabled by the hon. Member for Buckingham remained unanswered for the period in question, which was due in part to work pressures in the Department.

The hon. Member for Buckingham will receive a response to his question today.

WALES

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the written questions asked of him between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if he will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54086]

Mr. Paul Murphy: At the close of business on 30 April the following questions (excluding this one) had not received a substantive answer:

2001

1 June to 30 June—none

1 July to 31 July—none

1 September to 30 September—none

1 October to 31 October—none

1 November to 30 November—none

1 December to 31 December—none

2002

1 January to 31 January—two, John Bercow MP

1 February to 28 February—none

1 March to 31 March—one, Tony Wright, MP; one, Nigel Evans MP; one, Llew Smith MP

1 April to 30 April—one, Phyllis Starkey MP; three, Nigel Evans MP; one, Matthew Taylor MP.

It is my practice to answer questions as quickly as possible, consistent with the need to provide meaningful answers.

Of the 10 questions listed above, five had been with my Department for four working days or less on 30 April. The remainder asked for information which was not immediately available in the form requested and so required some additional time to compile.

Rheumatology Services

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had about the provision of rheumatology services in Wales. [53105]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with Cabinet Colleagues and National Assembly Ministers, about a range of issues affecting Wales.

I understand that the Assembly is currently considering with the national health service the provision of rheumatology services as part of the National Service Framework in Wales.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the High Court and County Courts Jurisdiction (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52666]

(2) the Civil Procedure (Modification of Enactments) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52650]

(3) the Legal Advice and Assistance (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52674]

(4) the Distress for Rent (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52684]

(5) the Criminal Defence Service (General) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52680]

(6) the Criminal Defence Service (Funding) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52681]

(7) the Transport Tribunal (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52682]

(8) the Criminal Defence Service (Representation Order Appeals) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52679]

(9) the Civil Courts (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52685]

(10) the Referrals to the Special Commissioners Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52686]

(11) the Human Rights Act 1998 (Amendment No. 2) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52683]

(12) the Social Security Commissioners (Procedure) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52622]

(13) the Legal Aid in Criminal and Care Proceedings (Costs) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52676]

(14) the Land Registration Fees Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52677]

(15) the Criminal Defence Service (Choice in Very High Cost Cases) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52678]

(16) the Legal Advice and Assistance at Police Stations) (Remuneration) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52675]

(17) the Legal Aid in Family Proceedings (Remuneration) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52672]

(18) the Social Security Contributions (Decisions and Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52687]

(19) the Pensions Appeal Tribunals (England and Wales) (Amendment No. 2) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52673]

(20) the Land Registration (District Registries) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52642]

(21) the Value Added Tax Tribunals (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52644]

(22) the Community Legal Service (Financial) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52645]

(23) the Civil Legal Aid (General) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52630]

(24) the Criminal Defence Service (Funding) (Amendment No. 3) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52643]

(25) the Litigants in Person (Costs and Expenses) (Magistrates' Courts) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52640]

(26) the Legal Aid in Criminal and Care Proceedings (Costs) (Amendment No. 2) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52641]

(27) the Financial Services and Markets Tribunal Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52655]

(28) the Magistrates' Courts Committees (Constitution) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52652]

(29) the High Court and County Courts Jurisdiction (Amendment No. 2) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [52653]

(30) the Magistrates' Courts (International Criminal Court) (Forms) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52654]

(31) the Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority (Constitution) (Amendment) 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52651]

(32) the Licensed Conveyancers' Discipline and Appeals Committee (Procedure) Rules Approval Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52648]

(33) the Court of Protection (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52647]

(34) the Civil Procedure (Amendment No. 4) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52649]

(35) the Insurers (Winding Up) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52634]

(36) the Immigration and Asylum Appeals (Procedure) (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52626]

(37) the Crown Court (Amendment) (No. 3) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52628]

(38) the Public Trustee (Notices Affecting Land) (Title on Death) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52629]

(39) the Employment Appeals Tribunal (Amendment) Rules 2001, and if she will make a statement; [52621]

(40) the Magistrates' Courts (Detention and Forfeiture of Terrorist Cash) (No. 2) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52627]

(41) the Civil Procedure (Amendment No. 6) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52624]

(42) the Civil Procedure (Amendment No. 5) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52625]

(43) the Public Record Office (Fees) (No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52639]

(44) the Financial Services and Markets Tribunal (Legal Assistance Scheme, Costs) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52636]

(45) the Financial Services and Markets Tribunal (Legal Assistance) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52637]

(46) the Contracting Out of Functions (Tribunal Staff) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52638]

(47) the Bankruptcy (Financial Services and Markets Act 2000) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52635]

(48) the Contracting Out (Administration and other Court Staff) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52632]

(49) the Community Legal Service (Cost Protection) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52631]

(50) the Community Legal Service (Financial) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52633]

(51) the Justices' Clerks (Qualifications of Assistants) (Amendment) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52658]

(52) the Civil Procedure (Amendment No. 3) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52660]

(53) the Children (Allocation of Proceedings) (Amendment No. 2) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52661]

(54) the Community Legal Service (Funding) (Amendment No. 2) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52646]

(55) the Parental Responsibility Agreement (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [52659]

(56) the Legal Aid in Family Proceedings (Remuneration) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52656]

(57) the Damages (Personal Injury) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52657]

(58) the Criminal Defence Service (Funding) (Amendment No. 2) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52671]

(59) the County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52668]

(60) the General Commissioners of Income Tax (Costs) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52669]

(61) the Justices and Justices' Clerks (Costs) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52670]

(62) the Enforcement of Road Traffic Debts (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52667]

(63) the Inner London Court Staff Pension (Amendment) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52664]

(64) the Criminal Defence Service (General) (No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [52663]

(65) the Civil Procedure (Amendment No. 2) Rules 2001; and if she will make a statement. [52665]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave to him on 1 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 863W.

SCOTLAND

European Union Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to her Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39113]

Mrs. Liddell: Since the Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999 no European Union directives or regulations have been implemented by my Department.

Scottish Financial Enterprise

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she plans to meet Scottish Financial Enterprise; and how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State. [41607]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 685W.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate she has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to her Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42487]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. To date there have been no applications for parental leave in the department.

My department is committed to helping its staff achieve a better balance between their home, family obligations and their work. Parental leave can play an important part in achieving this. We believe it will lead to greater commitment and morale among staff with families and to help reduce staff turnover.

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which her Department has made public

as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45404]

Mrs. Liddell: Since my Department was established on 1 July 1999 the Scotland Office Service Delivery Agreement, the Scotland Office Charger and the Scotland Office Departmental Annual Reports have been publicly available. These give details of the service the public can expect to receive from my Department, and its record against these standards.

Scottish Interests

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she has taken to represent Scottish interests to the Department for Work and Pensions on pensions issues. [46348]

Mrs. Liddell: I have frequent meetings with Department for Work and Pensions Ministers and discuss a wide range of matters with them.

Shipyards

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive on helping shipyards in Scotland to market themselves *(a)* abroad and *(b)* within the UK. [45963]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Clyde Shipyards Task Force set out recommendations to promote the Clyde Yards. I shall continue to have regular discussions with Scottish Executive Ministers about how we might support these and other Scottish shipyards at home and abroad.

Whisky Strip

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what representations she has received from the tourist industry in Scotland on the impact of the whisky strip on miniature whiskies produced for the tourist industry; [48040]

(2) what representations she has received from the gift packaging industry in Scotland on the impact of the introduction of a whisky strip for whisky miniatures used in producing gift packs; [48041]

(3) what representations she has received from the whisky industry on the impact of the whisky strip on the production of miniature whiskies. [48039]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I have received formal submissions from the Scotch Whisky Association and the Gin and Vodka Association covering a wide range of concerns on the introduction of fiscal marks on spirits. I have also received informal representations.

It was clear from the consultation process that the introduction of tax stamps would have a severe impact on the productivity and compliance costs of the spirits industry which, if passed on in full, could have had a significant impact on retail prices for spirits. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer therefore decided to pursue a joint programme of co-operation with the spirits industry to identify, track and trace illicit consignments of spirits, not involving strip stamps.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in her Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions she has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within her Department. [50473]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* My Department does not provide services directly to the public and I have had no discussions with private companies about the use of smart card technology. The office of the e-Envoy has established a working group to consider policy on smart cards for the United Kingdom.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pensioners in Glasgow, Pollok are receiving the minimum income guarantee; and what estimate she has made of the numbers of those who are eligible but have not claimed. [52479]

Mr. Foulkes: In the Glasgow, Pollock constituency, some 3,600 people benefit from the minimum income guarantee. Estimates of the number of pensioners eligible but not claiming minimum income guarantee are not available below Great Britain level. Figures for Great Britain are included in the publication "Take Up of Income Related Benefits: Statistics for 1999–2000".

Tartan Week

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what involvement her Department had in the Tartan Week celebrations in the USA. [52559]

Mrs. Liddell: The First Minister and other representatives of the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament attended the Tartan Day celebrations. I and my Department were happy to provide support. The First Minister and I share the view that such events can lend support to the Friends of Scotland initiative.

Grangemouth Refinery

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she, her Ministers and officials have held with BP over future plans for the Grangemouth refinery since January; and if she will make a statement. [53593]

Mr. Foulkes: I visited BP's complex at Grangemouth on 22 April and met with senior BP management. We discussed their long-term plans for sustaining the future of this very important complex and the contribution it makes to both the local and Scottish economy.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the written questions asked of her between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April;

and if he will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54089]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council. As at 30 April—due in no small part to the increasing number of 'round robin' questions—37 written questions await a reply. These will be answered as soon as possible.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people employed by her Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [45084]

Mrs. Liddell: Information on New Deal appointees who have now left my Department is not held centrally.

DEFENCE

84 Squadron

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to withdraw the Wessex helicopters in service with 84 Squadron; and what aircraft will be used to replace them. [49768]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans we expect to withdraw the Wessex helicopters of 84 Squadron from RAF service on 31 March 2003. They will be replaced by the Bell 412 Enhanced Performance helicopter.

National Insurance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost in the next 12 months of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* agencies of his Department, *(c)* each of the armed forces and *(d)* employers in respect of time spent by employees on reserve forces service. [52082]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W, by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary (Mr. Smith).

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the full year cost of Budget changes to national insurance to the MOD in the first year of its operation. [53528]

Mr. Ingram: The full year cost to the Ministry of Defence of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions in 2003–04 is estimated to be some £60 million.

Transport Aircraft

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many transport aircraft have been chartered and leased to operate on behalf of British armed forces *(a)* for ISAF and *(b)* as part of the operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan; and from which (i) sources and (ii) countries the leased aircraft have come. [52115]

Mr. Hoon: As at 22 April, a total of 89 aircraft have been chartered/leased in support of the International Security Assistance Force. With one exception, these were sourced through UK-based commercial aircraft brokers. 69 have been provided by various Russian airlines, nine by Ukrainian airlines and nine by a Latvian airline. An Armenian airline provided an aircraft over a period. An Iranian aircraft was sourced through a commercial company based in Germany.

64 aircraft were sourced through UK-based aircraft brokers in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, 52 from a Russian and 12 from a Latvian airline.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the responses, by percentage in each category of answer, from members of the *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Royal Air Force and *(c)* Army in the latest available continuous attitude survey to questions regarding (i) service family accommodation and (ii) single living accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [52106]

Dr. Moonie: The purpose of the continuous attitude surveys is to ascertain the attitude of personnel towards a range of service conditions including accommodation. Senior staff and policy makers use the information gathered from the surveys to identify which policies are seen to be working and to inform subsequent policy development work.

The surveys are purely a management tool and would risk losing their significance if published out of context. It is also relevant that, in order to encourage full participation, respondents are assured of the continuing anonymity of their inputs. I am therefore withholding the information requested in accordance with Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Royal Navy

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total requirement of the Royal Navy, broken down by ship type, in *(a)* 1997, and *(b)* 2002 and planned for *(c)* 2007, *(d)* 2012 and *(e)* 2017; and if he will make a statement. [52113]

Mr. Ingram: The term "requirement of the Royal Navy" is not one that is generally recognised by the Ministry of Defence, however the number of Royal Navy ships and submarines in service in 1997 and 2002 as well as the currently planned numbers for 2007 are shown in the following table.

Vessel type	*1997*	*2002*	*2007*
Submarines	15	16	13
Aircraft Carriers	3	3	3
Landing Platform Docks	2	0	2
Landing Platform Helicopter	0	1	1
Destroyers	12	11	11
Frigates	23	21	21
Minehunters	18	22	22
Offshore Patrol	8	7	5
Patrol Craft	15	16	16

Vessel type	1997	2002	2007
Ice Patrol Ship	1	1	1
Survey Ships	6	3	4

[1] HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark the new replacement landing platform docks are planned to enter service in 2003

Beyond 2007 numbers are dependent upon continuing analysis and evaluation and upon decisions about how particular capability requirements might in future most cost-effectively be met.

Aircraft

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total requirement of the *(a)* RAF and *(b)* Royal Navy, broken down by aircraft type in (i) 1997, (ii) 2002 and planned for (iii) 2007, (iv) 2010 and (v) 2017; and if he will make a statement. [52133]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* Holdings of RAF and Royal Navy aircraft in 1997 and 2002, and planned holdings in 2007—including both operational aircraft and those in sustainment fleets but excluding aircraft operated by the Defence Procurement Agency and QinetiQ—are set out. A separate table shows the aircraft which form the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight.

Beyond 2007, numbers are dependent upon continuing analysis and evaluation and upon decisions about how particular capability requirements might in future most cost-effectively be met. In some areas the capabilities currently provided by RAF and RN aircraft may be provided under service provision contracts with commercial partners under PFI arrangements—in these cases fleet sizes and aircraft types will normally be a matter for the service provider to determine in light of the specified requirement.

RAF aircraft

	Requirement		Current planning assumption
Type	1997	2002	2007
A400M	0	0	0
Astor	0	0	4
BAe125	8	6	6
BAe146	3	2	2
Bulldog[1]	116	0	0
C17	0	4	4
Canberra	9	7	0
Chinook[2]	34	—	—
Dominie[3]	10	11	11
Eurofighter	0	0	78
JSF	0	0	0
FSTA	0	0	1
Gazelle[4]	21	0	0
Glider—Vigilant	58	57	56
Glider—Viking	82	89	84
Glider—Valiant	4	0	0
Glider—Janus	2	0	0
Harrier[5]	70	83	75
Hawk[3, 6, 7]	100	118	112
Hercules	56	51	51
Islander	2	2	2
Jaguar	54	66	35
Jetstream[3]	10	11	11
Nimrod	29	24	24
Puma[2]	37	—	—
Sea King Mk3	25	25	25
Sea King replacement	0	0	0

RAF aircraft

	Requirement		Current planning assumption
Type	1997	2002	2007
Sentry AEW1	7	7	7
Tornado F3	107	113	72
Tornado GR	142	187	142
Tristar	9	9	9
Tucano[3]	73	126	126
Twin Squirrel[8]	0	3	—
VC10	26	20	19
Wessex[9]	50	4	0

[1] Training now provided under the Light Aircraft Flying Task (LAFT) contract.
[2] Support Helicopters now form part of the Joint Helicopter Command (Army).
[3] The UK Military Flying Training System (UKMFTS) requirement to replace current fixed wing aircrew training aircraft (Tucano, Hawk, Jetstream and Dominie) will potentially be met through a PFI contract.
[4] Training now provided under contract by Defence Helicopter Flying School.
[5] Excludes RN Sea Harriers (see RN table as follows).
[6] RAF requirement excludes aircraft for RN Fleet Requirement and Aircraft Direction Unit (FRADU) tasks.
[7] The specific capability required to meet the non aircrew-training tasks currently performed by the Hawks has yet to be determined.
[8] Leased aircraft for VIP transport, current contract runs to March 2004.
[9] Cyprus SAR only until 2002, to be replaced by contractor operated aircraft from April 03.

The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight currently consists of:

Type	Total Aircraft Holding 1997	Total Aircraft Holding 2002
Dakota	1	1
Hurricane	2	2
Lancaster	1	1
Chipmunk T10	1	1
Spitfire	5	5

RN Aircraft

	Requirement		Current planning assumption
Type	1997	2002	2007
Gazelle	8	8	0
Hawk[1]	15	14	15
Jetstream[2]	15	13	13
Light Utility	—	—	6
Helicopter	—	—	—
Lynx	82	80	62
Merlin	2	38	41
Sea Harrier[4]	49	54	0
Sea King[3]	111	88	67

[1] The specific capability required to meet the tasks currently performed by the Hawks has yet to be determined.
[2] The UK Military Flying Training System (UKMFTS) requirement to replace current fixed wing training aircraft (Jetstream T2) will potentially be met through a PFI contact. Numbers and types of aircraft to meet the requirement would be a matter for the contractor. The remainder of the Jetstream aircraft (Jetstream T3), employed in the communications role, have a later OSD.
[3] Our current planning assumption is that the Lynx Mk 3 and 8 will be replaced by the Surface Combatant Maritime Rotorcraft, in the latter part of the decade.

[4] Under the Joint Force Harrier migration plan the Sea Harrier will be withdrawn from service by Apr 2006.
[5] Our current planning assumption is that the Sea King MK4 (and Puma) will be replaced by the Support and Amphibious Battlefield Rotorcraft programme. The Anti Submarine Sea King force is being replaced by the Merlin Mk1. Numbers shown reflect this run down.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capabilities have been developed to verify the reduction in nuclear weapons since July 1998; and if he will make a statement. [51489]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* Following commitments made in the Strategic Defence Review the Ministry of Defence has developed its capability to consider technologies, skills and techniques which may be utilised in the verification of the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons. The MOD published a paper entitled 'Nuclear Verification' in April 2000 which summarised the work of an initial study by the Atomic Weapons Establishment Aldermaston which examined the United Kingdom's capabilities to verify the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons. A verification research programme has also been established to cover further technical and systems studies and this is continuing. MOD will continue to maintain its awareness of technologies which may be relevant to the verification of nuclear disarmament.

Defence Diplomacy Mission

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the enhanced arms control programme set up under the Defence Diplomacy Mission of the strategic defence review; how many staff were dedicated to this programme in *(a)* July 1998 and *(b)* April 2002. [51259]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* Principal achievements of the enhanced arms control programme under the Defence Diplomacy Mission of the strategic defence review have included:

Nuclear arms control

After withdrawal of the RAF's freefall nuclear bomb, Trident is now our only nuclear system. All WE-177 warheads have been dismantled, as have all Chevaline warheads. The operationally available stockpile has been reduced to fewer than 200 warheads, which is a reduction of more than 70 per cent. in the potential explosive power of our nuclear forces since the cold war. The readiness of our nuclear forces has been reduced. Only a single Trident submarine is now on deterrent patrol, carrying 48 warheads. The submarine patrol is normally on several days' "notice to fire" and its missiles are de-targeted.

Fissile material no longer required for defence purposes has been placed under international safeguards and all enrichment and reprocessing facilities in the UK are now subject to Euratom safeguards and liable to international inspection by the IAEA. The MOD has become more transparent about its nuclear and fissile material stockpiles. The Ministry of Defence published a report on Historical Accounting and Plutonium in April 2000.

The MOD has taken a lead in promoting the issue of the international verification of nuclear arms reductions and commissioned the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston to conduct studies. An initial report entitled Nuclear Verification was published in April 2000 and a programme has begun to develop UK expertise in verifying the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons internationally.

The MOD worked with the FCO to enable the UK to play a key role in the successful agreement of a final document at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in 2000 which set out a programme of action for the next five years.

The MOD has supported FCO efforts leading to the UK signature and ratification of the protocols to the treaty of Pelindaba (African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone) in 2001. It has played an active role in establishing the verification mechanisms for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban treaty (CTBT) through scientific support to the Provisional Technical Secretariat of the CTBT organisation in Vienna and, together with the FCO, has continued to promote its early entry into force.

Biological and toxin weapons convention

The MOD has provided expert technical and policy advice as part of the delegation to the ad hoc group in Geneva negotiating a protocol to strengthen the biological and toxin weapons convention (BTWC), as well as the delegation to the BTWC Review Conference, including drafting a number of important technical papers. In particular, DSTL Porton Down made a leading contribution to the technical aspects of the draft protocol and drafted a thorough and well received review of scientific and technological developments to inform the Review Conference. This input has been a key factor enabling the UK to play a leading role in these negotiations. The MOD has also contributed substantially to the Green Paper on Biological Arms Control to be published by the Foreign Secretary on 29 April.

Chemical weapons convention

The MOD has also provided expert technical and policy advice as part of the delegation to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague, including drafting a number of important technical papers. This input has played a key part in enabling the UK to play a leading role in the OPCW. We have provided a programme of training to enhance the capabilities of OPCW inspectors. This year we have contributed £50,000 to the OPCW voluntary fund to provide assistance to states in the event that they are attacked with chemical weapons. We have continued to conduct annual practice challenge inspection exercises to test our own responses and to help provide training to the OPCW inspectors. DSTL Porton Down is one of some 12 laboratories world wide that has achieved and retains the status of designation by the Director-General of the OPCW for the analysis of chemical samples. With the FCO, we have worked bilaterally with a number of states to clarify issues arising from their declaration of relevant facilities and activities under the chemical weapons convention.

Russia

We have initiated a programme of assistance to Russia with destruction of its chemical weapons and for biological non-proliferation projects, contributing up to £12 million over three years. We have successfully negotiated a treaty with Russia covering this assistance, which the Defence Secretary signed on 20 December 2001. We have also attracted to the UK programme

contributions worth some euro 2 million and £1.4 million from the EU and Norway respectively, which MOD will manage on their behalf.

Conventional arms control

Since July 1998 the Joint Arms Control Implementation Group (JACIG) has conducted or hosted some 400 inspections or visits related to existing arms control treaties, such as the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, or confidence and security building agreements, such as Vienna Document 1999. This includes 45 missions related to the Open Skies treaty. These have involved regular contact with all 54 other nations in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), although inspections are not conducted on or by other NATO nations. In addition, JACIG has conducted a variety of bilateral activities, outside formal treaty requirements, designed to foster good working relationships with a number of OSCE nations, particularly with Russia and countries in the Balkans. These have included running language training and arms control inspectors' courses, lecturing at overseas institutions, and providing technical expert advice in a variety of forums.

We played a positive role in the convention on certain conventional weapons (CCW) in gaining a mandate to take forward discussions to address explosive remnants of war.

We have supported implementation of the Ottawa convention in a number of ways, including through the provision of a member of staff, jointly with the Department for International Development, to the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

Export control regimes

Together with the FCO we have achieved a well established outreach programme to 12 countries on export control and non-proliferation. We have increased the effectiveness of the Wassenaar Arrangement, which covers the transfers of conventional weapons and dual-use material, particularly with respect to information sharing a transparency. We have agreed guidelines on the export of man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) and criteria for judging destabilising transfers of conventional weapons. We have also been instrumental in the restructuring of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Iraq

An MOD representative played an active role in the UN Secretary-General's panel which proposed the new UNMOVIC (United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission), on which MOD provides the UK commissioner. We have also assisted in the training of UNMOVIC inspectors.

Working with other Departments

The MOD works closely with the FCO as well as the DTI, DfID and other Government Departments to formulate arms control policy, negotiate in international forums and implement non-proliferation measures.

Staff numbers

The staff numbers involved in MOD work on arms control as part of the Defence Diplomacy Mission are as follows:

	Staff numbers
(a) July 1998	134
(b) April 2002	140

Note:

Numbers are full-time equivalents rounded to nearest whole number. They include both civilian and military staff. They exclude those in a support role and work conducted for other Departments.

Naval Vessels

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to put further Royal Navy vessels at states of low readiness. [52895]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The plan to hold HMS Sheffield at extended readiness from November 2002 until September 2004 was declared on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 34W.

On current plans, and commensurate with force levels endorsed within the SDR, HMS Invincible will be held at extended readiness from 2006 until she is withdrawn from service towards the end of this decade.

It has been decided that the Type 42 Destroyer HMS Glasgow will be placed at extended readiness from May 2002 to early July 2002. This will not affect the Royal Navy's ability to meet its current level of commitments during that priod.

Army Manpower

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Army training regiments will accept their last infantry recruits. [53050]

Mr. Ingram: All adult Standard Entry Infantry recruits will henceforth receive both initial and specialist training at the School of Infantry at Catterick in North Yorkshire on a combined course. Junior Entry Infantry recruits will receive their basic training at either the Army Training Regiment (ATR) at Bassingbourn in Cambridgeshire or the Army Foundation College at Harrogate, then move to Catterick for Phase 2 specialist Infantry training. It is our intention that no Infantry training will in future be carried out at other ATRs, although a number of adult Standard Entry recruits are still completing their initial training at ATR Glencorse, ATR Lichfield, ATR Pirbright and ATR Winchester.

Armed Forces

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the in-year requirement for UK trained Army, Naval Service and Royal Air Force personnel has been in each of the past five years; and what the requirement will be in 2003. [53606]

Mr. Ingram: The in-year requirements for UK trained personnel for each of the past five years are detailed in the following table.

	Naval Service	*[1]Army*	*[2]RAF*
1 April 1997	42,911	103,353	56,445
1 April 1998	41,937	102,825	54,527
1 April 1999	40,943	102,389	53,024
1 April 2000	39,863	103,086	52,160
1 April 2001	39,897	103,926	51,594

[1] This represents the requirement for UK Trained Army Personnel (UKTAP) and excludes the requirement for the Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS) personnel and Gurkha Trained Army Manpower (GURTAM)

[2] Figure excludes the requirement for FTRS personnel

The requirement on 1 April 2003 for the Naval Service is currently assessed at 38,321 personnel and for the RAF it will be approximately 49,000. Detailed work is still under way to determine the Army's requirement for 2003.

National Missile Defence

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions his Department has had with *(a)* EU member states and *(b)* the EU Commissioner for External Relations, regarding a European Union view on national missile defence. [53599]

Mr. Hoon: None. Missile defence is not a matter for the European Union.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what agreements have been made with the USA regarding the use of UK facilities at *(a)* Fylingdales and *(b)* Menwith Hill. [53585]

Mr. Ingram: The use of the Ballistic Missile Early Warning Station at RAF Fylingdales by the United Kingdom and the United States is governed by an exchange of notes between the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the American ambassador, dated 15 February 1960.

As with other UK bases that are made available to the United States visiting forces, the use of RAF Menwith Hill is governed by the NATO Status of Forces Agreement of 1951 and additional confidential arrangements.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions his Department has had with UK firms bidding for work on the US-initiated programme of national missile defence; and if he will make a statement. [53598]

Mr. Hoon: Expertise relating to missile defence was developed by a number of the United Kingdom companies during the Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme sponsored by the Ministry of Defence. An unclassified summary of the report was placed in the Library of the House on 26 February 2002. Regular discussions with firms take place as part of continuing activity in this area.

Afghanistan

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the number of civilians who have been killed in Afghanistan since the commencement of international coalition military action against terrorists in that country; and if he will make a statement. [53751]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 860W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones).

Missile Defence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the prospects are for a missile defence system that can cover the European countries of NATO; and if he will make a statement. [53692]

Mr. Hoon: The United States has made clear that it wishes to see friends and allies protected from the emerging threat posed by ballistic missiles. However, it has yet to put forward any detailed plans.

Sea Harriers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 823–4W, on Sea Harriers, if he will estimate the value of the savings to which he refers in column 824W. [53534]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* I refer the hon Member to the answer I gave to him on 29 April 2002 *Official Report*, column 531W.

Medical Treatment (Waiting Times)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks are awaiting medical treatment; and how many of these have been waiting over three months. [53872]

Dr. Moonie: Service patients are mainly treated in Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA) administered Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs) situated in National Health Service (NHS) Trusts, in other NHS hospitals as NHS patients or in DSCA Directly Managed Units in the United Kingdom and overseas. The Army administers secondary care in Northern Ireland. The British Forces Germany Health Service provides secondary care for Service personnel in Germany, where there are generally no waiting lists.

The MOD only maintains central records on the overall number of Armed Forces patients awaiting inpatient treatment (including daycase surgery) at MDHUs. MDHU waiting list information as at 31 December 2001 for all MDHUs except Portsmouth, for which the waiting list information is at 30 September 2001, is provided in the following table. These are the latest dates for which information is available.

Waiting time (months)	*Number of service patients waiting*
0–3 months	1,166
3+ months	897
Total waiting	2,063

Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut (Fatalities)

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what special inquiries have been undertaken in relation to two recent deaths from bullet wounds at Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut, near Camberley, Surrey; and if he will make a statement. [53885]

Dr. Moonie: The recent deaths of two soldiers at the Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut, are the subject of on-going investigations by the Surrey police. An Army Board of Inquiry will be held into each incident in due course, although this cannot take place until such time the associated police investigations are complete.

Pay

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel *(a)* with children and *(b)* without children in the (i) Army, (ii) Royal Navy and (iii) RAF are earning under £92.90 per week after tax and national insurance deductions; and if he will make a statement. [53762]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 425W. The minimum rate of pay for armed forces personnel (for Army new entrants under 17 only) is currently £8,997 per annum. As this is considerably greater than £92.90 per week (£4,830.80 per annum) and the adult new entrant rate is even higher at £10,778 per annum, an individual in the armed forces would not, therefore, receive as little as £92.90 per week after normal tax and national insurance contributions.

Comprehensive information on parental status is not held, for example on those single personnel with children, or married with a spouse with children from a previous relationship. Information on the parental status of individual armed forces personnel in receipt of specific rates of pay could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Warship Support Modernisation Initiative

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assurances will be given on the terms and conditions for the staff to be transferred to the private sector as part of the Warship Support Modernisation initiative. [54787]

Mr. Ingram: Following successful discussions between officials from my Department, MOD trade unions and the prospective partnering companies, my Department and the partnering companies have signed a Joint Statement of Intent on the transfer of staff to the private sector under the Warship Support Modernisation initiative. The Joint Statement of Intent gives assurances that current terms and conditions, including redundancy provision, will transfer in full in compliance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations and the MOD TUPE Code of Practice. New pension arrangements, broadly comparable to those currently enjoyed under the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme, will be offered to those who transfer.

The partnering companies have stated their intention to achieve any changes to pay and conditions of employment through consultation and negotiation. It is also their intention to achieve any job reductions that may arise through natural wastage and voluntary means to avoid compulsory redundancies. The companies confirm their commitment to work fully with the recognised trade unions after the transfer. These assurances are set out in full in the Joint Statement of Intent, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of single male pensioners aged *(a)* 70 and under, *(b)* 71 to 75, *(c)* 76 to 80 and *(d)* over 80 years had an income below 60 per cent. of the median income in each of the last 10 years. [53803]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Proportion of single male pensioners below 60 per cent. of median

Percentage of pensioners

	Income threshold: 60 per cent. of median	
	Before housing costs	*After housing costs*
Including the self-employed		
1991–92	23	30
1992–93	18	28
1993–94	17	26
1994–95	17	23
1995–96	17	22
1996–97	17	25
1997–98	18	28
1998–99	18	28
1999–2000	18	26
2000–01	16	24
Excluding the self-employed		
1991–92	21	29
1992–93	18	28
1993–94	16	25
1994–95	16	22
1995–96	16	21
1996–97	16	24
1997–98	18	28
1998–99	17	27
1999–2000	18	25
2000–01	16	23

Notes:

1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series. From 1991–92 to 1993–94 data are derived from the Family Expenditure Survey (two calendar years combined for 1991–92 and 1992–93 and two financial years combined for 1993–94). From 1994–95 to 2000–01, data is derived from the Family Resources Survey and represents singe financial years. The Family Resources Survey does not include Northern Ireland, and the latest year for which data are available is 2000–01.
2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors. Estimates are subject to both sample error and to variable in non-response. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).
3. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions. Figures are provided excluding the self-employed, as research suggests that, for self-employed people, income as reported in surveys is often a poor indicator of living standards. HBAI convention is to present results excluding the self-employed, presenting results including the self-employed where the two differ.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out the differences in eligibility criteria for each category of people claiming the *(a)* basic state pension and *(b)* state second pension. [52100]

Mr. McCartney: People can qualify for a full basic state pension on reaching state pension age providing they make a claim and satisfy the following contribution conditions:

They must have paid 50 qualifying contributions before 6 April 1975 or enough contributions in any one tax year after April 1975 for that year to be a qualifying year. Enough contributions must be paid or credited to give qualifying years for about 90 per cent. of their working life.

To qualify for any basic pension at all a person must have enough qualifying years to receive a pension of at least 25 per cent. of the full rate.

People can qualify for additional pension through the state second pension payable at state pension age if they are:

Employees without contracted-out pension arrangement earning between the national insurance lower and upper earnings levels, or

Employees who have contracted-out pension arrangements who earn between the national insurance lower earnings level and £24,600 (in 2002–03 terms) or

Carers who either qualify for Home Responsibilities Protection (HRP) where they are caring for an ill or disabled person or a child under age six; or are entitled to invalid care allowance throughout a qualifying year or

People who, throughout a qualifying year, are entitled to incapacity benefit at the long term rate or; receive severe disablement allowance, and who at state pension age, have worked and paid or are treated as having paid class 1 national insurance contributions for 10 per cent. of their working life.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of pensioner couples where the age of the head of the household was *(a)* 70 and under, *(b)* 71 to 75, *(c)* 76 to 80 and *(d)* over 80 years had an income in (i) the bottom income quintile, (ii) the second bottom income quintile, (iii) the middle income quintile, (iv) the second top income quintile and (v) the top income quintile, in each of the past 10 years. [53811]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Percentage distribution of income for individuals living in pensioners couples by age—excluding the self-employed

Percentage of pensioners

	Net equivalised disposable household income					
	Bottom quintile	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total*
Before housing costs						
Pensioner couples						
1991–92	28	28	21	13	11	5.1
1992–93	25	29	21	14	11	5.2
1993–94	24	31	21	12	12	5.2
1994–95	24	29	21	15	11	5.1
1995–96	27	26	21	15	11	5.1
1996–97	23	29	21	15	12	5.1
1997–98	24	28	22	14	12	5.2
1998–99	27	26	20	15	12	5.2
1999–2000	24	29	21	14	11	5.2
2000–01	26	27	21	14	12	5.2
of which:						
Head aged 70 and under						
1991–92	21	26	24	17	12	2.4
1992–93	20	27	23	16	14	2.4
1993–94	18	31	23	13	15	2.3
1994–95	18	28	23	18	14	2.1
1995–96	21	24	24	17	14	2.2
1996–97	16	27	23	19	16	2.2
1997–98	18	26	23	18	15	2.3
1998–99	20	25	22	18	15	2.3
1999–2000	17	27	23	18	15	2.3
2000–01	19	26	23	17	15	2.2
Head aged 71 to 75						
1991–92	31	28	21	10	11	1.3
1992–93	26	27	21	15	11	1.4
1993–94	27	31	19	13	11	1.5
1994–95	26	30	20	14	9	1.6
1995–96	28	30	19	13	10	1.6
1996–97	25	29	21	13	13	1.5
1997–98	28	31	19	11	11	1.4
1998–99	28	28	20	14	10	1.5
1999–2000	26	32	20	12	10	1.5
2000–01	28	27	22	14	9	1.4
Head aged 76 to 80						
1991–92	37	25	19	9	9	0.9
1992–93	35	31	20	7	7	0.9

Percentage distribution of income for individuals living in pensioners couples by age—excluding the self-employed

Percentage of pensioners

	Net equivalised disposable household income					
	Bottom quintile	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total*
1993–94	30	31	21	9	9	0.9
1994–95	32	26	21	11	9	0.8
1995–96	38	23	18	12	8	0.8
1996–97	30	31	21	13	6	0.9
1997–98	31	28	21	12	7	0.9
1998–99	36	28	16	13	8	0.9
1999–2000	32	29	20	12	7	1.0
2000–01	33	27	19	12	9	1.0
Head aged over 80						
1991–92	32	42	11	8	7	0.5
1992–93	27	39	17	10	7	0.5
1993–94	35	27	19	9	10	0.5
1994–95	32	31	20	10	7	0.6
1995–96	36	25	20	10	8	0.6
1996–97	31	33	17	10	9	0.6
1997–98	28	30	22	12	8	0.6
1998–99	37	27	12	14	9	0.5
1999–2000	39	26	22	7	6	0.5
2000–01	34	30	16	9	10	0.6

	Net equivalised disposable household income					
	Bottom quintile	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total*
After housing costs						
Pensioner couples						
1991–92	23	28	20	15	14	5.1
1992–93	20	28	22	16	14	5.2
1993–94	20	30	22	14	15	5.2
1994–95	19	28	23	16	13	5.1
1995–96	19	29	22	16	14	5.1
1996–97	16	30	22	17	14	5.1
1997–98	18	29	23	17	13	5.2
1998–99	18	29	22	16	15	5.2
1999–2000	18	29	23	16	13	5.2
2000–01	19	27	22	17	15	5.2
of which:						
Head aged 70 and under						
1991–92	16	25	23	20	16	2.4
1992–93	14	27	24	18	16	2.4
1993–94	14	30	23	15	17	2.3
1994–95	14	25	26	19	16	2.1
1995–96	14	25	25	19	17	2.2
1996–97	12	26	24	21	17	2.2
1997–98	12	25	24	21	17	2.3
1998–99	14	24	24	19	19	2.3
1999–2000	13	25	23	21	18	2.3
2000–01	14	24	24	21	18	2.2
Head aged 71 to 75						
1991–92	26	28	20	12	14	1.3
1992–93	22	26	21	16	14	1.4
1993–94	22	31	19	15	13	1.5
1994–95	20	29	23	16	11	1.6
1995–96	19	32	22	15	12	1.6
1996–97	18	31	22	14	14	1.5
1997–98	20	34	22	13	12	1.4
1998–99	18	31	23	15	12	1.5
1999–2000	18	32	24	14	11	1.5
2000–01	21	28	24	15	13	1.4
Head aged 76 to 80						
1991–92	29	29	20	10	11	0.9
1992–93	31	30	21	11	8	0.9
1993–94	26	29	23	11	11	0.9

	Net equivalised disposable household income					
	Bottom quintile	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total*
1994–95	27	29	20	12	12	0.8
1995–96	26	31	18	13	11	0.8
1996–97	21	35	21	15	7	0.9
1997–98	26	28	22	15	9	0.9
1998–99	24	34	18	13	10	0.9
1999–2000	20	36	21	13	10	1.0
2000–01	24	29	21	13	13	1.0
Head aged over 80						
1991–92	38	38	9	9	8	0.5
1992–93	28	35	16	13	9	0.5
1993–94	27	31	21	9	12	0.5
1994–95	26	33	21	12	8	0.6
1995–96	29	30	20	12	10	0.6
1996–97	26	36	17	12	10	0.6
1997–98	24	32	20	15	8	0.6
1998–99	28	32	14	13	13	0.5
1999–2000	32	31	22	10	6	0.5
2000–01	27	35	16	11	11	0.6

Notes:

1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series. From 1991–92 to 1993–94 data are derived from the Family Expenditure Survey (two calendar years combined for 1991–92 and 1992–93 and two financial years combined for 1993–94) and relates to the UK. From 1994–95 to 2000–01, data are derived from the Family Resources Survey and represents single financial years. The Family Resources Survey does not include Northern Ireland, and the latest year for which data are available is 2000–01.
2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response. The income measures used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).
3. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions. Figures are provided excluding the self-employed, as research suggests that, for self-employed people, income as reported in surveys is often a poor indicator of living standards. HBAI convention is to present results excluding the self-employed, presenting results including the self-employed where the two differ significantly.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of single female pensioners aged *(a)* 70 and under, *(b)* 71 to 75, *(c)* 76 to 80 and *(d)* over 80 years had an income below 60 per cent. of the median income in each of the last 10 years. [53813]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is provided in the table.

Proportion of single female pensioners below 60 per cent. of median income

Percentage of pensioners

	Income threshold: 60 per cent. of median	
	Before housing costs	*After housing costs*
Including the self-employed		
1991–92	31	42
1992–93	26	36
1993–94	25	34
1994–95	25	33
1995–96	24	29
1996–97	25	35
1997–98	25	34
1998–99	24	34
1999–2000	24	32
2000–01	23	30
Excluding the self-employed		
1991–92	29	42
1992–93	26	36
1993–94	24	33
1994–95	24	31
1995–96	23	28
1996–97	24	33
1997–98	24	33

Proportion of single female pensioners below 60 per cent. of median income

Percentage of pensioners

	Income threshold: 60 per cent. of median	
	Before housing costs	*After housing costs*
1998–99	23	32
1999–2000	24	31
2000–01	23	29

Notes:

1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series. From 1991–92 to 1993–94 data are derived from the Family Expenditure Survey (two calendar years combined for 1991–92 and 1992–93 and two financial years combined for 1993–94). From 1994–95 to 2000–01, data are derived from the Family Resources Survey and represents single financial years. The Family Resources Survey does not include Northern Ireland, and the latest year for which data are available is 2000–01.

2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors that control for tenure, council tax band and a number of other variables. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).

3. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions. Figures are provided excluding the self-employed, as research suggests that, for self-employed people, income as reported

in surveys is often a poor indicator of living standards. HBAI convention is to present results excluding the self-employed, presenting results including the self-employed where the two differ.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of single male pensioners aged *(a)* 70 and under, *(b)* 71 to 75, *(c)* 76 to 80 and *(d)* over 80 years had an income in (i) the bottom income quintile, (ii) the second bottom income quintile, (iii) the middle income quintile, (iv) the second top income quintile and (v) the top income quintile, in each of the past 10 years. [53810]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Percentage distribution of income for single male pensioners, excluding the self-employed

	Net equivalised disposable household income					
	Bottom quintile	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total*
Before housing costs						
1991–92	21	39	16	11	13	0.9
1992–93	19	40	16	12	13	0.9
1993–94	21	37	18	12	12	0.9
1994–95	21	34	23	12	10	0.9
1995–96	21	35	23	13	9	0.9
1996–97	19	31	25	15	10	0.9
1997–98	21	36	19	15	8	0.9
1998–99	21	35	21	13	9	0.9
1999–2000	21	33	21	15	11	1.0
2000–01	20	33	21	15	10	1.0
After housing costs						
1991–92	18	36	16	14	16	0.9
1992–93	16	40	15	13	17	0.9
1993–94	15	39	17	13	16	0.9
1994–95	16	36	19	14	15	0.9
1995–96	14	39	20	15	13	0.9
1996–97	14	34	21	18	14	0.9
1997–98	17	36	19	15	12	0.9
1998–99	19	33	20	16	12	0.9
1999–2000	16	35	19	15	15	1.0
2000–01	17	32	20	16	15	1.0

Notes:

1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series. From 1991–92 to 1993–94 data are derived from the Family Expenditure Survey (two calendar years combined for 1991–92 to 1992–03 and two financial years combined for 1993–94) and relates to the UK. From the 1994–95 to 2000–01, data are derived from the Family Resources Survey and represents single financial years. The Family Resources Survey does not include Northern Ireland, and the latest year for which data are available is 2000–01.

2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).

3. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions. Figures are provided excluding the self-employed, as research suggests that, for self-employed people, income as reported in surveys is often a poor indicator of living standards. HBAI convention is to present results excluding the self-employed, presenting results including the self-employed where the two differ significantly.

4. As a result of the small sample sizes associated with breaking down male pensioners according to age, only the overall distribution has been presented above. While sample sizes are adequate for point-in-time estimates, it is unlikely that a time series would have any validity as a guide to changes over time. The information for 200–01 can be found in the publication 'Households Below Average Income 1994–95 to 2000–01', a copy of which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of pensioner couples had an income below 60 per cent. of the median income in each of the last 10 years where the head of the family was aged *(a)* 70 and under, *(b)* 71 to 75, *(c)* 76 to 80 and *(d)* over 80 years. [53804]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is provided in the tables.

Proportion of individuals in pensioner couples below 60 per cent. of median income, including the self-employed

	Percentage of pensioners	
Income threshold: 60 per cent. of median	*Before housing costs*	*After housing costs*
1991–92	29	27
1992–93	24	25
1993–94	22	25
1994–95	19	23
1995–96	21	23

Proportion of individuals in pensioner couples below 60 per cent. of median income, including the self-employed

Income threshold: 60 per cent. of median	Percentage of pensioners: Before housing costs	After housing costs
1996–97	20	22
1997–98	21	23
1998–99	23	22
1999–2000	21	22
2000–01	22	22

Proportion of individuals in pensioner couples below 60 per cent. of median income, excluding the self-employed

Income threshold: 60 per cent. of median	Percentage of pensioners: Before housing costs	After housing costs
1991–92	28	27
1992–93	24	25
1993–94	21	24
1994–95	18	22
1995–96	21	23
1996–97	19	22
1997–98	20	23
1998–99	22	22
1999–2000	20	22
2000–01	21	21

Notes:

1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series. From 1991–92 to 1993–94 data are derived from the Family Expenditure Survey (two calendar years combined for 1991–92 and 1992–93 and two financial years combined for 1993–94). From 1994–95 to 2000–01, data are derived from the Family Resources Survey and represents single financial years. The Family Resources Survey does not include Northern Ireland, and the latest year for which data are available is 2000–01.
2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).
3. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions. Figures are provided excluding the self-employed, as research suggests that, for self-employed people, income as reported in surveys is often a poor indicator of living standards. HBAI convention is to present results excluding the self-employed, presenting results including the self-employed where the two differ.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of single female pensioners aged *(a)* 70 and under, *(b)* 71 to 75, *(c)* 76 to 80 and *(d)* over 80 years had an income in (i) the bottom income quintile, (ii) the second bottom income quintile, (iii) the middle income quintile, (iv) the second top income quintile and (v) the top income quintile, in each of the past 10 years. [53809]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the tables.

Percentage distribution of income for single female pensioners by age, excluding the self-employed

Before housing costs:	Net equivalised disposable household income: Bottom quintile	Second quintile	Third quintile	Fourth quintile	Top quintile	Total
Single female pensioners						
1991–92	29	38	16	9	8	3.5
1992–93	27	40	16	10	7	3.4
1993–94	27	37	17	12	7	3.4
1994–95	29	35	18	12	6	3.3
1995–96	28	34	19	14	6	3.2
1996–97	27	34	20	12	7	3.2
1997–98	27	33	20	13	7	3.2
1998–99	27	33	21	13	6	3.2
1999–2000	27	31	21	14	7	3.1
2000–01	27	33	20	13	6	3.1
of which:						
aged 70 and under						
1991–92	24	36	18	11	11	1.2
1992–93	22	37	19	11	10	1.1
1993–94	21	38	18	12	11	1.1
1994–95	23	35	19	13	10	1.1
1995–96	23	35	19	15	8	1.0
1996–97	22	34	22	13	8	1.0
1997–98	20	33	22	16	9	1.0
1998–99	22	33	22	14	9	1.0
1999–2000	21	33	22	14	10	1.0
2000–01	24	33	21	14	9	1.0
aged 71 to 75						
1991–92	35	34	13	11	7	0.7
1992–93	31	39	15	10	6	0.8
1993–94	33	36	14	12	5	0.7
1994–95	28	36	19	11	6	0.7
1995–96	27	34	20	14	5	0.8
1996–97	28	36	18	12	6	0.7
1997–98	29	35	19	11	6	0.6
1998–99	31	35	19	11	4	0.7
1999–2000	31	31	20	13	4	0.6
2000–01	25	35	21	13	6	0.6

Percentage distribution of income for single female pensioners by age, excluding the self-employed

	Net equivalised disposable household income					
Before housing costs:	*Bottom quintile*	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total*
aged 76 to 80						
1991–92	30	42	13	8	6	0.8
1992–93	31	41	13	10	6	0.8
1993–94	32	40	16	9	4	0.7
1994–95	33	37	16	11	3	0.6
1995–96	34	34	17	11	4	0.6
1996–97	30	35	19	9	6	0.6
1997–98	31	32	21	10	6	0.7
1998–99	28	36	19	13	5	0.7
1999–2000	30	34	19	12	4	0.7
2000–01	29	34	19	14	4	0.7
aged over 80						
1991–92	31	39	16	6	8	0.8
1992–93	28	42	17	8	5	0.8
1993–94	28	36	18	12	5	0.9
1994–95	33	32	18	12	5	0.9
1995–96	30	32	19	14	5	0.9
1996–97	29	32	21	13	5	0.8
1997–98	30	31	20	13	5	0.9
1998–99	29	31	21	15	5	0.8
1999–2000	28	27	23	16	6	0.8
2000–01	30	31	20	13	6	0.8

Percentage distribution of income for single female pensioners by age, excluding the self-employed

	Net equivalised disposable household income					
After housing costs:	*Bottom quintile*	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total*
Single female pensioners						
1991–92	27	35	15	12	11	3.5
1992–93	22	39	17	12	10	3.4
1993–94	22	39	17	13	10	3.4
1994–95	23	38	16	13	9	3.3
1995–96	20	38	18	15	9	3.2
1996–97	18	39	19	14	9	3.2
1997–98	22	35	19	15	9	3.2
1998–99	23	32	21	15	9	3.2
1999–2000	22	32	20	16	10	3.1
2000–01	23	31	21	15	10	3.1
of which:						
aged 70 and under						
1991–92	25	29	18	13	15	1.2
1992–93	21	34	17	13	16	1.1
1993–94	19	34	18	13	16	1.1
1994–95	20	34	18	15	13	1.1
1995–96	19	36	19	14	13	1.0
1996–97	17	35	19	16	12	1.0
1997–98	19	30	20	18	13	1.0
1998–99	19	29	23	15	14	1.0
1999–2000	20	29	21	14	16	1.0
2000–01	22	29	20	15	13	1.0
aged 71 to 75						
1991–92	30	37	11	12	11	0.7
1992–93	26	39	14	14	7	0.8
1993–94	29	35	15	11	10	0.7
1994–95	24	39	16	13	8	0.7
1995–96	19	36	21	14	9	0.8
1996–97	19	40	19	13	9	0.7
1997–98	24	36	17	14	8	0.6
1998–99	29	33	17	14	6	0.7
1999–2000	24	33	19	16	7	0.6
2000–01	24	26	24	16	9	0.6
aged 76 to 80						
1991–92	32	37	12	12	8	0.8
1992–93	23	43	16	9	8	0.8
1993–94	20	45	19	10	6	0.7
1994–95	27	42	14	12	5	0.6

Percentage distribution of income for single female pensioners by age, excluding the self-employed

	Net equivalised disposable household income					
After housing costs:	*Bottom quintile*	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total*
1995–96	23	42	15	13	7	0.6
1996–97	20	42	19	12	8	0.6
1997–98	22	38	19	13	8	0.7
1998–99	25	33	20	16	7	0.7
1999–2000	24	35	20	15	7	0.7
2000–01	21	34	22	15	8	0.7
aged over 80						
1991–92	23	40	18	10	9	0.8
1992–93	20	43	19	10	7	0.8
1993–94	19	43	16	15	8	0.9
1994–95	23	40	17	13	7	0.9
1995–96	21	37	18	17	7	0.9
1996–97	18	41	19	16	7	0.8
1997–98	23	37	18	15	7	0.9
1998–99	19	36	20	17	7	0.8
1999–2000	20	33	20	18	8	0.8
2000–01	24	34	20	15	8	0.8

Notes:
1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series. From 1991–92 to 1993–94 data are derived from the Family Expenditure Survey (two calendar years combined for 1991–92 and 1992–93 and two financial years combined for 1993–94) and relates to the UK. From 1994–95 to 2000–01, data are derived from the Family Resources Survey and represents single financial years. The Family Resources Survey does not include Northern Ireland, and the latest year for which data are available is 2000–01.
2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).
3. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions. Figures are provided excluding the self-employed, as research suggests that, for self-employed people, income as reported in surveys is often a poor indicator of living standards. HBAI convention is to present results excluding the self-employed, presenting results including the self-employed where the two differ significantly.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of pensioner households had an income below 60 per cent. of the median income in each of the last 10 years. [53812]

Mr. McCartney: Such information as is available can be found in the publication "Households Below Average Income 1994–95 to 2000–01" a copy of which is held in the Library.

Social Fund

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Social Fund limits were last increased; and if he will make a statement as to when he next expects them to be increased. [54068]

Malcolm Wicks: The gross national budget for social fund loans and grants is decided in time for allocations to be made to each district from 1 April each year. The setting and allocation of the 2002–03 budget has already taken place. At £627 million, the April 2002 budget represents an increase of £6.4 million over the budget set in April 2001. The size of the gross national budget will be reviewed against next year.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42462]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 and figures have been supplied from employment services and DSS legacy systems. Information for earlier years is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Date	*Staff employed*
31 December 1998	139,820
31 December 1999	131,539
31 December 2000	130,799
31 December 2001	134,489

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what buildings owned by his Department have solar panels installed. [53495]

Malcolm Wicks: Five of the buildings we occupy under the terms of the PRIME PFI agreement do have solar panels installed. These buildings are all located in the west country:

Bournemouth—Cotlands road

Truro

Plymouth—Durley

Exeter—Clarendon

Penzance—Branwell.

Royal Mail Benefit Scheme

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many local authorities are operating the Royal Mail "Do Not Redirect" benefit mail scheme. [53808]

Malcolm Wicks: 367 of the 408 local authorities administering housing benefit, representing 90 per cent. of the total, use the official "Do Not Redirect" scheme, stopping housing benefit fraudsters claiming from a false address. Some authorities have established similar

schemes locally with Royal Mail. We are keen to see all authorities using "Do Not Redirect" and will continue to encourage the remaining authorities to do so.

Family Allowances

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will disregard family allowances in benefit calculations. [51290]

Malcolm Wicks: There are no plans to disregard child benefit in the calculation of entitlement to income related benefits. Although the Government have not changed the way that entitlement to income support and income based jobseeker's allowance is calculated, low income families have gained substantially from increases in the allowances for children in these benefits. For example, a couple on income support with two children under the age of 11 is £2,000 a year better off in real terms than they would have been in 1997.

Further, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced recently, we plan to increase the child allowances in the income related benefits by a further £3.50 per week from October 2002.

In the longer term, the new child tax credit, to be introduced from April 2003 will build on the foundations of the universal child benefit to provide a seamless system of support for low income families. It will replace the children's allowances in income support and income based jobseeker's allowance and these benefits will no longer be affected by payments of child benefit. The child tax credit will, alongside child benefit, provide child support of £54.25 a week for the first child in families with an income of less than £13,000 a year.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of claims for incapacity benefit were unsuccessful in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [40784]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

Proportion of unsuccessful incapacity benefit (IB) claims

	Percentage of unsuccessful IB claims as a proportion of claims received
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000[1]	51
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	51
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	52

[1] The underlying data for the period 1 April 1999 to 31 May 1999 only include claims that were unsuccessful because they failed the contribution test. The underlying data from 1 June 1999 onwards include claims that were unsuccessful because they failed the contribution test or were withdrawn, and claims where no medical evidence was received or where the person claimed while living abroad in a country which does not have a reciprocal social security agreement.

Notes:

1. People whose IB claims are unsuccessful can go on the receive national insurance credits only.
2. The number of unsuccessful IB claims may refer to a slightly different time period to the number of claims received.

Source:

The underlying data are taken from 100 per cent. counts supplied by the Department's Central Data Unit.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people claimed incapacity benefit in the York and North Yorkshire area in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [28197]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[pursuant to his reply, 6 March 2002, c. 411W]:* The available information is in the table.

Number of people claiming incapacity benefit (IB) in the City of York and North Yorkshire local authority areas

	York	*North Yorkshire*[1]
31 August 1997	4,700	14,300
31 August 1999	4,500	14,000
31 August 2000	4,800	13,900
31 August 2001	4,900	14,600

[1] North Yorkshire includes Craven, Hambleton, Harrogate, Richmondshire, Ryedale, Scarborough and Selby.

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:

Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the incapacity benefit computer system and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

Information and Communication Sector (Vacancies)

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information he has concerning the total number of vacancies which arise annually for higher level skilled employees in the information and communications technology sector; what estimate he has made of the number of those positions which are filled by overseas applicants; and what plans he has to address these issues. [45380]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Comprehensive data on national notified vacancies and the number of these vacancies filled by overseas applicants are not centrally available.

New Deal for Young People

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions by what means Employment Services assess the costs required to provide different kinds of training in allocating funds to new deal for young people training providers. [49957]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The national funding rates for new deal for young people training provision are based on they type, length and occupational area covered by that provision. The rates are banded by occupational area to allow for higher payments for more expensive training. The amounts paid are based on historical data and the rates are broadly consistent with those of the Learning and Skills Council.

Training Providers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effect of the implementation of formula funding on the general level of funds available to training providers. [49958]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The introduction of formula funding for new deal provision has not created an additional restriction on the overall level of funds available to individual training providers. Subject to their satisfactory performance, the majority of providers will receive levels of income similar to those they received

previously. However, successful providers can enhance their earning considerably by increasing the number of clients they help into sustained employment.

Andrew Palmer

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) when the Chief Executive of the Child Support Agency will send a substantive reply to the letter of 29 January from my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) concerning his constituent, Andrew Palmer of East Tilbury; [37432]

(2) when and in what terms the Child Support Agency apologised to Andrew Palmer of East Tilbury; and if he will make a statement. [37436]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the child Support Agency is a mater for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Andrew Mackinlay, dated 1 May 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me to the operational aspects. I'm sorry about the long delay in providing this

You ask two questions, firstly, when and in what terms the Child Support Agency apologised to Andrew Palmer of East Tilbury and if the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will make a statement. Secondly, when I will send a substantive reply to your letter of the 29th January concerning your constituent Andrew Palmer.

I replied to your letter on 6th March 2002 and on the same day wrote in similar terms to Mr Palmer, my letter to you included the words;

"I apologise for the Agency's incorrect approach to your constituent, which I have now established arose as a result of an error many years ago in allocating your constituents National Insurance number to another person."

Child Support

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of *(a)* each of the CSA's monthly Business Information Bulletins since April 2001, *(b)* the CSA Board's quarterly review of its progress, *(c)* the CSA's Risk Management Framework and Report on Risk Management for and *(d)* the CSA's Latest Controls report from December 2001. [32548]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Kirkwood, dated 1 May 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me. I'm sorry about the long delay in providing this.

You have asked for a copy of each of the following to be place in the library:

(a) each of the CSA's monthly Business Information Bulletins since April 2001,

(b) the CSA board's quarterly review of its progress,

(c) the CSA's risk management framework and reports on risk management,

(d) the CSA's latest control report from December 2001.

I am anxious to place as much material as possible in the public domain and thereby open ourselves to public scrutiny. However I also need to balance this against the harm that release of the information could have in two areas:

– First, where the code of practice on access to government information exempts from disclosure "information whose disclosure would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion, including: internal opinion, advice, recommendation, consultation and deliberation; projections and assumptions relating to internal policy analysis; analysis of alternative policy options and information relating to rejected policy options".

– Secondly, in the area of "effective management and operations of the public service" where the relevant code exemption can embrace information "relating to the conduct of tests, examinations or audits conducted by a Department where disclosure of the methods used might prejudice the effectiveness of the tests or the attainments of their objectives".

I have carefully considered the four documents (or sets of documents) against those criteria. I do not believe that within that guidance it would be appropriate to release

(a) The CSA's monthly Business Information Bulletins. These are internally produced documents flagging month by month updates focused on issues and risks. They are written openly and frankly and it's effectiveness would be significantly constrained if the authors were aware that it would be publicly disclosed. This appears to fall within the first area described above.

(b) The quarterly review of progress. This is a standing agenda item for the Board and is not, as such a document. There are a number of documents commenting on different areas but my ability to release those documents is constrained by the factors mentioned in my previous paragraph. This also appears to fall within the first area described above.

(c) I am content to place the CSA's risk management framework within the library. I do not believe that the report on risk management, which review our internal controls, should be released. This appears to fall within the second area described above.

(d) I do not believe the CSA's latest controls report which by definition review our internal controls should be released. This also appears to fall within the second area described above.

If you are not satisfied with my reasons for not giving you the rest of the information, please tell me why. If you are still not satisfied after we have looked at your request again, you can approach the Ombudsman, who will be able to see all the relevant papers and decide whether the decision is fair.

I am sorry if this reply appears negative. I would be happy to meet with you and colleagues on DWP Select Committee to discuss how I might provide you with briefings covering the substance of these reports, perhaps informally on a regular basis.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many assessments have been made by the Child Support Agency within *(a)* one month, *(b)* two to six months, *(c)* seven to 12 months, *(d)* one to two years and *(e)* more than two years of application in each year since the Agency's creation. [51062]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Andrew Turner, dated 1 May 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply to me.

You ask, how many assessments have been made by the Child Support Agency within *(a)* one month *(b)* two to six months *(c)* seven to 12 months *(d)* one to two years and *(e)* more than two years of application in each year since the Agency's creation.

I am sorry but the information you have requested is only available from 1998. The figures in the table below are extrapolated from a sample of 5 per cent. of the live cases on our computer system. They are therefore subject to a small degree of sampling error. As a result, whilst the figures I am quoting are statistically valid, they will not match exactly previously published figures for assessments made in the years in question.

Maintenance Assessments made

Year to 31 March	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Under one month	8,300	4,000	2,300
Within two to six months	77,600	62,500	41,800
Within seven to twelve months	39,800	33,800	25,300
Within one to two years	25,200	17,200	17,400
Over two years	48,700	14,100	12,000

I do not yet have similar information available to 31 March 2002. I can tell you that for the period 1 April 2001—31 March 2002, 53,644 assessments were made within 20 weeks of receiving an application, 33,612 between 20 and 52 weeks and 19,209 over 52 weeks.

I hope this is helpful.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what was the average number of employees working for the Child Support Agency in each of the last five years; [30264]

(2) what the staff turnover was for each grade of employee working for the Child Support Agency in the last 12 months; [30265]

(3) how many appeals were made to the Parliamentary Ombudsman regarding the Child Support Agency in the last 12 months. [30267]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mark Tami, dated 1 May 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me. I'm sorry about the long delay in providing this.

You ask three questions: one, what was the average number of employees working for the Child Support Agency in each of the last five years, two, what the staff turnover was for each grade of employee working for the Child Support Agency in the last 12 months and three, how many appeals were made to the Parliamentary Ombudsman regarding the Child Support Agency in the last 12 months.

Table 1 on the attached annex shows the staff in post figures, which are based on an average of the year, commencing January to December. Figures shown are the amount of staff based on a headcount (which includes part time staff), also the number of whole time equivalent staff. The higher figure for 2001 reflect additional staff currently employed within the Child Support Reform Project. These figures do not include work undertaken for us in Belfast by Northern Ireland Child Support Agency staff.

Table 2 on the attached annex is the number of staff who have left the Agency between January 2001 to December 2001. These figures include staff who have moved to another part of Government as well as those who have resigned from the public service.

From 1st January 2001 to 31st December 2001 the Parliamentary Ombudsman received 136 requests for investigation regarding Child Support Agency cases.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex 1

Table 1: The average number of staff in post for each of the last five years

Year	*Whole-time equivalent*	*Headcount*
2001	9,486.78	10,292
2000	8,720.75	9,298
1999	8,442.03	9,305
1998	8,271.08	9,067
1997	8,502.02	9,312

Source:
Corporate Services Division. Department of Work and Pensions

Table 2: Staff turnover 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001

	Total leavers		
Grade	*Staff transferring to other Government department or agency*	*Staff leaving the civil service*	*Total*
Administrative Assistant	45	365	410
Support Grade 1	1	10	11
Administrative Officer	198	768	966
Executive Officer	141	98	239
Higher Executive Officer	55	17	72
Senior Executive Officer	16	4	20
Grade 7	4	0	4
Grade 6	0	1	1
Total	460	1,263	1,723

Source:
Corporate Services Division. Department of Work and Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many non-resident parents the CSA calculates have *(a)* 0 per cent. maintenance liability and *(b)* a net income of less than £100 per week; [42802]

(2) what the average percentage of net income paid in child support maintenance by the non-resident parent under the CSA system is for *(a)* one child, *(b)* two children and *(c)* three children; [42804]

(3) what the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of those in receipt of CSA child support maintenance who are also in receipt of (i) income support and (ii) income-based jobseekers' allowance is. [42805]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Steve Webb, dated 1 May 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me. I'm sorry about the long delay in providing this.

You ask three questions;

What is the number and percentage of those in receipt of Child Support Agency maintenance who are also in receipt of (i) Income Support and (ii) Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based);

How many non-resident parents the Child Support Agency currently calculates have (i) 0 per cent maintenance liability and (ii) a net income of less than £100 per week;

What is the average percentage of net income paid in child support maintenance by the non-resident parent under the Child Support Agency system for (a) one child, (b) two children and (c) three children.

The figures I have used in this reply have been taken from the Quarterly Summary of Child Support Agency statistics, a copy of which is placed in the House of Commons library the figures referred to below are all as at November 2001.

There were 380,900 parents with care with full maintenance assessments in receipt of child support maintenance who are also in receipt of Income Support, (37.4% of the total number of parents with care), and 8,600 in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based), (0.8% of the total number of parents with care).

There were 497,400 non-resident parents with a nil maintenance assessment. At the same date there were 506,900 non-resident parents who had a net income for assessment purposes of less than £100 per week.

The mean average percentage of net income (as currently defined) paid by a non-resident parent is 15% where one child is involved, 18% where two children are involved and 19% where three or more children are involved. This excludes cases where the net income for maintenance assessment purposes is nil.

It should be noted that the definition of net income in the current scheme differs significantly from that in the new arrangements in the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000.

Under the new scheme we will take account of the earned income of the non-resident parent, including overtime, bonus and commission, together with tax credits and income from occupational pensions. Deductions for tax, national insurance and pension contributions will be made.

Under the current scheme, we allow deductions for half of the pension contributions and we take account of other sources of income such as child benefit, contributory and non-contributory benefits, income from property or capital, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Not all of these other sources of income will be ignored entirely in the new scheme. A non-resident parent who, for example, receives Incapacity Benefit will be required to pay maintenance at a flat rate of £5 per week. And, where a non-resident parent has substantial property or capital assets, the parent with care may apply for a variation to the maintenance calculation.

Vinyl Chloride Monomer

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary for Work and Pensions when he is due to receive the report of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on whether vinyl chloride monomer should be added to the prescribed list for industrial injuries disablement benefit; and when it is proposed to publish *(a)* the report and *(b)* the response of the Minister. [33780]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 635W.

HEALTH

Child and Family Support Service

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has gone into the Child and Family Support Service since 1997. [45485]

Jacqui Smith: Between 1996–97 and 2002–03 resources for personal social services in England increased by over 20 per cent. in real terms. Councils determine what proportion of their overall resources, including this increase, is to be spent on children and family support services.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Child and Family Support Service; and what plans he has to increase cooperation with local authorities and improve access to services. [45487]

Jacqui Smith: Local authorities provide a wide range of services to support children and their families. The Social Services Inspectorate systematically assesses the performance of all local councils with social services responsibilities, evaluating the quality of services experienced by users and carers and monitoring the implementation of Government policy for social services.

In 1999 we published an overview report of the inspection programme of family support services in eight authorities. The report was entitled "Getting Family Support Right" and showed that 80 per cent. of families expressed satisfaction with the family support services they had received. At the same time we published a six-page pamphlet for front line staff called "Key messages for practitioners and first-line managers", which summarised the key findings of inspection assessments and disseminated examples of good practice.

Multi-agency working is a key element of the Government's five year £885 million quality protects programme which is improving the management and delivery of children's social services. The Government have set national objectives to improve outcomes for children and young people in need and local authorities are expected to show steady improvement towards the achievement of these in their annual quality protects management action plans.

The three cross Government programmes to tackle the social exclusion of children: Sure Start; The Children's Fund; and Connexions; all involve co-operation and multi-agency partnership working by a range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies, to ensure that children and family support services are accessible and effective.

Mount Vernon Hospital

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS agencies *(a)* own the Mount Vernon hospital estate and *(b)* are responsible for services provided there; and if he will list the chief executive and board members of each of these agencies. [48899]

Mr. Hutton: The Mount Vernon hospital estate is held by Hillingdon NHS Trust on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health.

Services at Mount Vernon hospital are provided by Hillingdon NHS Trust and West Hertfordshire hospitals NHS Trust.

The board members of West Hertfordshire hospitals NHS Trust are:

Rosie Sanderson Chairwoman
Val Harrison Chief Executive
Ritu Chabra Non-Executive Director
Robin Douglas Non-Executive Director
Neil Marshall Non-Executive Director
Said Namdarkhan Non-Executive Director
Barbara Saunders Non-Executive Director
Howard Borkett-Jones Medical Director
Ken Sharp Acting Director of Finance
Clare Mooney Acting Director of Human Resources
Gillian Hooper Director of Nursing
David Law Director of Strategic Planning
Nigel Coomber Director of Operations
Ann Donkin Director of Modernisation and Performance (from May 2002).

The board members of Hillingdon NHS Trust are:

Steve Coventry Chairman
David McVittie Chief Executive
Ann Chapman Non-Executive Director
Tony Valentine Non-Executive Director
Obaid Siddiqui Non-Executive Director
Christine Beatty Non-Executive Director
Linda Warren Non-Executive Director
Clare Panniker Director of Operations
Paul Wratten Director of Finance
Corinne Hall Director of Nursing
Stephen Meechan Director of Information and Commissioning
Diana Rimmer Medical Director.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to sell off part of the Mount Vernon estate. [48909]

Mr. Hutton: There are currently no plans to dispose of the Mount Vernon hospital estate.

Obesity

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department gives to directors of public health and general practitioners about the appropriate use of *(a)* traditional diets, *(b)* exercise, *(c)* formula slimming foods, *(d)* surgery and *(e)* slimming drugs, as part of the strategic response to the problem of overweight and obesity. [49315]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The balance of good health food model, which is based on current Government guidelines for healthy eating, has been widely disseminated.

The national quality assurance framework for exercise referral systems was published in April 2001. General practitioners were notified of the guidelines through the GP bulletin, which is sent to all GPs in England. The document offers guidance to primary care and fitness professionals, who work together to offer tailored exercise and physical activity programmes to patients whose health would benefit from increased exercise.

In 1987, a committee on medical aspects of food and nutrition policy (COMA) report was published on very low calorie diets (VLCD). The report highlighted that a major criticism of VLCDs is that individuals frequently re-gain any weight lost after the diet has ended. A recent report by the Royal College of Physicians (RCP 1998) on "clinical management of overweight and obese patients" supported the findings of the COMA panel.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has provided guidance on two anti-obesity drugs sibutramine and orlistat. Their guidance means patients can expect more equal access to these drugs in the future.

NICE is currently reviewing the clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of surgery for morbid obesity, and is due to report later this year.

Drug Inquiries (Liaison)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NICE and Scottish NICE are allowed to liaise with each other about similarities and parallel inquiries into a particular drug. [50823]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* We would expect the National Institute of Clinical Excellence to work with any experts and health bodies it deems appropriate in order to deliver robust guidance to the national health service in England and Wales.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many posts for speech therapists in *(a)* the national health service and *(b)* each relevant trust are unfilled. [51060]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Anaemia

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the advice from the British Committee for Standards in Haematology relating to blood transfusions and patients with chronic anaemia; [51547]

(2) what assessment he has made of the advice for the British Committee for Standards in Haematology on the benefits for chronic anaemia patients of maintaining haemoglobin levels at more than 12 g/dl. [51546]

Yvette Cooper: The publication of guidelines from the British Committee for Standards in Haematology in 2001 provides specific advice to clinicians. The type of treatment offered to chronic anaemia patients is a matter of individual clinical judgment and discussion with the patient concerned. The Department encourages the production of local protocols, which use existing guidance produced from a sound evidence based and clinical consensus.

Smallpox

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the amounts of smallpox vaccine necessary to treat the whole population in the event of a terrorist biological attack. [51786]

Mr. Hutton: The number of vaccine doses required to cover the population would be approximately 60 million.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the population would be expected to contract smallpox on a transmission ratio of *(a)* 4 to 6 and *(b)* 10 to 12. [44009]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* Crude estimates of the number of people that might contract smallpox following one initial case with prompt and vigorous public health intervention, assuming a United Kingdom population of 60 million are:

for a transmission rate of 1:4–6 (mean 5) 34 cases (0.00006 per cent. of the population)

for a transmission rate of 1:10–12 (mean 11) 11,800 cases (0.02 per cent. of the population).

Rates of 10–12 would be more likely to occur only at the very start of an outbreak before public health interventions were implemented. Lower transmission rates would apply thereafter.

Hospital Standards

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards are in place to maintain standards for waiting times and other services for patients of the host hospital trust when two trusts enter into a contractual agreement for services. [52236]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan clearly sets out the waiting times standards for both in-patients and out-patients and the staged improvements to be made each year. It is the responsibility of commissioners, including national health service trusts, to ensure that any contractual agreements entered into meet the extant waiting time standards set out in the NHS Plan.

The Department regularly collects data from the NHS to monitor progress and achievement towards the NHS Plan targets.

Organ Donation

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the benefits of conducting targeted campaigns to encourage organ donation. [52454]

Jacqui Smith: The South Asian Campaign was launched in 1999. Research into the attitudes on general health issues and organ donation in particular helped to inform the development of this campaign. An evaluation of the campaign was carried out in October 2000 and this helped to inform phase III which was launched last September.

The black campaign was launched in March 2002. The campaign focuses on the fact that black people are three times as likely to develop kidney failure and that under 1 per cent. of organ donors are black. Research to help develop this campaign was undertaken through Central Office of Information Communications. The Department will monitor the progress of the campaign carefully.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Black and Asian organ donors there were in each of the past 10 years. [52452]

Jacqui Smith: Number of Black and Asian organ donors in the last 10 years in the United Kingdom is shown in the table.

Year	*Black/ Black British*	*As percentage of adonors where ethnic origin recorded*	*Asian/ Asian British*	*As percentage of donors where ethnic origin recorded*
1995	0	0.0	9	4.7
1996	2	0.7	13	4.7
1997	2	0.7	3	1.1
1998	5	1.9	2	0.8
1999	4	1.5	3	1.1
2000	3	0.4	11	1.5
2001	6	0.8	7	0.9
2002[1]	3	1.5	2	1.0

[1] To 24 April 2002

The ethnic origin of donors only started being recorded on the National Transplant Database in 1995 and in the years 1995–99 there are still many cases where the ethnic origin is not recorded so the figures for these years may be underestimated.

Pariamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many named day written questions were tabled between 1 November 2001 and 26 March 2002; and how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days; [52268]

(2) how many named day written questions were tabled between 1 November 2000 and 26 March 2001; and how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days; [52269]

(3) how many named day written parliamentary questions tabled between *(a)* 1 November 2000 and 26 March 2001 and *(b)* 1 November 2001 and 26 March 2002 received (i) a substantive answer on the named day and (ii) a holding answer. [52270]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* 1,887 named day written questions were tabled to this Department between 1 November 2001 and 26 March 2002. A manual count shows that around 50 per cent. received a holding reply.

985 named day written questions were tabled to this Department between 1 November 2000 and 26 March 2001. A manual count shows that around 45 per cent. received a holding reply.

The information on the current database does not support the further analysis sought, which could be obtained only by a manual count and which would incur a disproportionate cost. We are developing an improved database capable of providing more sophisticated analysis of information which should be introduced before the next parliamentary Session.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by his Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52726]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Department spent approximately £5.7 million training and developing its staff in 2000–01. Leadership is often one element of a wider personal development programme. Information on the amount attributed to development of leadership skills from such programmes could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by his Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52749]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Department's records indicate that the Department has not paid for any Minister or official to receive training from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in any of the last five years.

Suicide

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the National Suicide Prevention Strategy will address the issue of assisted suicide; and if he will make a statement. [53196]

Jacqui Smith: The National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England, launched on 26 April for public consultation, does not address the issue of assisted suicide.

We have no plans to change the law in this respect.

Scanners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many MRI scanners there are in London. [53225]

Mr. Hutton: There are approximately 47 magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners installed in the national health service in London. It is estimated that there are a further 20 MRI scanners installed in the private sector in London.

Disability Facilities

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy that no elderly or disabled person should have to wait more than six months for aids and adaptations to enable them to take a bath or shower. [53314]

Jacqui Smith: Community equipment services that provide aids and adaptations determine local standards for assessing and responding to clients' needs. The national project to integrate health and social services' equipment services encourages those services to review and improve their standards with the expectation that they will use the new funding for these services announced in January 2001 to make waiting times as short as possible.

Care Homes

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care home places there were in Wiltshire in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [52988]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of places in residential and nursing care homes in Wiltshire at 31 March 1997 and 2001 is shown in the table.

Residential and nursing care places in Wiltshire[1]—at 31 March

Rounded numbers

	1997	*2001*
Residential places	4,510	3,990
Nursing places	[2]2,220	2,060
Total	6,730	6,050

[1] Figures are based on boundaries prior to local government reorganisation on 1 April 1997 and so for 2001 include Swindon unitary authority.
[2] Information relates to registered beds during the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.
Source:
Department of Health's annual returns.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in the number of care home beds in the Eastern Cheshire Primary Care Trust area since 1997. [53304]

Jacqui Smith: Information on care home places is not available at primary care trust level. The table shows the number of residential and nursing places in Cheshire at 31 March each year.

Residential and nursing care places in Cheshire, 1997 to 2001

At 31 March *rounded numbers, rates*

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Residential places[1]	5,090	5,320	5,360	5,730	5,530
Nursing places[2]	[3]5,390	5,910	5,750	5,560	5,470
Total	10,480	11,240	11,110	11,290	11,000
Percentage change	—	7	−1	2	−3

[1] Information is based on the boundaries for Cheshire county council prior to local government re-organisation on 1 April 1998. Information for 1999 onwards therefore includes Halton and Warrington unitary authorities.
[2] Information is presented for North Cheshire and South Cheshire health authorities
[3] Information for 1997 relates to registered beds during the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997
Source:
Department of Health's annual returns

British Red Cross

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support his Department has given since 1 April 2000 to projects run by the British Red Cross. [52946]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The British Red Cross was awarded a Section 64 grant for a three year project in the intermediate care programme at £122,000 for 2001–02, £122,000 for 2002–03 and £100,000 for 2003–04, to be paid with equal matched funding from the Home Office's Active Community Unit.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52831]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The newspapers subscribed to by the Department in 2002, the number of copies and the annual cost of each subscription are shown in the table.

Newspaper	Monday–Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Approx. annual cost per title (£)
Birmingham Post	3	2	—	331.20
Daily Mail	14	2	—	1,603.20
Daily Mirror	12	1	—	1,081.44
Daily Star	7	1	—	579.60
Daily Telegraph	16	6	—	2,452.80
Evening Standard	23	—	—	2,125.20
Express	13	2	—	1,255.80
Financial Times	20	6	—	5,568
Guardian	20	6	—	3,048
Independent	21	6	—	3,157.20
Independent on Sunday	—	—	5	288
Mail on Sunday	—	—	4	211.20
Manchester Evening News	1	—	—	276
Morning Star	3	3	—	792
News of the World	—	—	2	62.4
Northern Daily Echo	1	—	—	76.80
Observer	—	—	5	288
South London Press	1	—	—	19.20
Southern Daily Echo	[1]	—	—	276
Sun	12	1	—	993.60
Sunday Express	—	—	3	144
Sunday Mirror	—	—	2	62.40
Sunday People	—	—	2	62.40
Sunday Telegraph	—	—	4	192
Sunday Times	—	—	6	345.60
Times	19	6	—	2,299.20
Yorkshire Post	1	1	—	388.32

[1] Friday

The approximate total annual cost is £27,980 to which suppliers apply a discount of 13.5 per cent. to some titles.This information covers central purchasing through the Department's library for library use and for retention by individual units. The figures are based on subscriptions purchased in January and February 2002, and extrapolated for 12 months to give the annual figures. Newspaper titles purchased remain fairly constant but there are variations in number of copies per title due to cancellations and new purchases.

Prescription Charges

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the percentage of prescriptions incurring a charge which were not dispensed in the last three years. [53367]

Ms Blears: No assessment has been made of the extent to which people incurring a charge do not make use of prescriptions. Around 85 per cent. of items are dispensed free of charge and around 50 per cent. of the population do not have to pay charges.

Matrons

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many matrons have been recruited since his Department's announcement on the issue, broken down by *(a)* PCT areas and *(b)* age. [53300]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Available information was published in a report, 'Modern Matrons in the NHS: a progress report', on 15 April 2002 and is set out in the table. Data was collected prior to changes that took effect on 1 April 2002, and is therefore presented within old regional office boundaries. Data broken down by PCT area and by age is not available centrally.

Region	Number of matrons by April 2002
London	452
North West	224
South West	261
Trent	205
West Midlands	210
Northern and Yorkshire	239
South West	180
Eastern	124

Princess Royal Hospital (Haywards Heath)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what occupational therapy is available for patients of the Villa psychiatric ward at the Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath; [53280]

(2) what work is taking place at the Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath to remove asbestos panelling in the Villa psychiatric ward. [53293]

(3) what recent representations he has received on behalf of patients regarding conditions at the Villa psychiatric ward at the Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath. [53279]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Information on the occupational therapy services available for patients in the Villa psychiatric ward is not held centrally. However, it is recognised locally that there needs to be impfovements in the provision of occupational therapy and other activities for patients. West Sussex Health and Social Care NHS Trust, which now has responsibility for the facility, is taking action as a matter of urgency to bring this about.

The Villa ward is currently undergoing refurbishment to the bathroom and toilet areas. As part of this work, it has been necessary to remove and replace asbestos panels located in the service ducts. I have been assured that the existing panels are contained within the trust's asbestos register, that the work is being undertaken by authorised asbestos removal contractors and notifications have been given to the Health and Safety Executive.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what security arrangements are in force for protection of medical records for psychiatric patients at the Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath. [53281]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Medical records for current patients are kept under lock and key on the ward. Records for discharged patients are kept under lock and key in secure rooms.

I was very concerned to learn that individuals entered the Villa Ward office and appeared to have looked at confidential records and removed other items. The break-in was reported to Sussex Police and they are currently investigating. An internal investigation is being carried out by the Trust.

MMR

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been taken by his Department

to maintain records of children who have been vaccinated for measles, mumps and rubella by separate injections through private providers. [53269]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* It is the responsibility of private providers to submit information on children who have had separate vaccines either to the general practitioner (GP) responsible for the child's care, or to the primary care trust where they live. If the private provider does not submit such information, it can only be ascertained by either the GP or the community child health unit approaching the parents of apparently unimmunised children.

Antenatal maternity Units

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many antenatal maternity units have been modernised since 2001. [53316]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Over 200 maternity units in England received a share of the £100 million capital investment to carry out a range of major and minor projects some of which included upgrading of antenatal units.

Projects relating to refurbishment of antenatal units are in various stages of completion, with equipment purchased for some, redecoration work underway in most, while some projects involving building work are in the tendering process. All projects should be completed around April 2003.

Hepatitis C

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the number of people infected with hepatitis C in the United Kingdom. [53275]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* It is estimated that 0.4 per cent. of the general population in England (about 200,000 people) have chronic hepatitis C infection. Information on the prevalence of chronic hepatitis C infection in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can be obtained from the respective devolved administrations.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the main common characteristics of those suffering from hepatitis C in the United Kingdom. [53277]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* In the majority of cases, people who acquire hepatitis C infection do not have any immediate symptoms. Only a small proportion of patients develop an acute illness with jaundice soon after infection. Up to 80 per cent. of people infected with hepatitis C develop chronic infection. Many of those remain well or only develop symptoms after many years, with the onset of complications of chronic liver disease. Some of those with chronic infection report non-specific symptoms, such as tiredness and fatigue, muscle pains and aching joints, depression, and some complain of poor memory or concentration.

Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses have been recruited to Worthing and Southlands Hospitals Trust; and, of these, how many have been recruited from overseas and from which countries. [53321]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust has advised that the figures for the last two years are as follows:

	Total nursing staff recruited	*Overseas recruitment (percentage)*
2000–01	[1]202	[2]25
2001–02	[3]221	[4,5]67 overseas nurses (30 per cent.)

[1] Of which 72 were nurse assistants.
[2] Philippines 12 per cent.
[3] Of which 59 were nurse assistants.
[4] 65—Philippines.
[5] 2—South Africa.

Source:
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust.

Acute Services (East Kent)

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made with the review of acute services in East Kent; and when he expects it to make a decision. [52978]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The Kent and Medway health authority considered the options for the configuration of acute services in East Kent on 16 April. Their recommendations will be put to Ministers shortly.

Kent Ambulance NHS Trust

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason he has forbidden the Kent Ambulance NHS Trust to recruit substantively to senior management positions. [52980]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* It is for the new Kent and Medway strategic health authority to determine if senior posts, currently vacant, should be filled during the period of the review of ambulance services.

As the hon. Member is aware, health authorities, together with their primary care trusts, will review the position of their local ambulance services. They will make recommendations to the director of health and social care for the south, by September 2002, about how ambulance services should be organised in the future.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made with the review into the Kent Ambulance NHS Trust; and when it is expected to be complete. [52979]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* As announced on 15 January 2002, health authorities, together with their primary care trusts, will review the position of their local ambulance services. They will make recommendations to the director of health and social care for the south, by September 2002, about how ambulance services should be organised in the future.

Nursing Care

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how the allocation of free nursing care outside hospital is monitored; [53461]

(2) what avenues exist for individuals and their relatives to appeal when *(a)* claimants are not adequately assessed for nursing care and *(b)* when necessary items are excluded and then subjected to charging and means-testing; [53462]

(3) what mechanisms exist within the NHS to ensure that nursing care outside hospital is free. [53460]

Jacqui Smith: Guidance was issued to the national health service and to councils with social service responsibilities on 25 September 2001 under cover of HSC 2001/17: LAC (2001)26. The National Health Service (Nursing Care in Residential Accommodation) (England) Directions 2001 direct the national health service to carry out these functions. Copies of the guidance and the directions are in the Library.

From 1 October 2001, the NHS became responsible for determining the need for care by a registered nurse of all people who pay the full costs of their nursing care themselves and for arranging payments to nursing homes. Budget responsibilities lie with the nursing home co-ordinator and professional responsibilities with a lead nurse. From that date nobody should have to pay for the care that they need from a registered nurse. This corrects the anomaly of people in a nursing home having to pay for the care from a registered nurse that would have been provided free of charge in any other setting.

All new residents entering homes after that date will have had their needs reviewed within three months and 12 months thereafter. It is open to anyone—the resident, their family or the nursing home—to seek a review of any determination made if they feel it does not accurately reflect the person's need for a registered nurse. The lead nurse may arrange for a further determination to be carried out. If anyone remains dissatisfied, the matter can be referred to the health authority's continuing care panel for a decision to be reviewed.

Residents of nursing homes should have access to services from the NHS and local authorities on the same basis as they would if they were in any other setting. Local authorities continue to be able to charge for some of the services that they provide. For residents of care homes providing residential care and those receiving care in their own home, NHS services are provided free of charge directly by the community nursing service. In the case of nursing home residents, nursing homes are paid for the care from a registered nurse that a person needs and which they provide.

BCG Vaccination

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities do not provide the BCG vaccination. [38683]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 February 2002]*: The Government have recommended continually since 1953 that BCG vaccine should be routinely offered to all school children aged 10 to 14. These recommendations are set out in the book "Immunisation against infectious disease" (1996).

The national schools BCG programme resumed in March 2001 following a period of suspension from September 1999 due to limited supplies of the vaccine. However, routine BCG vaccine is currently not being offered to school children in Oxford, Avon and York/Selby.

The Department will be working with all health authorities to ensure that they comply with the policy in the coming school year.

NHS Professionals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that accurate comparisons can be made of the costs of NHS Professionals and commercial nurses' agencies. [41727]

Mr. Hutton: Agency framework agreements are currently being put in place with commercial agencies providing temporary staff to the national health service.

These will clearly set out each agency's charging rates, and allow cost comparisons with NHS professionals, who charge a standard management fee of 7 per cent. to cover operational costs.

Private Finance Initiative

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he plans to make to the development of private finance initiative schemes. [53229]

Mr. Hutton: The Department issued guidance on 21 March 2002 which sets out a number of initiatives that are designed to speed up private finance initiative (PFI) procurement and ensure that the national health service obtains the best value from the current market.

The guidance entitled "Improving PFI Procurement" can be found on the dedicated Department's PFI website at www.doh.gov.uk/pfi

The operation of the PFI process will continue to be monitored and refined to ensure it makes its contribution to the modernisation of the NHS set out in the NHS plan.

Locums

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress with including locums on health authority supplementary lists. [53226]

Mr. Hutton: Health authorities and primary care trusts have until 31 May 2002 to complete the initial compilation of their supplementary lists.

Provisional information provided by health authorities indicates that sufficient numbers of non-principals had applied to join supplementary lists, at 31 March, to maintain the existing level of support provided by this section of the work force to General Medical Services.

Waiting Times

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time for routine endoscopies was in the last 12 months. [53231]

Mr. Hutton: We do not collect waiting times for endoscopy. The NHS cancer plan sets out new goals to reduce waiting times for cancer patients. The target is that

by 2005 no one should wait longer than two months from urgent general practitioner referral to beginning cancer treatment except for a good clinical reason or through patient choice. This target period includes the time for necessary diagnostic tests including endoscopy. Data collection on the waiting times to treatment targets will be introduced as we roll out the cancer plan waiting times targets.

£2.5 million over three years has been made available within the national cancer plan to train more GPs, nurses, surgeons and gastroenterologists to meet the rising demand for endoscopy. This training will increase the number of diagnostic investigations that will be able to be carried out as an aid to diagnosis for patients with suspected cancer.

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to broaden the definition of cancelled operation to include operations cancelled the day before admission. [53223]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1227W.

Nursing and Midwifery Council

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent advice his Department has given to the Nursing and Midwifery Council on registration procedures. [53224]

Mr. Hutton: None.

General Practitioner Appraisals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to announce the recruitment of further GP appraisers. [53230]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts (PCTs) are responsible for ensuring they have sufficient appraisers to implement general practitioners (GPs) appraisals. Most PCTs have put forward between three and 10 GPs. We are pleased with the progress being made.

Nurses

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the fees for the re-registration of nurses have increased in the last year. [53232]

Mr. Hutton: Registration fees for nurses, midwives and health visitors are the responsibility of the Nursing and Midwifery Council. The increase, which was decided by its predecessor, the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, and introduced from 1 October 2001, was to match increases in core business, notably on casework relating to professional conduct.

Occupational Health

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the new investment in the NHS is to be devoted to *(a)* workplace health and *(b)* the development of the occupational health service. [53600]

Mr. Hutton: Decisions about what proportion of the extra resources for the national health service announced in the 2002 Budget is to be devoted to workplace health and occupational health services will be taken locally rather than nationally.

Good occupational health and safety is an essential part of the effective management of the health of people at work. "The Effective Management of Occupational Health and Safety Services in the NHS", issued by the Department of Health in November 2001, describes the range of services which should be available to all staff working in the NHS and sets a number of standards for their delivery. The service delivery standards form part of the Improving Working Lives programme in the NHS.

Primary Care Trusts (Leeds)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of extra funding each primary care trust in Leeds may receive as a result of the changes announced in the Budget statement. [53333]

Mr. Hutton: As a result of the Budget, the national health service in England will receive an annual average real terms growth in resources of 7.4 per cent. for the five years from 2003–04 to 2007–08. Local allocations to primary care trusts will be announced later this year.

Primary Care Premises

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many primary care premises have been improved in *(a)* England and *(b)* each health authority since March 1999. [45718]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The number of improvements to premises used by General Practitioners in England and by health authority from April 1999 to December 2001 are shown in the table.

The table includes provisional data for 2001–02.

Health authority	*Improvements*
Bradford	13
County Durham and Darlington	12
East Riding and Hull	11
Gateshead and South Tyneside	1
Leeds	30
Newcastle and North Tyneside	23
North Cumbria	21
Northumberland	7
Sunderland	6
Tees	32
Wakefield	13
North Yorkshire	13
Calderdale and Kirklees	16
Barnsley	5
North Derbyshire	11
Southern Derbyshire	18
Doncaster	3
Leicestershire	25
Lincolnshire	21
North Nottinghamshire	6
Nottingham	11
Rotherham	4
Sheffield	6
South Humber	10
Birmingham	31
Coventry	5
Dudley	12
Herefordshire	0

Health authority	Improvements
Sandwell	2
Shropshire	9
Solihull	2
North Staffordshire	16
South Staffordshire	6
Walsall	9
Warwickshire	13
Wolverhampton	39
Worcestershire	1
South Lancashire	10
Liverpool	13
Manchester	7
Morecambe Bay	7
St. Helens and Knowsley	29
Salford and Trafford	16
Sefton	33
Stockport	1
West Pennine	13
Bury and Rochdale	10
North Cheshire	24
South Cheshire	14
East Lancashire	10
North West Lancashire	6
Wigan and Bolton	15
Wirral	28
Bedfordshire	8
North Essex	6
South Essex	32
Suffolk	4
Cambridgeshire	25
Norfolk	20
Hertfordshire	12
Hillingdon	10
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	23
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	7
Croydon	13
Kingston and Richmond	2
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	3
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	13
Barking and Havering	27
Brent and Harrow	35
Camden and Islington	7
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	13
East London and City	48
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	6
Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich	12
Berkshire	27
Buckinghamshire	9
East Kent	31
West Kent	12
East Surrey	13
West Surrey	41
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	15
West Sussex	61
Northamptonshire	20
Oxfordshire	20
North and Mid Hampshire	36
Southampton and SW Hampshire	48
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	21
Somerset	0
South and West Devon	39
Wiltshire	8
Avon	10
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0
Dorset	11
North and East Devon	3
Gloucestershire	2
England	1,452

Correspondence

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list which individuals and bodies he understands to be represented by the phrase "all concerned" in Sir William Wells' letter to him of 28 February 2001 as being content to publish the draft statement appended to that letter. [51930]

Ms Blears: This is a matter for Sir William Wells.

NHS Staff Numbers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there were for *(a)* occupational therapists, *(b)* physiotherapists and *(c)* speech and language therapists in each NHS region in each year from 1997. [53473]

Mr. Hutton: Between 1999 and 2001 there have been increases in the number of physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists of:

1,250 (10 per cent.) occupational therapists

1,140 (7.75 per cent.) physiotherapists

400 (8 per cent.) speech and language therapists.

The information requested on vacancies has been placed in the Library. The Department did not collect vacancy information in 1997 or 1998.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* occupational therapists, *(b)* physiotherapists and *(c)* speech and language therapists were employed in the NHS in each NHS region in each year since 1997. [53471]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Overall between 1997 and 2001 the number of

occupational therapists has increased by 2,390 (20 per cent.)

physiotherapists has increased by 1,970 (14 per cent.)

speech and language therapists has increased by 810 (16 per cent.).

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff within the specified areas of work and NHS regional office areas as at 30 September each year

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Occupational therapists	11,520	11,980	12,660	13,130	13,910
Northern and Yorkshire	1,390	1,430	1,550	1,640	1,750
Trent	1,260	1,310	1,400	1,420	1,580
West Midlands	1,050	1,150	1,220	1,260	1,340
North West	1,490	1,540	1,620	1,710	1,820
Eastern	1,090	1,150	1,210	1,270	1,410
London	1,670	1,760	1,870	1,940	2,000
South East	2,050	2,070	2,150	2,190	2,340
South West	1,410	1,460	1,540	1,590	1,680
Others	100	90	100	100	0
Physiotherapists	14,240	14,700	15,070	15,610	16,210
Northern and Yorkshire	1,970	2,000	2,070	2,120	2,270
Trent	1,450	1,530	1,570	1,610	1,600
West Midlands	1,580	1,630	1,670	1,740	1,750
North West	2,070	2,150	2,170	2,280	2,360
Eastern	1,170	1,220	1,270	1,300	1,400
London	2,030	2,120	2,230	2,300	2,320
South East	2,350	2,390	2,420	2,480	2,670
South West	1,620	1,660	1,680	1,790	1,850

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff within the specified areas of work and NHS regional office areas as at 30 September each year

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Speech and language therapists	4,870	5,030	5,180	5,430	5,680
Northern and Yorkshire	570	570	600	640	690
Trent	500	480	460	530	520
West Midlands	510	540	540	570	580
North West	660	690	700	750	730
Eastern	410	450	460	500	510
London	840	910	960	960	1,020
South East	890	880	920	950	1,060
South West	490	500	540	530	570
Others[1]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—

[1] Others include special health authorities and other statutory bodies
[2] Five or less and greater than zero

Notes:
1. Due to the new regional office boundaries in 1999 the 1997 and 1998 figures are estimated regional splits
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

Source:
Department of Health non-medical workforce census

Ambulance Service Reviews

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of ambulance service reviews carried out in south-east England in the last five years, stating *(a)* when each began, *(b)* when each was conducted, *(c)* how much each cost and *(d)* how much was spent on consultants on each occasion. [53914]

Ms Blears: In 1999 the national health service executive's south-east regional office first asked ambulance trusts in the south-east to review their structures to ascertain whether their number and size were appropriate to enable them to fulfil core duties, including emergency services, effectively. This culminated in formal proposals for a review of ambulance service in the region which were circulated for public consultation between May and September 2001.

As a result of the consultation it was announced on 15 January 2002 that health authorities, together with their primary care trusts, would review the position of their local ambulance services. They will make recommendations to the Director of Health and Social Care for the south, by September 2002, about how ambulance services should be organised in the future. This is the only review conducted centrally. Each ambulance trust also reviewed its service in terms of performance standards.

Information on local reviews of ambulance services is not collected centrally.

No additional work force costs were incurred as most of the work in connection with the review of ambulance services in the south-east has been carried out by existing civil servants at the Department and staff at health authorities and trusts. Additional costs were incurred for printing and the hire of, for example, church halls, for public meetings. Consultants KPMG were also involved in some service reviews. However, the wide ranging nature of the process and the number of organisations involved have meant that no central collation of costs was made.

National Insurance

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of the 1 per cent. increase in national insurance payments for each NHS trust in its first year of application. [53934]

Mr. Hutton: It is not possible to estimate the cost for each individual national health service trust. The cost to the NHS as a whole is estimated to be around £200 million next year, or 0.3 per cent. of total NHS spending.

Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many franchising bids he has received for the post of Chief Executive of the Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust. [53915]

Ms Blears: The Department's directorate of health and social care for the south of England has received two expressions of interest. An announcement will be made shortly.

Anti-TB Vaccination

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the commercial basis of the decision to award the anti-TB vaccination contract to Powderject was. [38678]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The contract was awarded to Powderject under European Union public procurement regulations.

Powderject was the only manufacturer with a United Kingdom licence to supply BCG vaccine at that time.

Doctors' Salaries

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the starting salary for *(a)* junior house officers and *(b)* senior house officers in (i) the north-west, (ii) the south-east, (iii) the north-east, (iv) the midlands and (v) Scotland was in (A) 1999, (B) 2000 and (C) 2001; what it is in 2002; and what it will be in (1) 2003 and (2) 2004. [44998]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The basic starting salaries of junior doctors are negotiated and determined nationally, and therefore show no regional variation. This includes Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The following table shows as starting salaries the first scale point for house officers and senior house officers over the period 1999 to 2002.

	House officer	*Senior house officer*
1999	16,710	20,845
2000	17,260	21,535
2001	17,935	22,380
2002	18,585	23,190

These are basic salaries, subject to a post-specific supplement to reflect the intensity and unsocial hours aspects of the work of that post. Supplements range from

20 per cent. of basic salary to 70 per cent. of basic salary; most posts attract at least 50 per cent. Regional variations are not significant. The salaries of doctors in training form part of the remit of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDRB). Doctors' pay is influenced by DDRB recommendations and salary levels in 2003 and beyond will be dependent upon the views of that body in the light of the circumstances at the time.

GP and Dental Services

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* dentists were located (i) within five, (ii) five to 10, (iii) 10 to 15 and (iv) more than 15 kilometres from settlements with under 3,000 people in (A) 1999, (B) 2000 and (C) 2001. [46507]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Table A shows the estimated percentage of general practitioners in England who were located within (i) five, (ii) five to 10, (iii) 10 to 15 and (iv) more than 15 kilometres from settlements with under 3,000 people, at September for 1999, 2000 and 2001. Table B shows the equivalent data for dentists.

Table A: Estimate of the percentage of Unrestricted Principals and Equivalent (UPEs) within certain distances from settlements with under 3,000 people at September for each of the years 1999, 2000 and 2001 in England

Percentage

Distance from settlement	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Less than 5 km	88	88	88
5 km to 10 km	7	7	7
10 km to 15 km	5	4	4
Greater than 15 km	0	0	0

Note:
Data as at 1 October 1999 and 30 September 2000 and 2001.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Table B: General Dental Service—estimated percentage of principal dentists[1] within certain distances from settlements with under 3,000 people at September[2] for each of the years 1999, 2000 and 2001

Percentage

Distance from settlement	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Less than 5 km	85	86	86
5 km to 10 km	9	8	8
10 km to 15 km	6	6	6
Greater than 15 km	—	—	—

[1] Dentists are General Dental Service principals on health authority lists. They are counted at every location where they practice. Assistants and vocational dental practitioners are excluded.
[2] Dentists who had a payment claim processed in September.
[3] Less than 1 per cent.

Acute Hospitals

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those parties which have indicated interest in providing franchised management services for acute hospitals. [50800]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Department is setting up a register of interest for organisations outside of the national health service which are interested in taking on the management franchise for poorly performing NHS trusts. The register will be made public and its criteria published in full. The Department has not yet formally invited expressions of interest, pending publication of the register in the summer.

Negligence Claims

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many negligence claims have been made against the NHS in each of the last five years; what the cost was to the NHS from negligence claims over that period; what the average length of time was for a negligence case against the NHS to be settled; and how many inquiries have been set up following settlement of negligence claims against the NHS in those years. [53035]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 1 May 2002]:* The Department does not hold figures for all negligence claims made against the NHS.

Overall figures for expenditure on clinical negligence, which have been taken from the national audited summarised accounts for health authorities, NHS trusts and NHS litigation authority (NHSLA), for each of the latest years are as follows:

	£ million
1996–97	235
1997–98	144
1998–99	221
1999–2000	373

Figures prior to 1996–97 are not available because clinical negligence was not separately identified in the accounts prior to that date. Changes to accounting policies mean that these amounts are not directly comparable. Data for 2000–01 are not available owing to the transfer of the existing liability scheme to the NHSLA and the format of the accounts.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what precautions *(a)* local hospitals and *(b)* emergency management services are planning to take in preparation for the crowds anticipated during the weekend of the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and if he will make a statement. [44596]

Mr. Hutton: Planning for big events, including the Queen's Golden Jubilee, is co-ordinated by the local police forces built upon tried and tested procedures. There are established major Incident procedures and cross border support mechanisms. All hospitals and ambulance services have major incident plans.

The main celebrations for the Queen's Golden Jubilee are being held in London. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport has an operational and safety planning group, which includes emergency services and health representatives, to oversee the safety and health aspects of the events in the Royal Parks, the City of London and the processional route to St. Paul's Cathedral.

These systems are designed to treat as many casualties as possible at the event sites using first aid posts or advance treatment centres which will be staffed by doctors, nurses and first aiders. This will reduce vehicle movements around the events and reduce potential pressure on accident and emergency departments.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 384**

SESSION 2001–2002

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Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

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Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

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The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
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- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

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- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
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- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
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Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
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REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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